From Gertrude Stein to Dance: Repetition and Time in Intersemiotic Translation

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Daniella Aguiar and João Queiroz
From Gertrude Stein to Dance: Repetition and Time in Intersemiotic Translation

DANIELLA AGUIAR and JOÃO QUEIROZ

Gertrude Stein is considered one of the most radical literary experimentalists of twentieth-century literature. Stein’s main innovations are related to syntax deformation and space-time perception. Here we focus on how repetition and time in Stein’s work are intersemiotically translated in two contemporary dance pieces Always Now Slowly (2010, by Lars Dabi Pedersen) and, e [dez episódios sobre a prosa topovisual de gertrude stein] (2008, by João Queiroz, Daniella Aguiar, and Rita Aquino).

The relationship between dance and literature was intense during the Modernist period. Sergei Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes attracted writers to performances and stimulated some of them to write librettos for new ballets; Loïe Fuller attracted the attention of Stéphane Mallarmé and W. B. Yeats; Isadora Duncan was stimulated by Friedrich Nietzsche’s ideas; the figure of the dancer was important to T. S. Eliot’s poetry. However, the writings of Gertrude Stein—the most difficult writer of this period to “digest,” as the Brazilian poet and translator Augusto de Campos has suggested, have apparently been overlooked in the context of their interactions with the dance of the period.

The American writer Gertrude Stein (1874–1946) is among the most radical of the early twentieth-century literary Modernists. Her work was refined through her written portraits, initiated with the novel Three Lives (1909). She was strongly influenced by William James, her teacher at Harvard Annex, who directed her literary experiments toward questions about personality, consciousness, and perception of time. Intersemiotically (a term we will discuss at greater length shortly), her writing translated the compositional techniques developed by Paul Cézanne and Pablo Picasso, creating a kind of literary cubism. Those innovations had an important impact on space-time perception in literature. One of Stein’s main innovations is the attempt
to deform the development of space-time perception, freezing its dynamic flux.\textsuperscript{7} The creative procedures used to produce such effects are among the most important aspects of her work, which we will examine later through examples.

Since 2000, Stein’s work has attracted the attention of several choreographers. Examples of their work include, among others, \textit{e [dez episódiros sobre a prosa topovisual de gertrude stein]} (2008) by João Queiroz, Daniella Aguiar, and Rita Aquino, and \textit{sobre o mesmo} (2010) by João Queiroz (Brazil);\textsuperscript{*} \textit{Always Now Slowly} (2010) by Lars Dahl Pedersen (Denmark); \textit{Shutters Shut} (2004) by Sol León and Paul Lightfoot (Netherlands); and \textit{Four Saints in Three Acts} (2000) by Mark Morris (United States). Most of these were created as pieces of intersemiotic translation, a subject of study in such fields of research as comparative literature, translation studies, interarts, and intermedial studies.

Roman Jakobson defines \textit{intersemiotic translation} or \textit{transmutation} as “an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems.”\textsuperscript{8} Since Jakobson’s definition, the term’s use has broadened, no longer restricted to the interpretation of verbal signs, and now designates relations between systems of different natures.\textsuperscript{9} Intersemiotic processes occur among several sign systems, including literature, cinema, comic strips, poetry, dance, music, theater, sculpture, painting, video, and so on.

In this article, we focus on two properties of Stein’s portraits related to cubist visual experiments and the Jamesian theory of mind—repetition and continuous present. We analyze how those properties are intersemiotically translated into two contemporary dance pieces: \textit{Always Now Slowly} (2010)\textsuperscript{**} and \textit{e [dez episódiros sobre a prosa topovisual de gertrude stein]} (2008)\textsuperscript{†}.

The three-part work \textit{Always Now Slowly} had its debut at Dansescenen, Copenhagen. The first part is a female duet, mostly based on Stein’s portrait

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\textsuperscript{*} João Queiroz created the project and invited five choreographers/performers (Clara Trigo, Daniella Aguiar, Olga Lamas, Rita Aquino, and Tiago Ribeiro) to translate the same portrait by Stein independently, without having any contact with each other. Also invited, and working by themselves, were an architect (Adriano Mattos Corrêia), to conceive the space and lightning, and a musician (Edson Zampronha), to create the original music. Each of the artists had contact only with João Queiroz. One week before the premiere, the whole group met to create the combined presentation of the work done separately.

\textsuperscript{**} Choreography by Lars Dahl Pedersen; danced by Louise Hyun Dahl, Petra Fors, Michael Tang Pedersen, and Jonathan D. Sikell; lighting design by Thomas Bendiksen; sound design by Mikkel Engel Gemzøe; costume design by Camilla Lind; consultant Laura Luise Schulz.

\textsuperscript{†} Choreography by João Queiroz, Daniella Aguiar, and Rita Aquino; concept by João Queiroz and Daniella Aguiar; danced by Daniella Aguiar and Rita Aquino; lighting and set design by Adriano Mattos Corrêia; original music by Edson Zampronha; costume design by Amábilis de Jesus; graphic design by Phillip Rodolfi; photography by Adriano Mattos Corrêia and João Millet Meirelles.
“Idem the Same: A Valentine to Sherwood Anderson” (1923); the second section is a male duet, largely based on the portrait “If I Told Him: A Completed Portrait of Picasso” (1924); the third part is a quartet based on the play *Three Sisters Who Are Not Sisters* (1944). The dance, *dez episódios sobre a prosa topovisual de gertrude stein* had its debut at Teatro Vila Velha in Salvador, Brazil. A duet divided into small semi-independent episodes, it is based on Stein’s portraits “Orta or One Dancing” (1912), “If I Told Him: A Completed Portrait of Picasso” (1924), and the plays *Four Saints in Three Acts* (1933) and *Listen to Me* (1936).

In these two works, different choreographic approaches were used to explore Steinian syntactic and temporal properties, mainly related to the regular use of repetition in several levels of description, such as singular movements, movement sequences, sound objects, light behavior, and so on.” Below we analyze these approaches, explain how they are related to Stein’s work, and compare different choreographic choices. First, however, we further explore the concept of intersemiotic translation.

INTERSEMIOTIC TRANSLATION

As the Brazilian poet and translator Haroldo de Campos has emphasized, creative translation of poetry is not centered on the reconstitution of the referential message, but on the *transcreation* of several levels of semiotic processes. Supported by Jakobson’s notion of the poetic function of language, and in opposition to the idea of translation as message transmission, Campos claims that, in translation of poetry, we transcreate the sign itself, its own materiality:

Of course in a translation of this type not only the signified but also the sign itself is translated, that is, the sign’s tangible self, its very materiality (sonorous properties, graphical-visual properties, all of that which forms, for Charles Morris, the *iconicity* of the aesthetic sign,† when an iconic sign is understood as that which is “in some degree similar to its denotation”).

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** Sound objects refer here to musical entities and processes, and any kind of acoustic phenomena perceived as related to dance performance; light behavior has the same general meaning, with regard to lighting.

The signified, the semantic parameter, becomes just a kind of boundary marker for the “re-creative” enterprise. For Campos, creative translation is an iconic transcreation of “verbal equations”—that is, “an isomorph translation would be, by definition, an iconic translation.”

A translation transcreates a multilevel system of relations. The problem of relations between various descriptive levels particularly affects the phenomenon of intersemiotic translation. It seems theoretically natural to describe an interlinguistic translation by establishing direct correlations between equivalent semiotic levels of description such as morphological–morphological, phonetic–phonetic, rhythmic–rhythmic. However, an intersemiotic translation does not exhibit the same principle of corresponding levels. Therefore, the main theoretical difficulty relates to the comparison between radically different semiotic systems and their specific levels of description. That supposition depends on the idea of a semiotic system as multilevel, as we have argued elsewhere. Accordingly, an intersemiotic translation can be described as a relation between multilevel systems where levels are coordinated in terms of mutual constraints. In this sense, although we can describe the scenic dance space, for instance, without reference to movement morphology, they do, in fact, mutually constrain one another.

Intersemiotic translation operates on different descriptive levels, selecting relevant aspects from the source and translating them into the target according to new materials and processes. What we call a “level of description is a theoretical artifact with some heuristic power of explanation. Therefore, it does not mean that the “levels” are naturally distributed in hierarchical structures. It also does not mean that they act independently. But, in descriptive terms, the levels have a certain degree of autonomy and they are coordinated by mutual constraints and dependency. For example, from literature to dance, linguistic and paralinguistic levels (rhythm, prosody, syntax, or psychological ambience) may be translated into movement dynamics, organization of space, light design, costumes, scenography, and so forth. Notably, a mapping of correlations cannot be easily established between levels of different sign systems. Nevertheless, it is theoretically possible to

he dedicates to the “aesthetic sign” as a predominantly iconic process is pioneering. As the icon is considered the only type of sign involving a direct presentation of the qualities that belong to its object, it is strongly related to the notion of aesthetic sign. See Pedro Atan and João Queiroz, “Iconicity in Peircean Situated Cognitive Semiotics,” in Charles Sanders Peirce in His Own Words: 100 Years of Semiotics, eds. Torkild Thellefsen and Bent Sørensen (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2014).

*Morphology* is used here in its vernacular sense of form and structure of something. In the dance context, it is used in reference to the form of the movements.
describe intersemiotic translation as an iconic relation between different mul-
tilevel sign systems.

Our approach is based on the premise that intersemiotic translation is
fundamentally an iconic semiotic relation. Beyond that, as many authors
have claimed, we assert that intersemiotic translation can be defined pre-
dominantly as a multilevel iconic relation.¹⁷

GERTRUDE STEIN’S TIME AND REPETITION

According to Lavalle, “by exploring new means to apprehend the topography
of the real through literature and by denouncing the collapse of the linearity
of conventional literary discourse, Stein created an oeuvre that disrupts the
typical aesthetic, technical and thought patterns of the nineteenth century.”¹⁸

Stein’s literary experimentations embraced many genres and styles, listed
by Lavalle as “plays, opera librettos, poems, literary portraits, biographies
and autobiographies, short stories, novels, lectures and essays, philosophical
meditations, a children’s story and even a mystery story.” Because Stein’s
work does not fit traditional formats, we agree that her work is “unclassifi-
able; even though her work is unmistakable, it is always unpredictable.”¹⁹

We will discuss two phases of Stein’s work. The first begins with Three Lives (1909) and culminates with The Making of Americans (1925); it is
imaginatively enriched with her many written portraits and is based on
the systematic use of repetition creating “a fine new kind of realism,” as
William James precisely characterized Three Lives.²⁰ In the second phase,
which overlaps chronologically with the first, Tender Buttons (1913) is the
most important work; here, the writer explores new kinds of relations be-
tween words and their meanings. This division of Stein’s work does not
pretend to fix a typology, either temporal or stylistic, but rather to indicate
predominant tendencies. She simultaneously created in completely different
patterns, inhibiting any easy classification, either diachronic or temporal.

As we mentioned, Stein was strongly influenced by the psychologist and
philosopher William James, not only in directing her toward themes related to
personality, identity, and memory, but especially in her application of James’s
notion of the stream of consciousness or thought.²¹ She also incorporated
developments and compositional techniques of Paul Cézanne and Pablo
Picasso, such as the multiperspective method, metonymic composition, and
collage, which led to her developing a kind of cubist literature. The portrait
“Orta or One Dancing” (1912) is a good example of both influences: “This
one is one having been doing dancing. This one is one doing dancing.
This one is one. This one is one doing that thing. This one is one doing
dancing. This one is one having been meaning to be doing dancing. This
one is one meaning to be doing dancing.”²² In this fragment, Stein tries “the
seemingly impossible task of capturing the inarticulate stream of her own
consciousness." She explores the effects from the deformation and dilatation of self-conscious experience, verbally materializing James’s notion of stream of thought. Also, in this fragment we see prominent cubist characteristics, such as the use of a small number of components and their repetition in different syntactic positions, suggesting multiple perspectives on the same action or idea.

Here we stress two important properties of Stein’s work, analyzed by many authors, that we consider essential to comprehend the dance translations. Repetition and the continuous present are systematic procedures for writing and are the result of her experimentations, interrelating James’s theory of mind and the cubist visual language. Stein converts time into a new kind of perceptual experience. The continuous present, which has the effect of freezing time, is one of the most surprising aspects of her writing, and among the most controversial.

Jakobson’s analysis of time in poetry, particularly of the experience produced by verse, reveals the dynamics of the temporal effects perceived and experienced in Stein’s writing. For Jakobson, speaking in dialogue with Krystyna Pomorska verbal language generally falls into two images of time—"on the one hand the time of the speech event and on the other hand the time of the narrated event. The clash of these two facets is particularly evident in verbal art." The author refers to verse as the textual expression that promotes the most intense experience of the verbal tense, because verse “simultaneously carries within it both linguistic varieties of time.” The author continues:

Verse pertains to our immediate experience of speech activity, both motor and auditory. At the same time, we experience the structure of the verse in close connection with the semantics of the poetic text—regardless of whether there is harmony or conflict between the structure of the verse and the semantics of the text—and in this way the verse becomes an integral part of the developing plot. It is difficult even to imagine a sensation of the temporal flow that would be simpler and at the same time more complex, more concrete and yet more abstract.

Considering Jakobson’s concepts of time, we can observe in Stein’s work the immediate experience of speech and of the narrated event in the structure and semantics of the text. Stein’s first-phase portraits seem to intensify the temporal effect that Jakobson describes as produced by verse, because these

* Wendy Steiner divided Stein’s portraits production in three phases. According to the author, the first-phase portraits depict their subjects through their activities. Most of them are portraits of artists and, in several texts, Stein establishes an identity between the artist and his or her work, a relationship between “to be” and “to work.” Among the most characteristic features are the experimental syntax, limited sound structures and vocabulary, repetition, and techniques related to the continuous present. See Wendy Steiner, _Exact Resemblance to Exact_...
portraits reiterate the experience of the present time in all its facets. In the small fragment of “Orta or One Dancing,” cited above, some characteristics of the first-phase portraits related to the experience of present time are demonstrated. At the structural level, the repetition of words, sentences, and paragraphs with slight differences reintroduces new experiences of the same thought. At the same time, the use of the present participle creates the temporal effect of present time on the semantic level.

Beginning with *Three Lives* Stein sought to freeze time. She models the perception of time by mimicking the stream of thought of the characters in *Melanctha*, and of herself, in *The Making of Americans*, as well as in her portraits, as we saw in the example above. If, according to James, thought is continuous, the only way to represent this property is to convert the text into a continuous moment in the present time, as Hoffman asserts, “Since all action does take place in a present moment and since each human being expresses his basic nature through repeated action, the only valid way to describe a character is to report the repetitions of his behavior during continuously present moments.” For James, the perception of past or future time is always mixed with our knowledge about the present. “Objects fade out of consciousness slowly. If the present thought is A B C D E F G, the next one will be B C D E F G H, and the one after that of C D E F G H I—the lingerings of the past dropping successively away, and the incomings of the future making up the loss.”

Stein’s interest in time is related to the perception of time as James proposes it. Little by little, the present is left behind and receives new information from the future. This approach of time, the *continuous present* as Stein called it, consists in “a series of similar but not identical statements each perceived as a now. The fact that the sentences are similar but not identical… is an imitation of now-perception where everything is in constant flux.” Stein developed many techniques for creating the continuous present. On the macrostructural level of the text, she uses paragraph reiterations, as the same paragraph is rewritten in an almost identical form with subtle variations. Sentences are also repeated, in the same paragraph and in the following ones, always with small differences. Paragraphs and sentences are composed with few words, which appear again and again.

The repetition produces a new beginning, and a new experience takes place. The portraits express the author’s experience watching the portrayed. The writer restarts the sentence or the paragraph again and again because her thoughts are changing, creating a new experience based on the observation of the portrayed person. *Four Dishonest Ones* (1911) has successive new beginnings of a sentence, in different paragraphs:

She is one working. She is one not needing to be changing. She is one working. She is one earning this thing earning not needing to be changing. She is one not needing to be changing. She is one being the one she is being. She is not needing to be changing.

She is earning being one working. She is going on earning being one working. She is working. She is not needing being changing.

Starting with her writing of *Melanctha*, “The composition must begin over and over again; the same words ... and the same sentences are repeated with slight variation, and gradually everything changes.” In the example above, we see this exactly: repetition with gradual modifications.

Another characteristic related to the continuous present, and easily observed in the portrait *Four Dishonest Ones*, concerns the verbal tense. As Campos asserts, Stein's continuous present "would lead her to privilege the verbs, especially in gerundial forms, and the reiterations." The constant use of the present participle has the effect of slowing down or distorting the ordinary syntactical rhythm usually associated with standard English. We can interpret the continuous present as a procedure, and its effect transforms language into a processual phenomenon. For Norman Weinstein, “her stylistic experimentation can be seen as an outgrowth of a writer's attempt to capture life by language, to capture the process of living by re-creating English to make it a language more process-oriented.” According to Joan Retallack, Stein’s “continuous present experienced in the pulse of her words was part of her project to register a new time sense peculiar to her era—not to write as though it were still the nineteenth century.” Retallack further asserts that, in the lecture “Composition as Explanation” (1925–26), Stein “radically reconceptualized the nature of what the temporal dimension of writing could be, positing the revolutionary idea that one was actually composing the ‘time of the composition’ into ‘the time in the composition’ [italics added], not by speaking about time but through the arrangement and progression and implied tempi of the words. Grammar could literally score the new time sense.”

Rhythm is another aspect of time that Stein used to intensify the sense of the present in her work. Henri Meschonnic insists that, in general, rhythm transforms the result of the semiotic process; in other words, it is part of the signification process because it modifies meaning. Rhythm is the materialization of time through literary text structure, especially in poetry. In some of her portraits and other texts, Stein musically explores the effects of rhythm. In examples of her portraiture, the rhythm seems to be more important than the semantic dimension of the continuous present. Marjorie Perloff shows how the rhythm in “Susie Asado” (1913), a portrait of a flamenco dancer, is the materialization of the dance-shoe beats, so particular to this form of dance.
Sweet sweet sweet sweet sweet tea.
Susie Asado.
Sweet sweet sweet sweet sweet tea.
Susie Asado.
Susie Asado which is a told tray sure.
A lean on the shoe this means slips slips hers.

In this portrait of La Argentina the flamenco rhythm is perceived in the utterance of the portrait. The beats in the beginning, resulting from the repetition of “sweet,” are themselves the sounds of the dancer’s shoes against the floor. The portrait re-creates, through rhyme and repetition, the rhythm of flamenco dance. Given the importance of the prosody, and how rhythm modulates the process of signification and the feeling of time through the reading, scholars frequently highlight the orality of Stein’s texts. In this example, the best way to experience the dance shoes beating on the floor is through reading aloud. The repetition and accumulation of similar words, their rhymes, and the insistent use of monosyllables produce surprising rhythmic patterns in this and other works.

The repetitive use of a reduced vocabulary was harshly treated by critics of her time. However, we agree with Rob Wallace that “it is not merely the babbling of a brook (or a baby), or sound and fury signifying nothing: it is language signifying how language fits into reality.” For Nathalie Pheulpin, the repetition in Stein’s work “is the way to penetrate the internal structure of language and establish a point, a passage within the four-dimensional space of the object presented by the cubist paintings. It is what permits the verbal language to designate the referent, the object, under its multiple aspects and configurations.” Pheulpin also notes that, when using repetition as she does, “Gertrude Stein liberates language from its communication function.” To Weinstein, repetition has consequences in the style and content of *The Making of Americans*, revealing the representation of a nonhierarchical reality:

If all people and objects and events are of equal significance, then all the words used to describe the consciousness of this reality are of equal significance. And if all words are of equal significance then the semantic weight of single words matters less than the plastic arrangement of words in terms of the whole flow. . . .

Suppose that individual words are no longer used to refer to singular realities but all words are subordinated to the flow itself. Once this device is put into practice the possibilities for word organization are nearly endless. The rigidity of word position in the English language is a product of our insistence that language communicate with optimum clarity semantically.
Language becomes an icon of the present time, in flux, mimicking the way we perceive our temporal experience. Stein’s works frequently deal with mundane themes; however, she embeds her philosophical views in her experimentations.

DANCE: INTERSEMIOTIC TRANSLATIONS

Here we analyze how two contemporary dances, *Always Now Slowly* by Lars Dal Pedersen, and *e [dez episódios sobre a prosa topovisual de gertrude stein]* by João Queiroz, Daniella Aguiar, and Rita Aquino, are related to Stein’s work. Each of the three sections of *Always Now Slowly* is based on different source texts and, consequently, on specific characteristics of Stein’s writing. We focus here on the first and second parts, since the third one is a translation of a play, *Sisters Who Are Not Sisters* (1943) and involves kinds of relationships that are distinct from those established in the translation of written portraits, which are the basis for the first two parts.

In the first part, a duet for two women, the dancers wear short dresses of similar design but different colors—one black and the other white (see Figure 1). The scenic space contains only four lamps upstage. They produce a low amber light and constitute all the lighting for the duet, resulting in a dark environment in which we can barely see the dancers. Although this part of the dance piece draws most clearly on the portrait “Idem the Same: A Valentine to Sherwood Anderson” as its source, Pedersen also considered Stein’s portraiture in a general as source material.

In this dance translation of Stein, it is possible to observe diverse choreographic strategies. Most of them are related to syntax, especially variations of repetition. One of the choreographic strategies is directly related to *The Making of Americans*. In the beginning of the dance we hear an audio recording of Stein reading an excerpt of that novel. The recorded reading has been modified, with some parts removed and the order of sentences altered. The text, reproduced below, becomes a synthesis of the dance work about to unfold:

Slowly everyone in continuous repeating.
Always again and again and again.
Certainly everyone could be certain of this thing hearing it again and again hearing it again and again telling this again and again.
Everyone in continuous repeating everyone in continuous repeating.
Always be one hearing it again and again, telling again and again and again and again and again.

Slowly everyone in continues repeating, continuous repeating, continuous repeating, continuous repeating, continuous repeating, continuous repeating, continuous repeating, again and again.*

This text guides the viewer’s interpretation of the choreographic piece. The excerpt not only announces what is coming, but also prepares the spectator to appreciate the importance of repetition in the dance piece. While the audio recording is playing, the dancers are moving to the repetition pattern of the text. Each dancer performs a choreographic routine in which some movements are repeated and the routine is rewound and reinitiated. The dancer in white performs spasmodically, with angular and

* Transcription of the text used in the dance, from the video of *Always Now Slowly*, provided by the Lars Dahl Pedersen to the authors and checked by him by email communication, Mar. 26, 2015.
cutting dynamics; the other, in black, moves more fluidly and sinuously. The relation between the text and the movement becomes clear: irregular repetition is a main focus of this translation.

Another remarkable choreographic strategy of repetition in this duet uses the changing of time dynamics in the execution of the same choreographic sequence. When the same trajectories of the body are performed in different time dynamics, viewers may doubt if what they are watching is in fact a repetition. Not only the perception of that trajectory changes, but also differences in time duration and muscular effort transform the movement itself, for example. This effect can be compared to what we experience with the repetition in Stein’s portraits. Although the procedures are not exactly the same, repetition with slight modifications continuously produces differences in both the written text and the dance work. In this choreography, different manipulations of time sequentially and gradually contribute to create a perception of stationary time, or a gradual progression of presents.

As an example, in one scene each of the dancers performs a distinct choreographic sequence and modifies its temporal dynamics. Both dancers simultaneously perform their own sequences many times, changing the timing of movements. This procedure creates the feeling of continuously beginning (new and yet surprisingly the same) actions; it is strongly related to Stein’s portraits of the first phase—especially to the continuous present, in which the repetition progressively creates minimal differences.

Another example of changing time dynamics occurs when the dancers, positioned side by side upstage right, execute calm, fluid, continuous movements with their torsos and arms, without moving into the space. The dancer on the viewer’s left stops her sequence, walks to the opposite side of the stage, and starts again. A few seconds later, the other dancer joins her, and both start the same movements, again slowly and continuously. Each dancer executes three movements, but each repetition is performed with different speeds and durations. In the beginning they are slow and controlled; then, the speed picks up and they become more vigorous. Besides the change in time dynamics, the choreography explores the repetition of just a few movements (three) in different sequences. The movements are transformed by the subtle variations in time performance as well as by the syntax recombination, since one movement changes the perception of the one that follows it.

The dancers abruptly separate from each other, moving vigorously and widely around the stage. It is possible to observe in this scene another repetition strategy. All movements are pendular,* repeated again and again until they are replaced by another pendular movement, also repeated until the next, successively. This exploration of repetition reveals something distinct from the modification of time dynamics: the action, which is indefinitely

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* Pendular movement has a trajectory in space similar to that of a pendulum swinging in an ongoing back-and-forth manner.
repeated until its substitution by another action, is performed in the same
way, with the same duration, muscular effort, and velocity, in all repetitions.
The viewer perceives this scene as a performance of the same action over
and over, so that the dancers seem to be stuck in their actions, with no
development or transition from one movement to another.

When one observes this first part macroscopically, another repetition
strategy becomes evident: at the section's conclusion, the choreography and
the music performed in the beginning are repeated. This compositional re-
source offers the audience a cyclic dramaturgy in which the cycle is com-
pleted when something from the beginning reappears at the end. The fluid
and continuous movement in this duet makes the connection between one
movement and the next central to the first part of *Always Now Slowly*. The
movement patterns are not exactly part of any specific dance technique but
it is easy to recognize certain patterns, such as rolling, sliding, and turning
that are well known in contemporary dance. This choice stresses that the
morphology of movement is not an important aspect for the translation of
Stein's work in this dance piece. Nevertheless, by focusing on repetition, the
choreography of this first section iconically materializes, in different forms,
the perception of time that we experience in Stein's written portraits.

The second part of the piece is also a duet, but now by two men (see
Figure 2). The mainly white overhead- and backlighting create shadows on
the dancers, who become silhouettes. The costume is exactly the same for
both dancers: trousers and sleeveless shirts. Before this section begins, we
hear Stein's voice reading the following excerpt from the portrait "If I Told
Him: A Completed Portrait of Picasso": "He he he he and he and he and and
he and he and he and and as and as he and as he and he. He is and as he is,
and as he is and he is, he is and as he and he and he and he and he and
he and he he." The recording alerts us that, after the female duet, we are
about to see "he" in continuous repetition and in process of modification.

One can observe that the portrait excerpt is composed of many repe-
titions of the words "he," "and," "as," and "is." The reiteration of these few
vocables, so characteristic of Stein's work, is the main feature the audience
experiences in the next part. This duet, indeed, intensifies the repetition
of "he" in space and time. Despite the use of this excerpt from a portrait
as an epigraph, no specific work of Stein's serves as a main source for
the duet. Instead, the source is a general procedure perceived in Stein's
portraits—especially those from the first phase and, in some cases, from the
second. Change through repetition is a tendency in Stein's work during the
period when she was interested in freezing time. The second part of *Always
Now Slowly* can be described as two men continuously repeating movements
until those movements are slightly modified.

Although this duet is related to repetition as a general procedure, it uses
another choreographic resource: the canon. Canon is a musical composi-
tional strategy in which diverse voices imitate a melody uttered by the first

voice, initiating it one after the other. In dance, the term is used when several dancers perform the same movement sequence, but the second begins after the first, and so on successively.* The use of canon in this work, however, is unconventional. In this second part, there is an alternation between canon and unison. The same choreographic sequence is performed in canon and then in unison, successively. This interchange is a peculiar way to translate the repetition in Stein. During the canon, one dancer becomes an echo of the other. In the unison, the repetition occurs in real time. The alternation leads to a specific perception of the choreographic repetition.

*Canon is a “musical form and compositional technique, based on the principle of strict imitation, in which an initial melody is imitated at a specified time interval by one or more parts, either at the unison (i.e., the same pitch) or at some other pitch,” according to [http://global.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/92848/canon](http://global.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/92848/canon) (accessed August 28, 2014). In music there are several kinds of canon, but we will use this term in a general way, without further subdivision.
At certain moments a substantial difference becomes noticeable in the canon: the dancers are not performing the same choreography, but rather corresponding choreographies, as if one is a translation of the other. For each movement from the first choreographic sequence there is a correspondent in the second one. For example, the first dancer moves his leg, then the second one does. However, the movement of the second is not the same; it is done with the same leg and the same time duration and dynamics of the first, but with a different morphology. The beginning of this part is an example of a distinct exploration of a canon. After the epigraph, the lights come up slowly and we see two dancers, side by side, facing the audience. They perform slightly different choreographic sequences successively. Performed in this way, the canon reinforces repetition. The choreographer changes the canon itself to translate relevant aspects of Stein’s work.

Beyond that, this first choreographic sequence is explored in other ways: in canon facing the audience, in unison facing the backdrop, with different time dynamics, and in a unison version in which the dancers are looking each other in the eyes. Like the first part, the vocabulary is fluid and light. The dancers initiate the movements with the head, arm, or other body part, and that first part leads others to move fluidly in a chain. In this way, the body moves in succession, as the choreography occurs through the strategy of canon moving from the first dancer to the second. As in the first part, the choice of a mostly fluid and continuous movement quality does not seem to result from a translation of Stein; rather, the choreographer’s and dancers’ backgrounds determined this choice.

As in the first part, repetition is the focal point. Therefore, syntax is the epicenter of these translation experiments. We observe different uses of the same canon strategy. Materialized, the echo creates a temporal effect that can be iconically compared to Stein’s continuous present. Repeating a sequence with a delay creates the feeling that time is not progressing. Although these choreographic strategies are simple and well known in contemporary dance, they are applied in a categorical way in this work in order to translate Stein’s work into dance—to take her main procedures and the effect of her work, and re-create them in dance.

The Brazilian dance piece, *e dez episódios sobre a prosa topovisual de gertrude stein* is a female duet irregularly divided into semi-independent episodes or parts. As in the Danish example, this dance translation has more than one source text. Although related to Stein’s work in general, the piece focuses on four texts: an excerpt of the play *Four Saints in Three Acts*, the first-phase portrait “Orta or One Dancing,” the second-phase portrait “If I Told Him: A Completed Portrait of Picasso,” and an excerpt of the play *Listen to Me*.

Two episodes use overhead projectors. The first is in the beginning of the piece, in the staging of an excerpt of the play *Four Saints in Three Acts*, translated into Portuguese by Augusto de Campos. The scene consists
of a composition of words on two screens with transparency sheets. Each
monosyllabic unit of speech occupies a whole transparency film, covering
almost the whole screen. The scene is transformed into a dance duet by
the variation of speed and trajectories with which the performers manipu-
late the sheets on the equipment, which in turn creates a dialog between
the screens. Therefore, the scene consists of a composition of words, with
the transparency sheets as an augmentation of the dancers' bodies.

This episode is about the physicality of monosyllabic words. This be-
comes clear when, at the end of this episode, the word *Dez* (Ten) is su-
perimposed on identical transparency sheets, and the spectators perceive
the accumulation of the word *Dez*, visually different from the *Dez* exhibited
alone on the other overhead projector (see Figure 3). In this simple episode
it is possible to identify a combination of Stein's ideas: the materiality of the
written word, repetition, the idea of difference through repetition, and the
accumulation of identical instances of the same word. Similar to what occurs
with Stein's audio reading in *Always Now Slowly*, the choreographed text on
the overhead projector works as an epigraph of the dance piece. Through
the manipulation of an excerpt of the source, the first episode presents the
main aspects of Stein's writing that become the focus of the choreographic
piece. While *Four Saints in Three Acts* is an opera, this and other aspects
of the work are not evident in this fragment. The choice of this excerpt is
adequate to the purpose of the choreography and not to a faithful staging of
the play.

The second episode is based on repetition. In this experiment there are
only three basic actions: walking, sitting, and the act of lying down. These
actions are executed in a cubic space delimited by the lighting structure and
by a diagram on the floor. Each dancer moves in straight lines, forward and
backward, using only the lateral edges of the cube. The actions occur alter-
natively, between moments in which they are organized in set choreography
and others that suggest an improvisational game, always based on the three
actions in the limited space.

Besides the repetition, there is another relation to Stein's work in this
episode. The three actions that constitute the choreography are not part of
a dance code or technique. They are trivial movements for dancers, and can
be considered transitional movements, which means that they are frequently
used as a transition from one dance movement to another. Therefore, there
is a re-creation of the use of *transitional words* or relational terms, a resource
Stein emphatically explored. How can one re-create, in dance, this emphasis
on connectives, transitional particles in general, and adverbs? In this episode,
the dancers only walk, sit, and lie down, with exactitude, not permitting any
movement to look like what the audience expects to see as dance movement.
There is no fluidity between one action and the next, contravening another
familiar quality in dance; rather, what we see are singular, independent,
everyday actions.
FIGURE 3 João Queiroz, Daniella Aguiar, Rita Aquino, e [dez episódios sobre a prosa topovisual de gertrude stein], performed by Daniella Aguiar and Rita Aquino, 2008. Here the materialization of the monosylable “Dez” is explored through the accumulation of transparencies. Photograph by Adriano Mattos Corrêa. © João Queiroz and Daniella Aguiar. Reproduced by permission of João Queiroz and Daniella Aguiar. Permission to reuse must be obtained from the rightsholder.
The third episode is a *gaze score*. In this scene, the dancers, outside the limits of the light cube and closer to the audience, sit in front of a music stand in a situation similar to musicians. The work lights are on, and the viewer perceives that an action is being performed with the dancers’ gaze. In fact, the dancers follow a score that prescribes where they should look: to the score, to the dance partner, and to the audience. The audience watches the performance of the same action they execute themselves: a gaze action. The dancers are watching the audience’s performance. Once more there is a choreography: in this case the gaze action has the stipulated three variations, so that repetition, mundane movements, and the perception of the audience are the subjects explored.

The fourth episode is a solo performed in the delimited space of the light cube. For this scene only one of the lines of the light structure is on, at a low intensity, focused on the dancer’s location. She executes small and spasmodic movements, creating vectors with distinct parts of the body (see Figure 4). As in the third section, the audience here needs time to realize that something is happening in the scene. Once again, in a distinct manner, the episode works on the perception and the habits of audience reception.

As with Stein’s portraits of the first phase, we find in this section of the dance the illusion of a scene that does not develop, created by the performance of a succession of movements in a low light, in which the difference between each movement is hard to perceive. However, as is the case with reading Stein’s work, the more insistent the spectator of this choreographic piece is, the better he or she will perceive that the dancer presents a succession of different movements or body positions, even if minimally different. Additionally, this episode explores the size of the vocables. The following excerpt of the portrait of Picasso is an example of Stein’s monosyllabic composition:

```
He he he he and he and he and and as and
as he and as he and he. He is and as he is, and as he is and he is, he is
and as he and he and as he is and he and he and he and he.

... As trains.
Has trains.
Has trains.
As trains.
As trains.44
```

The use of short vocables creates a peculiar reading rhythm that can be called *staccato*, another term borrowed from music. The re-creation of this rhythm is obtained in this dance scene with the development of a sequence of almost microscopic movements of body segments, for a few seconds
FIGURE 4 João Queiroz, Daniella Aguiar, Rita Aquino, e fez episódios sobre a prosa topo-visual de gertrude stein, performed by Daniella Aguiar, 2008. Only one of the lines of the light structure is on and the dancer is performing minimal and spasmodic movements. © João Queiroz and Daniella Aguiar. Photograph by Adriano Mattos Corrêa. Reproduced by permission of João Queiroz and Daniella Aguiar. Permission to reuse must be obtained from the rightsholder.
creating an illusion of an immobile dancer. For example, minimal and angular movements of the elbow, shoulder, head, and hips are performed in sequence, almost imperceptibly. By making the movements so small, the dancer establishes a correspondence to the monosyllables in verbal language and, at the same time, reproduces the rhythm imposed by the reading of such elements. It is interesting to note that in this episode all elements are presented in their minimal configuration: only one of the two dancers is performing; the movements are the smallest possible; and the light is low.

The fifth episode is another experiment with emphasis on repetition and on syntactically minor vocables, as is the first episode. However, it is a direct transcription of an excerpt of “If I Told Him: A Completed Portrait of Picasso,” using the text as a score in which there is a correspondent movement for each word. Of course, the audience does not have access to the source text while the dancers perform. Again, the dancers have a music stand in front of them. The chosen movements are quotidian and almost imperceptible actions—straightening the blouse, scratching the nose, adjusting the hair (see Figure 5). Again, the choreographers use movements not traditionally recognized or perceived as dance, treating them choreographically. Such quotidian actions here call attention to the movement itself; they are self-referential movements that stress the dance material per se, as happens with Stein’s literary language that stresses words.

The dancers’ patterns are not identical; each executes her own self-referential movement sequence. Sometimes the dancers perform the movements simultaneously; other times, in distinct moments, almost creating a kind of canon, as we saw in Always Now Slowly. The combination of similar, but nonidentical, movements and the alternation of unison and nonunison amplifies the sense of repetition. The use of the same words in different orders, already present in the text, also appears, amplified by the choreographic strategies.

Another experiment with the overhead projector is performed in this piece using an excerpt of the play Listen to Me. Here the same choreographic strategies are applied to manipulate the transparency pages—remarkable care in handling the sheets and in choreographically controlling the time and manner of putting them on the equipment. But now the dance is a solo, not a duet. Compared to the first overhead projector scene, the relation between the written text and the dance piece is more referential: it represents the nature and the dynamics of the work. The excerpt acts as a metalanguage of the dance piece, which uses this excerpt from Listen to Me:

Fourth Act. And what is the air.
Fourth Act. The air is there.
Fourth Act. The air is there which is where it is.
Kindly notice that is all one syllable and therefore useful. It makes no
FIGURE 5 João Queiroz, Daniella Aguiar, Rita Aquino, e [dez episódios sobre a prosa topo-visual de gertrude stein], performed by Daniella Aguiar and Rita Aquino, 2008. In this episode Stein’s text serves as a score for self-referential movements. Photograph by Adriano Mattos Corrêa. © João Queiroz and Daniella Aguiar. Reproduced by permission of João Queiroz and Daniella Aguiar. Permission to reuse must be obtained from the rightsholder.
feeling, it has a promise, it is a delight, it needs no encouragement, it is full.

Fourth Act. The air is full
Fourth Act. Of course the air is full
Fourth Act. Full of what
Fourth Act. Full of it.
Fourth Act. The air is full of it
Fourth Act. Of course the air is full of it.
Fourth Act. Of course
Fourth Act. The air
Fourth Act. Is full
Fourth Act. Of it.

The excerpt, shown on the transparency sheets, highlights Stein’s compositional tactic of insistently using monosyllables. The text also alerts the audience to this characteristic—“Kindly notice that is all one syllable and therefore useful”—and then suggests its sufficiency: “It makes no feeling, it has a promise, it is a delight, it needs no encouragement, it is full.” Stein makes noticeable her language strategies and effects. In using this text, the dance piece also allows the audience to think about the property of insistently using monosyllables as a choreographic strategy. It creates a dialog with audience perceptions about dance, dance movements, and music for dance, and it highlights the dance itself and its conventions. This excerpt of the text, therefore, can be interpreted as a metalanguage of the dance piece itself, since even in another language system it indirectly presents to the spectator a comment about what is being watched.

The last episode of, e... is a dyadic experiment with emphasis on the dynamics of “pure” action and reaction. Two dancers are sitting on benches facing each other in the delimited space of the light cube. From there, they begin a series in which they stand up and walk toward each other, their forward progress interrupted when their bodies collide. They come back to their original positions and begin a new cycle again, with variations. The beginning (the moment when they start), the development (the duration of the walking), and the end (the colliding) are different in each cycle. We can relate the structure of this episode to the portrait “Orta or One Dancing.” The following excerpt is an interesting example for comparison: “This one is one having been doing dancing. This one is one doing dancing. This one is one doing that thing. This one is one doing dancing. This one is one having been meaning to be doing dancing. This one is one meaning to be doing dancing.”

The first direct correspondence that can be found between dance and text are the successive beginnings. It seems that Stein initiates the same sentence over and over again, and yet a different sentence always emerges. In the same way, the dancers always come back to the initial position, sitting
on benches, facing each other. Each cycle corresponds to a sentence. Each
new cycle, like each new sentence, is very similar to the previous one, with
subtle differences. The episode, one could say, is equivalent to a paragraph
in which the beginnings of the sentences are very similar.

The piece behaves as a Stein portrait, divided into episodes, without
climax or hierarchical relations between parts. At the same time, there is an
internal coherence between the parts, owing especially to the fact that all the
episodes explore the same characteristics of the source, re-created through
different procedures and materials. This approach reveals subtle peculiarities
in Stein’s work, since each episode shows more than the familiar aspect of
repetition. Thus, a landscape of slight differences substitutes for an “endless
platitude,” as Augusto de Campos interprets Stein’s work.

The choreography in, e [dez episódios sobre a prosa topovisual de
gertrude stein] also focuses on audience perception and attention, inten-
sified by the use of low light, brief and nontraditional dance movements,
time freezing, and solemnity in execution. The piece produces an immer-
sion in this ambience. Lacking any spectacular action, its mechanisms are
very different from a conventional dance piece: there is no demonstration
of extraordinary bodily ability, no rhythm alterations or climax to attract
the attention of the audience. A peculiarity of this intersemiotic translation,
compared to Pedersen’s choreography, is the movement vocabulary. Each
episode or fragment deals in a distinct way with the type of movement per-
formed, presenting to the spectator a specific assemblage of body patterns
focused on translating Stein’s work into dance.

DANCE AND LITERATURE: TIME AND SYNTAX

For Haroldo de Campos a creative translation is guided by the idea of the
“fragment.” The translation “is a miniature model that throws a light on
the original revealing the virtualities of the whole by the exponentiation of
the part.” In the dance works analyzed, the modus operandi is intensive
and fragmentary. In, e [dez episódios sobre a prosa topovisual de gertrude
stein], one can observe how the fragments increase some Steinean exper-
imental effects: repetition, frequency of simple and irrelevant words and
monosyllables, and new beginnings are intensified, exponentiated, in each
fragment. None of the referential components of “Orta or One Dancing”
are emphasized. Similarly, Always Now Slowly does not translate Stein’s
work as a whole, but critically selects relevant aspects from the source to
re-create.

This characteristic shared by both works shows that the choreographers’
goal is not a submissive, faithful translation; on the contrary, their objectives
involve a critical interpretation of Stein’s work. This characteristic also reveals
an action plan shared by the choreographers; both Stein’s work and the
translations can address different levels of description, actively selected for creative re-creation in the dances.

In language, syntax is connected to the rules that govern the relations between words or classes of words. But one could extend this category to other language systems, such as dance. For Susan Foster, the term defines “the rules governing the selection and combination of moves.” Although Foster refers to both “selection and combination,” here we use “syntax” to refer only to the combination of movements.

We have observed different strategies to explore syntactic properties, most of them related to repetition. In *Always Now Slowly* and in *e [dez episódios sobre a prosa topovisual de gertrude stein]* those strategies are combined to produce repetition. A notable shared choice is the duet, a structure on which both dance pieces are based. This choice emphasizes the repetition of syntax by means of echoes and duplications. A duet seems to be the most efficient means of translating aspects related to Stein’s experiments with syntax, especially in the first- and second-phase portraits. A choreographic sequence performed by two dancers is syntactically different from the same sequence performed by one dancer—or by a group.

In the intersemiotic translation of the portrait “If I Told Him” observed in the dance piece *e . . .*, the duet has an important role in the composition. It permits the viewer to observe the subtle variations in a choreographic sequence that would not be seen if it were executed by only one dancer. For instance, in *e . . .*, even if the dancers perform movements based on the same text, those movements are not identical, but rather belong to the same group or family of movements. In this case, the spectator can perceive the small differences between the movements of one dancer and those of the other, and also recognize each dancer’s movement typology.

When associated with the canon, the duet observed in the second part of *Always Now Slowly* clearly modifies time perception. This way of relating duet and canon is very close to Stein’s constructions, in which the continuous present is the result of repetition with slight modifications. According to Luci Lavalle, “sentences that use words from previous sentences generate an echo effect; the movement that comes from the words, . . . related to the temporal conditions leads us to an intense sense of existence based on the consciousness of the present time.”

As we have seen, besides the syntax deformation connected to continuous repetitions, Steinean uses of gerundial verbal forms intensify the effects of time perception. In Stein’s first-phase portraits, at the semantic level we observe events generated by the insistent use of gerundial form. At the structural level, there are repetitions of syntax and of sound elements. In this way, semantic and structural levels are coordinated; both continuously intensify the present time and the feeling that we are witnesses to a process. The purpose of the combined use of those semantic and structural resources
could be to systematically transgress certain literary conventions. For Wendy Steiner this is another analogy to visual cubism:

In effect, both Stein and the cubists reversed the treatment of temporality in their arts. Where the subject of a painting normally appears in an arrested moment of time, in cubist art the subject is definitely a temporal object. And whereas literature normally develops its subjects gradually from one sentence to the next, supplying new information as it proceeds, Stein’s subjects were to be totally present, fully developed, in each atemporal sentence.52

In dance, time is hardly perceived in a semantic sense. It can be observed when there are explicit narrative elements, as materialized in the costumes, for example (informing us of certain historical periods), or in the structure of beginning, development, and end, as in the case of classical ballet repertory.53 However, in nonnarrative dance, or in nonlinear narrative cases, what is easily recognized is the compositional structure that creates a temporal statement, strongly defined by syntax.

In spite of the impossibility of establishing a semantic correspondence for literary time perception, we mention some conventions related to the perception of time in dance. The verbal semantic dimension is related to the use of predominantly symbolic entities. From a Peircean semiotic perspective, such entities are fundamentally dependent on laws and conventions.54 What kinds of conventions operate in the recognition of time progress in choreography? For Inma Álvarez, “In dance performances every movement is followed and preceded by another one, and sequences can only progress into further movements in the future.”55 Thus, the choreographic structures related to the chosen movements conventionally address the perception of continuity and flux. In choreographed movement sequences each movement serves as preparation for the next, without clear division between the movements, producing a feeling of continuity and flux.

The perception of the temporal flux is related to any phenomenon that involves perceptual activity in time; it is not a specificity of dance. However, the statement of the choreographic pieces analyzed here, always in the present, can be manipulated by modifying the perception of time through different strategies for body action and syntax, for instance. For Álvarez, one of the possibilities of time manipulation is based on the creation of artificial time that “has the capacity to stop time and make the piece timeless.”56 an example of which we discuss below. Álvarez associates this possibility with literary works, asserting that “repetition is one of the devices that has been used expressively, for instance, by Gertrude Stein” to freeze time, as we have mentioned several times.
To exemplify what we called *time manipulation*, we look at another syntax experimentation frequent in the dance duets and based on the repetition of a small number of movements, creating different sequences. In the Danish example, dancers are side by side, performing torso and arm movements. In the Brazilian example, dancers walk, sit, and lie in the restricted space of light; the repetition of only three movements during a relatively long time period, in different sequences, creates an atypical composition. In most contemporary pieces, the sequencing of movements traditionally engenders a flux toward the next movement, framing the perception of time according to choreographic conventions. By repeating only three movements over and over, the action is frozen in time, working against the principle of temporal progress. One could assert that, similar to Steinean explorations, the translations tentatively create a deformed syntax, breaking with dominant traditions related to time perception. Idiosyncratic time perception involves not only repetition, but also movement vocabulary and composition de-emphasizing the fluency of movements. The choreography of, *e dezl episódios sobre a prosa topovisual de gertrude stein* explores a delineated vocabulary based on discrete movements separated by long pauses, breaking the expectation of a fluid and continuous composition.

Although both dance pieces are based on Stein’s work, they show very different results regarding time perception. The use of repetition plays a fundamental role in the continuous-present effect and appears in both pieces, but it is not sufficient in itself to freeze time in dance. The main focus of *Always Now Slowly* is the exploration of syntactic effects based on repetition. Time perception seems to be a byproduct of the syntactic experiments, and is not the main focus of intersemiotic translation.

On the other hand, *e ...* is focused on modifying time perception by exploring other choreographic aspects that contribute to freezing time action. These elements include a rigorous concern with motor vocabulary, the episodic fragmentation of the piece, and the syntactic composition based on the coordinated accumulation of minute movement components. When they do not exhibit continuous flux sequences and create stationary portions of actions repeated in space and time, such combined choices provide a fruitful collection of possibilities to disrupt well-established habits of time perception in dance.

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From Gertrude Stein to Dance

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NOTES

12. Ibid., 315–16. This quotation and all non-English sources are translated by the authors.

 fighters
of Charles S. Peirce (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994), 10; Plaza, *Tradução Intersemiotica*. See also Queiroz and Aguiar, “Iconicity and Intersemiotic Translation.”


21. Steiner, *Exact Resemblance to Exact Resemblance*.


25. Ibid., 22.


29. Steiner, *Exact Resemblance to Exact Resemblance*, 52.


34. Weinstein, *Gertrude Stein and the Literature of the Modern Consciousness*, 45.


37. Perloff, “Poetry as Word-System,” 34.


41. Weinstein, *Gertrude Stein and the Literature of the Modern Consciousness*, 44.


43. Augusto de Campos, “Gertrude Stein: Sim e não,” 244–47.


46. Stein, “Orta or One Dancing,” 287.


52. Steiner, *Exact Resemblance to Exact Resemblance*, 145.


56. Ibid., 8.