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# The Cinema and Modernist Innovation: Serial Representation and Cinematic Immediacy Effects in Gertrude Stein's Early Portraits

Heike Schaefer

"Montage structure," "camera eye perspective": it is common critical usage to describe the formal innovations of modernist literature in cinematic terms. And, indeed, the cinema provided numerous modernist writers with a model for their break with the conventions of realism. This essay seeks to expand the critical understanding of how early film affected literary practice – and thus also to broaden the scope of what may count as cinematic writing – by addressing an aspect that has received little attention to date: namely, the impact that the immediacy effects of early cinema had on modernist writing. My analysis focuses on an author who began writing during film's early years and who was particularly invested in modernist experimentation: Gertrude Stein. In her literary portraits of the 1910s, Stein uses a cinematic form of serial variation to develop a performative non-mimetic mode of writing that is able to convey both the presentness and processuality of experience, identity, and signification. Stein's concern with temporal, perceptual, and representational immediacy, her use of seriality as a compositional method to create the impression of presence and movement, and her recognition that autoreferentiality can be employed to heighten immediacy effects establish a correlation between her portraits and early film.

## *The Critical and Aesthetic Relevance of Immediacy Effects*

If we want to gauge the influence that early cinema exerted on modernist literature, the study of immediacy effects is of central importance. There are two major reasons for this. First, appeals to immediacy consti-

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tute a driving force in media history because new media tend to establish themselves by claiming that they possess greater immediacy than earlier media. As Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin argue in their study of digital culture, *Remediation*, the development of new media may best be understood as a reworking of older media with the aim of achieving a higher degree of immediacy. A new medium typically seeks to gain cultural acceptance by promising an enhanced access to “the real or authentic” (65). In the process, it redefines what counts as real in relation to its particular possibilities of representation (65). The classic example of this dynamic are the rival claims to increased verisimilitude that different visual media have made (60). When photography first appeared on the scene, many people thought, for instance, that a photographed horse seemed more lifelike than a painted horse because of the precision and detail of the photographic image. But when film introduced the possibility of representing moving figures in life-sized images, a filmed horse began to seem more real than a still photograph of it. As a central factor in intermedial competition, appeals to immediacy are a prime indicator of how a new medium alters perceptual habits and aesthetic expectations and thus transforms the context in which all media operate. Hence, studying how media texts produce and dissolve immediacy effects enriches our understanding of how modern media culture, including literary practice, changes.

Let me briefly clarify my concept of immediacy, then. I define immediacy as an actual or an imagined relation of direct contact between distinct entities. Immediacy means that two or more elements are joined without any intervening or connecting element that bridges the distance (spatial, temporal, ontological, conceptual etc.) between them; or that they are experienced *as if* there was nothing between them. The *OED* notes that the word “immediacy” stems from the Latin *immediatus* and consists of the components *im-* “not” and *mediatus*, the past participle stem of *mediare*, which translates as “to be in the middle,” “to intercede,” or “to act as an intermediary.” With regard to literature and other media this means that immediacy effects are created so that elements which are usually perceived as separate can be experienced as directly connected – a feeling and its verbal expression, a photograph and its subject, a ballgame on TV and the audience at home, for instance. The desire for immediacy signals a wish to reduce the difference or distance between discrete objects, dimensions of reality, or levels of representation.

While immediacy seems to presuppose the absence of intervening elements or acts of mediation, our experience of something as immediate frequently depends not on the complete absence of intermediate factors but merely on their conceptual or perceptual backgrounding (Bolter and Grusin 11). Effects of immediacy require that we privilege

the connection between originally separate elements over the mediation that allows this connection and that determines the shape of this contact. An aesthetic experience of immediacy depends on the capacity of the audience to attenuate its awareness of specific acts of mediation or of the very question of mediality (see Bolter and Grusin 70). When we read a realist novel, for instance, we may become immersed in the fictional world of the narrative and gain a sense of immediacy if we allow our attention to be deflected from the material make-up of the book, the formal composition of the text, or our active collaboration in constituting its meaning.

The bracketing of mediation which immediacy effects require can occur intentionally, such as when the lights in a movie theater are dimmed at the beginning of a film screening, or it can happen as the result of processes of habituation. In the latter case, the effect of immediacy depends on the naturalization of the audience's viewing or reading habits. We become so accustomed to certain representational conventions and our ability to decode them that they disappear from our conscious awareness. We tend to watch movies, for instance, without paying attention to the interpretive procedures that allow us to assemble the individual shots of the film into a coherent narrative. We disregard internal and external processes of mediation as we become caught up in the action. Aesthetic experiences of immediacy, then, hinge on the cultural training of our perceptual, cognitive, and psychological routines (see Bolter and Grusin 73). Accordingly, immediacy is best conceived as a culturally and historically situated effect.

### *The Modernist Pursuit of Immediacy*

While the study of immediacy effects is a productive lever for intermedial studies in general, it also speaks to the particular concerns of modernist literature. And this is the second reason why a consideration of immediacy effects is key here. If we think of urbanization, mass production, labor movements, changing gender and race politics, the waves of immigration, World War One, or the theories of Marx, Freud, Nietzsche, Einstein, and Heisenberg as some of the central forces forging the development of modernist culture (Bradbury and McFarlane 27; Bell 9-12), then it is easy to see why the search for new forms of immediacy was central to the modernist project. In a world experienced as fluxional and unstable, in which social relations were subject to radical change, and facts and values were considered relative and provisional, the first-hand experience of reality provided a constantly accessible and subjectively reliable source of meaning and identity. In lieu of inherited,



metaphysically secured, or at least non-subjective systems of order and belief, the authenticity of experiential knowledge was prized (Singal 14-15). As the modernists turned away from the restrictions of Victorian culture, they concentrated on inventing new representational immediacy effects that could capture the unpredictable flux of experience and thus reinvest reality with (now dynamic forms of) order and meaning.

The effort to create new forms of literary immediacy impelled numerous modernist innovations and provides a link between some of the conflicting poetics that fall within the variegated field of modernist literature. To cite a few examples: stream-of-consciousness technique tries to tap directly into the workings of the conscious mind. It manipulates literary and linguistic conventions to create the illusion that the text provides an unmediated record of thoughts, sensations, and feelings as they swirl through the mind, without the imposition of linguistic and logical order by a narrator. The automatic writing of Dada, by contrast, seeks to evade all interventions of consciousness and aims to access the subconscious mind directly. Yet another form of modernist poetics, imagism, tries to bypass both conscious thinking and subjective feeling by centering on objects – “no ideas but in things” (Williams, “A Sort of Song” 55). It tries to tie cognition directly to the object world by collapsing the difference between observer and observed as well as between observation and articulation. The represented thing is to contain and express the ideas connected with its apperception. The mediation of these ideas through processes of perception and signification is backgrounded. The appropriation of cinematic technique was yet another path modernist writers took in search of novel forms of immediacy that did not hinge on the transparency effects of realism. To bear out this claim, this essay will first examine which new immediacy effects were generated by early film. With this media historical framework in place, I will then analyze the significance cinematic immediacy held for Stein’s attempt to create a non-mimetic mode of writing that could represent the present flux of experience.

### *The Immediacy Effects of Early Film*

How did early film redefine immediacy? And how important were immediacy effects for the cultural impact of film? Although the cinema emerged out of diverse earlier technologies, such as (chrono-)photography and the stereopticon, its makers sought to establish the new medium among competing forms of entertainment by presenting it as a technological marvel that offered a more immediate and hence a more exciting mode of representation than its precursors. It belongs to the

founding myths of the cinema that its depiction of motion constituted such a radical break with earlier forms of spectacle that viewers were mesmerized or terrified to the point of mistaking the moving images for reality (Gunning, "Aesthetic of Astonishment" 114). The stories about audiences panicking at the first film shows are an established part of cinema lore. Although no historical evidence exists that people actually did more than anxiously squirm in their seats (Musser 118), the fact that they were imagined to run in fear from the screening of such films as the Lumières's *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station* (1895) is highly significant for our consideration of the relations between mediation and immediacy in early cinematic practice and discourse. What those accounts suggest is that an experience of "living moving pictures," as they were advertised (Musser 98), is preferable to the spectacle of merely *life-like* movement – that it is more entertaining for spectators to regard the reality on screen as continuous with the world they inhabit and to believe that a filmed train therefore may burst out of the screen and slam into the audience than to be aware that one is watching a filmed recording of a train that already has pulled into a station elsewhere and some time ago. Clearly, a desire for experiences of immediacy is at work here. It is invoked to promote the appeal of the new medium.

Historians of silent film have shown that early film shared with the venues of popular entertainment at which it was screened a common aesthetics: an interest in visual thrills and a self-consciously theatrical style of presentation, which undercut the mimetic realism of the cinematographic image (Musser 3). The set design was often deliberately stylized and syncretic. Real and painted props were combined, for instance (Musser 4). Moreover, the films frequently acknowledged their status as spectacle by allowing characters to look directly at the camera or even to gesture towards the audience (Gunning, "Cinema of Attractions" 57). This presentational style, along with the popularity of explicitly self-reflexive films, which portrayed the response of fictional characters to the movies, such as Edison's 1902 remake *Uncle Josh at the Moving Picture Show* (Musser 321-22), indicates that early film was intent on reminding viewers that they were watching a show. Unlike the continuity system that Hollywood later developed to obliterate the spectator's awareness of the filmic medium, the presentational aesthetics of early film invited the viewers both to engage with and to ignore the mediated nature of the moving images and their viewing experience. The oscillation between thrilled immersion and self-reflective distance was expected to enhance rather than reduce the audience's enjoyment of the cinematic spectacle.

What was the advantage of this "particularly complicated" form of entertainment (Gunning, "Aesthetic of Astonishment" 121)? Why did

early film offer experiences of immediacy in the context of an overt confrontation with the dynamics of display and reception? It is my contention that the contradictory pull of early film towards creating both media awareness and immediacy effects encapsulates the cultural function of early cinema as both a manifestation of and a refuge from the challenges of modern culture. To telescope a long critical debate: from its beginnings, film has been associated with modernization processes and perceived as the medium that could best capture the accelerated pace, compressed space, and fragmentation of modern urban life because it is able to record and visually organize the sensory abundance and confusing chaos of a fast-moving world.<sup>1</sup> Early film served a two-fold cultural function: on the one hand, it trained spectators in the new forms of attention necessitated by shifts in modern living conditions that such factors as industrialization, urbanization, and the rise of consumer mass culture had brought about. On the other hand, it offered entertaining moments of respite from these very realities. By combining a presentational style that overtly displayed mediatory processes with representational strategies that rendered the medium transparent, the early cinema reminded the spectators that their perception of the world (both on- and off-screen) was inflected by larger forces, such as technology and cultural codes, while the thrill of its immediacy effects also offered them an entertaining escape route from such self-reflexive considerations. What impact did this autoreferential recasting of immediacy effects in early film have then on literary culture?

*"Making a Cinema of It": The Immediacy Effects of Gertrude Stein's Early Portraits*

When Stein toured the United States in 1934 to promote her work, she recommended her experimental literary portraits of the 1910s to her audience by claiming: "I was doing what the cinema was doing, I was making a continuous succession of the statement of what that person was until I had not many things but one thing" ("Portraits and Repetition" 177). Stein used film as a model to explain to her baffled readers her strategy of using serial variation to create an effect of immediate presence, a method she called "insisting" ("Portraits and Repetition" 166-67). Since the audience was familiar with movies but probably had

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<sup>1</sup> While early critics linked the emergence of film culture to the modernization processes underway in early twentieth-century Western societies, recent film scholars have begun to debate the critical rewards and pitfalls of this identification (Bordwell 141-46; Singer 101-30).

not read Stein's avant-garde work, which had gained a reputation of being mostly unreadable (see Curnett), Stein trusted that the intermedial comparison offered her listeners a familiar framework that would help them relate to her non-mimetic texts outside the constraints of literary tradition.

Stein wanted to recreate in her texts the immediacy with which we experience the present moment. To create this effect of temporal presence, Stein invented a serial mode of representation that continually alerts the reader to the text's temporal unfolding. We can see this at work in her portraits of Matisse and Picasso, which were published together in an issue of Alfred Stieglitz's magazine *Camera Work* in 1912.<sup>2</sup> The portraits are composed as a sequence of successive statements that follow one another as moments do. The textual movement from sentence to sentence enacts the flux of the portrayed life as it continually asserts and transforms itself, while it also tracks the portraitist's ongoing observation of her subject. In "Picasso," Stein presents the painter, for instance, this way:

This one was one who was working. This one was one being one having something being coming out of him. This one was one going on having something come out of him. This one was one going on working. This one was one whom some were following. This one was one who was working.  
(283)

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<sup>2</sup> Although Stein had begun writing portraits as early as 1908 and completed "Matisse" and "Picasso" in 1909, the companion pieces were her first portraits to be published. The literary portrait was a format well-suited for Stein's attempt to represent the "present immediacy" of experience (Stein, "How Writing is Written" 444) because the genre addressed questions of interiority and intersubjective perception in a non-narrative and non-chronological manner. "Literary portraits can be defined as short and condensed prose texts," Ulla Haselstein explains, "which do not employ narration and ignore chronological time in their identification of psychological traits held to be essential for the represented subject in question" (724). A portrait typically seeks to characterize a person by describing the features and dispositions that seem representative, that is, unique and consistent, about him or her. It condenses the life of its subject, constructing a unified persona that is presented as the summation of the subject's lived experience. This conceptualization of identity agreed well with Stein's idea that our identity is fully expressed in our immediate experience of the present moment. Just as portraits distill the lives of their subjects, so our experience of the present moment encapsulates who we are. The way we engage with our present situation carries within it our past experiences and indicates the direction in which we are moving. Hence, for Stein, the best way to represent the traits that define a person is to concentrate on how that person lives through the present moment. For my thinking about Stein's early portraiture Haselstein's analysis has been particularly influential. The most extensive study of Stein's portraits is Wendy Steiner's *Exact Resemblance to Exact Resemblance*. Steiner lists 132 portraits that Stein wrote between 1908 and 1946 (209-15).



The paragraph describes Picasso, “this one,” as he is in the present moment. The first sentence defines Picasso in terms of the kind of person he exemplifies. Both the specific individual and the type are characterized by their actions: “This one was one who was working.” The use of the progressive form of the verb, “working,” serves to prolong the moment. The present participle lets Picasso’s activity appear ongoing rather than singular or instantaneous. It introduces duration. This representational strategy is semantically motivated since the cited behavior is supposed to be representative of Picasso, a trait that remains consistent over time – he is the kind of person who is working. The next sentence repeats the gesture but stretches the moment even further: The beginning of the first sentence, “This one was one,” is expanded into “This one was one being one.” The attribute that now defines Picasso is his ongoing existence, if we emphasize “being,” or his individuality or integrated character, if we stress “one.” Again, Picasso is characterized not in terms of an inert quality but in terms of an activity that takes shape now and that extends beyond the current moment—the experience of “being one” and “having something.” The object of this experience, just like its subject, is cast as an active entity. It is not a static thing but “something being.” Its action likewise has duration – it is “coming out of him.”

The second sentence thus specifies the first sentence. Picasso’s work is creative and shares his vitality or even his ontological rank. It is as he is – “being one having something being.” The unusual syntax suggests that Picasso’s creative work (his art, if we rely on our extratextual knowledge) is produced by means of expressive openness rather than directed will power. It is not made but is “something being coming out of him.” The semantic link between the first two sentences reinforces the effect generated by the use of the progressive tense: the present moment is shown to continue into the next moment.

This spreading of the present into the future – which, of course, is not experienced as future but as yet another present that replaces what has gone before – is addressed on the level of content in the third and fourth sentences: Picasso is said to be consistent. He is “going on having” and “going on working.” He continues to create. He persists. Picasso is thus shown to be dedicated to the creative process. There is no doubt that he will continue to create art in the future. He is “one going on.” The next two sentences complete the movement and circle back to the paragraph’s beginning: Picasso enjoys public renown. He is working.

While the paragraph presents Picasso’s creative productivity as his central characteristic, the text’s composition strives to portray not merely who Picasso is but how Picasso is continually being who he is. The extension of the moment into a “continuous present” (Stein,

"Composition as Explanation" 524-25) is effected through the consistent use of present participles. It is also aided by the semantic development of the passage. Because each sentence specifies or adds to the preceding ones we get a sense of accumulating meaning rather than an effect of mere reiteration. The sentences and the moments they address happen consecutively (although there is no narrative progression). They are going on just as the portrayed subject is (and the consecutive nature of language underscores this impression of flow).

In which sense can Stein's technique of serial variation or "insistence" be considered "cinematic"? What does the intermedial comparison to the cinema add to our understanding of Stein's experiments with literary form?<sup>3</sup> At first thought, the film analogy seems misleading, since Stein's serial sentence permutations call up a form of photography that precedes the invention of film – the chronophotography or time photography developed by the French physiologist Etienne-Jules Marey in the 1880s (see Murphet 76). Inspired by the motion study photographs of Eadweard Muybridge, Marey developed a camera which allowed for rapid exposures and enabled him to record the movement of an object or person on one photographic plate (Marien 212). The result were photographs, such as "Demeney Walking" (1883), which represent figures in motion in the form of composite images that display the moving body in a series of consecutive but only slightly different poses (Braun 81). In their emphasis on the successive phases of the body's movement, Marey's composite images create an effect of seriality similar to that produced by Stein's sentence variations. In Marey's portrait, Demeney walks and walks and walks just as in Stein's portrait, where Picasso is doing his work now and now and now. Yet Marey refined his innovation in just the opposite direction that Stein was pursuing. He tried to minimize the overlap between the different phases of movement and to separate each moment from the next (Braun 268, Marien 212). For this purpose, he invented another camera in which the film would move with each exposure (Marien 212). This made it possible to isolate the different positions that the moving body passed through. In Marey's "improved" chronophotographs, such as "Schenkel, Long Jump" (1886), "Soldiers Walking with Packs" (1891), or "Sprinter" (1890-

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<sup>3</sup> The "cinematic" quality of Stein's writing has been examined by Susan McCabe (56-92) and Julian Murphet (67-81). McCabe focuses on questions of embodiment and Stein's "Mrs. Emerson," relating the text to the aesthetics of Man Ray's film *Emak Bakia* and the comedies of Charlie Chaplin. Murphet contrasts the poetics of *The Making of Americans* and *Tender Buttons*. He discusses Stein's style in the context of the capitalist rationalization and industrial standardization of work routines.



1900), the blurring effect is minimized (Braun 108, 111). Little overlap between the consecutive positions of the body occurs.

Marey's interest in segmenting a continuous movement into clearly differentiated stages marks a major difference to Stein's approach, because her insistent style is geared to portray both the perceptual now of the moment and the processual flow of experience. In "Picasso," time continues to move while the subject of the portrait remains present and consistent – an effect that is emphasized through the constant anaphoric repetition of the phrase "this one was one." Each sentence attends to a present moment and allows this moment – through the use of present participles, word repetitions, and semantic interrelations – to extend into a following moment. In this way, the portrait conveys both the present and the processual unfolding of Picasso's life.

Stein described her representational strategy this way:

You will see that when I kept saying something was something or somebody was somebody, I changed it just a little bit until I got a whole portrait. I conceived the idea of building this thing up. . . . What I was after was this immediacy. A single photograph doesn't give it.

("How Writing is Written" 448)

In her portraits, Stein strove to give a unified expression of her subjects. She aimed to create "a whole portrait." Yet unlike "a single photograph" or a chronophotographic series, which may present us with the realistic likeness of someone at one or several fixed moments in time, the serial composition of Stein's early portraits is in orientation temporal and dynamic rather than visual and static. Instead of freezing the flux of time, the texts refuse to rest on any impression. As their sentence permutations "build up," the portraits accompany the flow of experience rather than fix its meaning. Because of her dual focus on presence and process, Stein contrasted her compositional method with photography and likened it to a time-based medium that could represent continuous movement – film. In her early portraiture, Stein asserted, she was "making a cinema of it" ("How Writing is Written" 448).

Stein's film analogy highlights the very feature of cinema that distinguishes it from earlier forms of visual representation, such as chronophotography, and that not only baffled her contemporaries but that neurophysiologically still cannot be fully explained: the medium's ability to create the illusion of continuous motion. For this is the fundamental paradox of cinematic representation: we perceive a projected sequence of discontinuous static pictures as one continuous moving image (Anderson and Anderson 3). With the insistent style of her early por-

traits, Stein aimed to create the same effect. As she explained her approach:

In a cinema picture no two pictures are exactly alike each one is just that much different from the one before, and so in those early portraits there was . . . no repetition. Each time that I said the somebody whose portrait I was writing was something that something was just that much different from what I had just said that somebody was and little by little in this way a whole portrait came into being, a portrait that was not description and that was made by each time, and I did a great many times, say it, that somebody was something, each time there was a difference just a difference enough so that it could go on and be a present something.

("Portraits and Repetition" 177)

Stein's insistent style is cinematic in the sense that she uses serial variation to create the impression of a continuous movement that possesses temporal immediacy for the beholder. Her words and sentences can be said to function like the individual frames imprinted on a filmstrip insofar as they form sequences of similar, yet constantly changing units that build up into a successive movement through a present that is continuously dissolving and reasserting itself. The serial variation of the text's syntactic elements produces an effect of both processual motion and temporal presence. Like film frames, the sentences of Stein's text possess similarity and "difference enough so that it could go on and be a present something" ("Portraits and Repetitions" 177). Texts like "Picasso" advance through a series of repetitions and modifications that keeps the portrait constantly focused on the now while it integrates the successive moments into one continuous movement. In this way, it creates the impression of an ever-expanding moment, of a "continuous present," that is supposed to carry over into our reading experience: we are to respond to the text's insistent sentence sequences as we would to the ongoing presentness of projected film images. We are to assume that the statement we are currently reading records the portraitist's observation of a moment as it is occurring, just as we feel that the filmed scene unfolding on screen happens as we are watching. This is a conceit, of course. Yet the sense of temporal immediacy that Stein's performative style generates is indeed similar to that which film possesses as a time-based art.

Stein's strategy of highlighting the materiality of her medium to produce effects of immediate presence also agrees well with the presentational aesthetics of early film. As explained earlier, the cinema of attractions prompted its viewers through the deliberate staging of acts of display and reception to remain conscious of the medium. The main "at-

traction” of Stein’s portraits, to stay with the cinema analogy, is the movement of the text’s word and sentence patterns and the self-reflexive engagement with mediatory processes that this compositional principle inspires in the reader. Like the presentational style of early cinema, Stein’s insistent style is geared to jolt the audience into an intensified awareness of mediality to present them with an experience of temporal and perceptual immediacy.

To conclude, the comparison of Stein’s avant-garde texts with the cinema opens up an intermedial perspective that brings into focus the features that define her work as innovative and modernist: Stein dispensed with mimesis and used autoreferential seriality as a means to develop a performative mode of writing that is able to convey both the presentness and the processuality of experience and knowledge. Her early portraits link considerations of temporality (of such polarities as moment and process) to explorations of subject formation (to such polarities as consistency and change) while they test the capacity of the printed word to express states of awareness as well as the development of knowledge and identity over time.

Situating Stein’s experimental work in the same media landscape as early cinema qualifies the still common perception of modernism as a form of “high” cultural practice that is divorced from the vicissitudes of everyday life and inherently hostile to popular culture. Stein deliberately placed her work in the context of modern mass culture. She asserted that her time “was undoubtedly the period of the cinema and series production. And each of us in our own way are bound to express what the world in which we are living is doing” (“Portraits and Repetition” 177). Linking an aesthetic and an industrial use of seriality in this comment, Stein suggests that the modernization of American culture made a radical transformation of literary practice necessary if literature was to remain relevant to the lived experience of its authors and readers.

If we read Stein’s insistent style as a translation of two central principles of mechanical production – seriality and repetition – into a method of literary composition, as Julian Murphet suggests (72), it is noteworthy that the objective of her early portraits is the qualified affirmation rather than negation of individuality and creative agency. The obsessive repetition of the word “one” in the early portraits, for instance, suggests that singularity continues to represent a desirable quality. In her insistent texts, Stein confronts serial repetition – the procedure that many of her contemporaries identified with the erasure of uniqueness (Steiner, “Introduction” xiv) – and turns it into a means to reconceptualize identity and representation in processual and intersubjective terms. Stein’s serial compositions thus participate in early twentieth-century debates about

the changing status of the individual and the arts in a society increasingly shaped by technological mass production and its homogenizing effects.

By “making a cinema” of portraiture, Stein expanded the repertoire of literary technique. Her work demonstrates that cinematic references and appropriations in modernist literature often serve to promote or propel formal experimentation – and that these film-inflected innovations are part of the modernist effort to create new forms of representational immediacy that can capture distinctly modern forms of experience. Stein’s serial compositions render palpable a dimension of reality that traditional Western thought and mimetic representation cannot grasp – the flux of a continually emerging and dissolving present moment of time, experience, and signification. By employing a cinematic form of serial variation that locates the text’s meaning in the movement of its sentence permutations rather than its mimetic capacities, Stein keeps the readers focused on the workings of language and the temporal unfolding of the text and thus manages to turn an awareness of mediatory processes into a tool to center our attention on the always elusive present moment.

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