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### Cognitive Theory and the Enactive Interpretation of Experimental Poetry

The focus on interrelations of concepts in cognitive approaches to literature allows a means of discussing how readers invoke worlds of significance in performative acts of reading. Nowhere is the reader's active interpretive role more apparent than in the interpretation of experimental poetry, a genre of literature that explicitly disrupts the conventions enabling words to serve as an unobtrusive conduit between objective situations in the world and their mental representations. Yet precisely because they require the reader to pause and reflect on the linguistic and behavioral foundations of communication, the defamiliarizing features of such disruptive writing call attention to how we construct conceptual models of the world through our use of language. Though poetry seldom if ever adheres to strictly scientific methods, it is most appropriately labeled "experimental" when it functions as a kind of empirical testing ground for a writer's vision of how language functions and when it serves as a space in which a writer can work to challenge common notions of language's conventional limitations. The writings of Gertrude Stein operate in precisely these ways. The lectures that Stein delivered to explain her methods of composition, such as those collected in the volumes What Are Masterpieces (1926) and Lectures in America (1935), outline her understanding of how grammar could be manipulated in her experimental texts to call attention to the effects our representations of the world have on our conceptions of how it operates. Though Stein's delivery of these lectures often served the purpose of propagandizing her "difficult" writings, they provide a starting point for investigating how her experimental texts present fresh perspectives on modern life through

the disruption of syntactical and semantic conventions. In particular, “Composition as Explanation” presents her ideas regarding art’s relation to its historical situation, and “Poetry and Grammar,” as its title implies, explains how the attributes of standard grammatical categories shape her understanding of genre distinctions between prose and poetry. Through comparison of these lectures with the writing practices exhibited in Stein’s Tender Buttons (1914), this paper will argue that this famously experimental and difficult text demonstrates her use of metonymy as a prevailing conceptual principle in her writing. Since Stein criticism has often used terms proposed by Roman Jakobson in his structuralist model of signification to explain her writing methods, it will begin by outlining Jakobson’s ideas, leading to his distinction between metaphor and metonymy as the literary tropes that most clearly exhibit the two fundamental actions of selection and combination in his model of language usage. Yet the paper will ultimately examine how a Jakobsonian description of metaphor and metonymy might be reconfigured in cognitive terms in order to describe how Tender Buttons encourages the reader to map out innovative metonymical links within our mental representations of the objects that populate common domestic situations.

Several prominent critics have used a Jakobsonian theoretical framework in order to characterize Stein’s various styles and explain their relations to the trajectory of her entire career.<sup>1</sup> Common to most of these critical views is their use of Jakobson’s dualistic model analyzing language usage along two axes: the selection, or paradigmatic, axis, on the one hand, and the combination, or syntagmatic, axis, on the other. This model explains how speakers combine words from a language’s lexicon to form comprehensible utterances. Each axis corresponds to a type of action that addressers (speakers and writers) and addressees (listeners

and readers) undertake in producing and receiving utterances. Elmar Holenstein explains Jakobson's distinction between these two basic actions as follows:

When we speak, we carry out two acts. We make a selection from a pre-given stock of linguistic units and combine them into more complex units. Every element of discourse is thus extended along two axes. It occurs in combination with other units, in which it finds its context, while also providing the context for the units of which it is itself composed. On the other hand, every unit of a message represents a selection from a stock of units which can be substituted for it without rendering the message meaningless or wrong. (138)

The processes of selection and combination occur in tandem, as we draw from the stock of units that exist within a particular language and join them into meaningful combinations according to the conventions that guide their usage. In this model of language usage, our choice of any particular linguistic unit is largely determined by context, both the verbal context established by the other units with which we combine it to form a message and by the extra-verbal contexts that influence any given utterance situation. Any chosen unit alters these contexts and thus affects future choices. Essentially, Jakobson's model of selection and combination describes the ways addressers and addressees employ the resources of a language according to its conventions to suit the demands of a particular utterance situation.

The interplay of the two axes in forming and interpreting signs and utterances is particularly clear in the figurative language of poetry. In "Linguistics and Poetics," Jakobson defines the poetic function of language as follows: "The set (Einstellung) toward the message as such, focus on the message for its own sake, is the POETIC function of language" (69). This definition follows his discussion of six factors operative in any instance of verbal

communication, which he describes in the following passage in which the words printed in all capitals designate these factors:

The ADDRESSER sends a MESSAGE to the ADDRESSEE. To be operative the message requires a CONTEXT referred to (the “referent” in another, somewhat ambiguous, nomenclature), graspable by the addressee, and either verbal or capable of being verbalized; a CODE fully, or at least partially, common to the addresser and addressee (or in other words, to the encoder and decoder of the message); and, finally, a CONTACT, a physical channel and psychological connection between the addresser and the addressee, enabling both of them to enter and stay in communication. (LIL 66)<sup>2</sup>

To each factor of communication corresponds a particular function of language that verbal messages perform. All verbal messages perform a variety of functions, and according to Jakobson, the differences between types of messages lie in the hierarchical order of the functions. Much everyday language is dominated by the referential function, an orientation toward context. Here the term context corresponds primarily to the world beyond language to which verbal messages refer. However, the term context is also used by Jakobson to mean the matrix of other linguistic units in which any individual unit is embedded or into which it is inserted.

This overlap in his use of the term context indicates a point at which we can begin to consider how Jakobson’s ideas can be usefully supplemented by cognitive perspectives. Noting potential confusion in such differing uses of the term context, Friedrich Ungerer and Hans-Jörg Schmid distinguish the world of objects outside the mind from mental representations with the two terms situation and context:

[...] we define the term **situation** as the interaction between objects in the real world.

[...] When [a] sentence is being processed by the hearer or reader, the words call up the corresponding cognitive categories, or to put it more simply, the mental concept which we have of the objects in the real world. In addition, a cognitive representation of the interaction between the concepts is formed, and it is for this cognitive representation that we would like to reserve the term **context**. (46-47)<sup>3</sup>

This distinction between mental representation and states of affairs in the objective world to which concepts correspond is a useful means of avoiding confusion. Yet in parsing acts of communication into the two levels of concepts and the objective world outside mental representations, one leaves out the notion of context that Jakobson notes in the ways that other linguistic units affect the functioning of any other unit: the verbal matrix of other linguistic units among which any individual unit functions as a significant part of a language. Even in a cognitive approach that stresses the interaction of concepts in achieving mental representations, one cannot ignore the intervening level of material representation of thoughts in the words of a language. Thus I propose that we add another notion of context to our discussion: the verbal matrix within which words are placed in relation to other words, or, more broadly, within which linguistic units function in relation to other linguistic units. Of course, these words are on some level themselves objects in the world and thus form part of the ground covered by the use of situation cited above. However, they also stand apart from most of the objective world in their use as material representations of it. Therefore, I will subsequently use three terms to label the different notions context just discussed: the situation, describing the relationships between objects in the tangible world; the verbal matrix, describing the interaction of linguistic units; and the conceptual context, describing the interaction of mental representations.

Acknowledgment of the verbal matrix is important in understanding Stein's relation of her writing to its objective situation and how she uses grammatical categories to define the genres of poetry and prose. Discussions of the relationships between a work of art and its historical moment occupy much of Stein's attention in "Composition as Explanation." This lecture offers an extended explanation of how the work of art, i.e. the artistic composition, relates to the overall manner in which people are living at a given period of time in a given cultural setting. She defines "composition" broadly as "the thing seen by one living in the living they are doing, they are the composing of the composition that at the time they are living is the composition of the time in which they are living. It is that that makes living a thing they are doing" (Selected Writings 516; hereafter SW). However, elsewhere in this lecture and in others she uses the term more restrictedly to mean a piece of art, as in the following famous passage: "That is the reason why the creator of the new composition in the arts is an outlaw until he is a classic" (SW 514). She thus uses the word composition to refer both to the work of art and to the make-up of the historical situation in which it is created. This choice cleverly dramatizes a main point of her talk: that it is the job of avant-garde artists to devise the appropriate formal means in their works to represent the contemporary "time-sense" as accurately as possible. Or to use the terms arrived at in the preceding discussion of context, she argues that it is her job as an experimental writer to depict the predominant features of the contemporary historical situation through formal innovations on the level of the verbal matrix, in order to create changes in how people understand their lives by means of the conceptual contexts that represent the objective world.

Stein claims at the outset of her lecture that the only thing that changes from one generation to the next is the way in which people go about creating their lives according to their understandings of what their historical moment requires:

The only thing that is different from one time to another is what is seen and what is seen depends upon how everybody is doing everything. This makes the thing we are looking at very different and this makes what those who describe it make of it, it makes a composition, it confuses, it shows, it is, it looks, it likes it as it is, and this makes what is seen as it is seen. Nothing changes from generation to generation except the thing seen and that makes a composition. (SW 512)

Her statement “how everybody is doing everything [. . .] makes what is seen as it is seen” suggests that each person’s actions produce the mental representations of the world that he or she enacts in concert with others living in the same society at the same time. Her emphasis on the interdependence of environment and agent, of the things seen and those seeing, thus finds a parallel in enactive models of embodied cognition. In proposing such an enactive model of mind based on the development of an individual’s mental life according to the actions he or she performs, Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch state, “perception is not simply embedded within and constrained by the surrounding world; it also contributes to the enactment of this surrounding world” (174). People compose the conceptual contexts that guide their ways of living and largely create their sense of the world they inhabit according to their individual understandings of what their times require, but those understandings are themselves shaped by how each individual sees others acting. Stein rephrases this point later in the lecture as follows: “the only thing that is different is what is seen when it seems to be being seen, in other words, composition and time-sense” (SW 514). For Stein, composition refers to the whole

of cultural activity at a given time (and to particular cultural products created in that time), while time-sense refers both to one's understanding of a historical zeitgeist and to one's understanding of historical development from one time to another. However, disjunctions occur between different individuals' understandings of their shared time because, according to Stein, the majority of people base their sense of their own time upon models drawn from past cultural productions: "No one is ahead of his time, it is only that the particular variety of creating his time is the one that his contemporaries who also are creating their own time refuse to accept" (SW 514). Those people who retrospectively are designated as having been "ahead of [their] time" actually are just more attuned to the requirements of their time than their "contemporaries." This is the phenomenon that Stein implies is occurring for the modernist avant-garde; they are "avant" not in relation to their time but in relation to the majority of their contemporaries' lagging time-sense. Stein thus sees the work of avant-garde art in general, and of experimental poetry in particular, to reside in its enactment of conceptual models attuned to one's own time, in opposition to the inherited conventions of the past.

While "Composition as Explanation" thus describes how the formal attributes of an artwork correspond to the predominant characteristics of its cultural situation, "Poetry and Grammar" describes Stein's seemingly idiosyncratic attitudes toward different parts of speech and explains the grammatical issues that guided her development as a writer. The lecture begins with a question of genre: "What is poetry and if you know what poetry is what is prose" (Stein, Lectures in America 209; hereafter LIA). In the first portion of the lecture, she expresses her opinions concerning particular parts of speech: to put it simply, she dislikes nouns and adjectives, while she likes verbs, adverbs, articles, prepositions, conjunctions, and pronouns. She condemns nouns because she thinks them to be essentially names for objects in the world.

She considers people's familiarity with nouns as names of objects an impediment to perceiving the world afresh, to seeing "the thing in itself"<sup>4</sup> beyond its linguistic representation: "As I say a noun is a name of a thing, and therefore slowly if you feel what is inside that thing you do not call it by the name by which it is known" (LIA 210). She is thus critical of our tendency to parse the world into readily available categories, thereby diminishing the uniqueness of any individual experience.<sup>5</sup> As the most common markers of such conceptual categories, nouns receive the brunt of her ire. In order to more clearly represent the objective world as it really is, she feels the need to reject the kinds of words, nouns, that are generally seen as most directly tied to its objects. To see the world clearly, beyond the worn tokens of names but nevertheless through the verbal matrix of language, Stein's initial impulse is to banish nouns from her writing, or at least trouble their place within it. These concerns motivate her question, "Was there not a way of naming things that would not invent names, but mean names without naming them" (LIA 236). In terms more closely aligned with cognitive studies, one could rephrase this question, "Was there not a way of invoking concepts without using the words that indicate their denotative meanings?" The task she sets for herself is thus somewhat paradoxical: to show "the thing in itself" in her writing without using the word that refers to that thing; to make her reader experience the shock of fresh perception of the world by severing the linguistic ties that refer most directly to its objects. In order to present a sense of the world in her writing that is charged with the immediate impact of nonlinguistic experience, she concludes that one must, initially, do without the mediating presence of nouns.

Stein's avoidance of nouns led her to develop the style of writing that characterizes much of her prose fiction, especially The Making of Americans: long sentences largely devoid of nouns that attempt to evoke in the reader a feeling of movement in space and time through the

use of verbs and grammatical connectives, such as prepositions and conjunctions. However, since such prose compositions still primarily present narratives of living in a world populated by named persons and objects, she found herself unable to dispose of the nouns that tether such narratives to the objective world. Therefore, she decided to confront nouns head-on, as she explains in the following passage:

But and after I had gone as far as I could in these long sentences and paragraphs that had come to do something else I then began very short things and in doing very short things I resolutely realized nouns and decided not to get around them but to meet them, to handle in short to refuse them by using them and in that way my real acquaintance with poetry was begun. [. . .] Nouns as you all know are the names of anything and as the names of anything of course one has had to use them. (LIA 228-29)

She thus describes this decision to meet nouns as shifting her project from the ground of prose to that of poetry. She characterizes poetry's essence as a pervasive preoccupation with nouns:

Poetry is concerned with using with abusing, with losing with wanting, with denying with avoiding with adoring with replacing the noun. It is doing that always doing that, doing that and doing nothing but that. Poetry is doing nothing but using losing refusing and pleasing and betraying and caressing nouns. That is what poetry does, that is what poetry has to do no matter what kind of poetry it is. And there are a great many kinds of poetry. (LIA 231)

As one can see from these statements, Stein's definitions of poetry as a genre have little to do with traditional attributes like 'written in meter and rhyme' or 'employing symbolic imagery,' and largely to do with a focus on nouns as the dominant part of speech shaping the formal concerns of a verbal composition. And since nouns most directly determine reference to

objective situations and serve as the most prevalent grammatical markers of conceptual categories, an accompanying goal of her poetry is to reshape her readers' understanding of the contexts that represent our mental pictures of the world.

In the overview of her writing that she gives in "Poetry and Grammar," Stein locates the shift of her writing from prose to poetry in the composing of Tender Buttons and in her concurrent realization that names (i.e. nouns) were necessary in portraying a world populated by things. She states,

I began to discover the names of things, that is not discover the names but discover the things the things to see things to look at and in so doing I had of course to name them not to give them new names but to see that I could find out how to know that they were there by their names or by replacing their names. And how was I to do so. They had their names and naturally I called them by the names they had and in doing so having begun looking at them I called them by their names with passion and that made poetry, I did not mean it to make poetry but it did, it made the Tender Buttons, and the Tender Buttons was very good poetry [. . .] (LIA 235)

In this passage, she describes her renewed interest in naming as the result of a discovery akin to a breakthrough in science or philosophy: her discovery of "things," or of a new way "to see things," demanded that she rethink the role of names/nouns in her work and led to a passion for name-calling that made poetry. This emphasis on re-seeing things and finding the right way to name them highlights nouns' referential connection to the situations they depict. Her move into the genre of poetry also marks a shift from her earlier interest in portraying wholly subjective mental states in her fiction to portraying the conceptual contexts evoked in an individual's interaction with objective situations.

Later in “Poetry and Grammar,” she elaborates on the problem that the direct confrontation with nouns posed for her: “And so for me the problem of poetry was and it began with Tender Buttons to constantly realize the thing anything so that I could recreate that thing. I struggled I struggled desperately with the recreation and the avoidance of nouns as nouns and yet poetry being poetry nouns are nouns” (LIA 238). She carries on this motif of a struggle with nouns throughout the lecture: “And so in Tender Buttons and then on and on I struggled with the ridding myself of nouns, I knew nouns must go in poetry as they had gone in prose if anything that is everything was to go on meaning something” (LIA 242). The ambiguous status of the phrases “go in” and “gone in” in this last passage illustrates Stein’s equivocal stance on the place of nouns in her writing. In one sense, they have to go, to be refused and dispensed with; however, in another sense, they still must go in(to) the poetic composition in order to reestablish a connection with the objective world. Stein considers a preoccupation with nouns to be the essential feature of poetry, so by her own definition a poem must primarily concern the grammatical functioning of nouns. Yet she must also find a way to refuse the role of nouns as names only arbitrarily connected to the objects they label in order to achieve a vital language that is adequate to her presentation of “the thing in itself.”

Having largely eliminated references to the objective world from the prose style she developed in writing The Making of Americans, Stein recognized that this referential function, carried predominantly by the ties nouns forge with situations in the world, was necessary in her attempts to represent the modern “composition,” i.e. the modern world of objects and events. Tender Buttons is the chief text in which Stein embarks on her project of representing objects on an intimate scale, and many critics read this series of prose poems as depictions of Stein’s domestic partnership with Alice Toklas. Marjorie Perloff states, “the whole of Tender Buttons

may be said to take place in an indeterminate room without ‘centre,’ in which food and dressing and love rituals are occurring interchangeably” (107). Such circumscription is still consistent with her project to represent the time-sense of the modern composition if she takes herself and her impressions to be representative of one living at this time in the midst of its composition.

Such a project accounts for her shift in focus from portraying the inner psychology of various character types through syntax in The Making of Americans to what Randa Dubnik calls the “mimesis of the intersection of the present moment of consciousness with an object” (28).<sup>6</sup>

Steven Meyer also notes this trend in Stein’s writing, quoting her description of this development in The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas: “Stein in fact recognized a movement in her career from an early excessive concentration on ‘the inside,’ . . . to some middle ground, as in the observation . . . that during the summer of 1912 her ‘style gradually changed’: ‘Hitherto she had been interested only in the insides of people, their character and what went on inside them, it was during that summer that she first felt a desire to express the rhythm of the visible world’ ” (232). According to her explanations of genres in “Poetry and Grammar,” this shift from representing character psychology to depicting the interaction of consciousness with the objects of the world also marks a genre transition from prose fiction to poetry.

In Tender Buttons, Stein expresses “the rhythm of the visible world” as it appears within the mental representations of her reconfigured associations on the conceptual level. The depictions of the objective world that we encounter in the three sections of Tender Buttons—“Objects,” “Food,” and “Rooms”—strive to break the habitual associations of conventional poetic metaphor and the reader’s past linguistic experience by forging new associations on the model of metonymy. Like the Romantic and Symbolist poetry of individual expression to which Stein’s poetry responds, the language of Tender Buttons is characterized by what Jakobson labels

as the poetic function, an orientation to the formal and material features of the message, what I've been calling the verbal matrix, itself. This orientation is particularly apparent in passages that give the freest rein to verbal play and sound patterning, as in "Cooking" from "Food":

COOKING

Alas, alas the pull alas the bell alas the coach in china, alas the little put in leaf alas the wedding butter meat, alas the receptacle, alas the back shape of mussle, mussle and soda.

(SW 492)

In this poem, Stein lovingly repeats one of the words she uses as a substitute for Alice's name, "alas," also identifying her lover as "a lass" and imbuing the passage with a playfully melodramatic tone. Her attention to the material characteristics of language also includes the appearance of letters and their spoken sounds; she repeats the "l" found within "alas" throughout the passage ("pull," "bell," "little," "leaf," "receptacle," "mussle"), and the double l's of "pull" and "bell" are echoed by other doublings: "little," "wedding," and "mussle." The word "mussle" is spelled to read as a pun combining the words "mussel" and "muscle," connecting an ingredient of Alice's cooking with the appearance of the muscles in her "back shape." While this poem does not employ traditional markers of poetry such as verse form, its complex patterning and attention to the material characteristics of its component words clearly satisfy Jakobson's descriptions of poetry.

However, unlike most lyric poetry, the style of Tender Buttons reduces the role of the expressive function of language connected to the poet's individual perspective and heightens the referential function that gestures outward to the interrelated objects of situations in the world. Whereas Romantic and Symbolist lyrics are certainly populated by objects, such objects typically serve as vehicles for the metaphorical projection of the poetic speaker's views. Many

of Stein's poems in the noun-heavy style still express her views on writing and on the objects and events of her household, but the refraction of such perspectives through the text's indeterminate language forces the reader to complete these pictures. Describing the style of Tender Buttons, David Lodge states that it "is clearly a type of metaphorical writing based on radical substitution (or replacement) of referential nouns. But the perception of similarity on which metaphor depends is in this case private and idiosyncratic to a degree that creates almost insuperable obstacles to understanding" (153). This assessment is true only on the assumption that it is the reader's goal in approaching Tender Buttons to see through obscure metaphors to Stein's own associations and ideas, or in other words, that the text unsuccessfully emphasizes the expressive function of language typical of Romantic lyric poetry. On my reading of the text, this is clearly not its purpose. Instead, Stein attempts here to move to a "middle ground" between inside and outside, between the objects of her experience and her impressions of those objects, and between writer and reader. She achieves this middle ground by employing metonymy as a principle that leads the reader to form associations between concepts sharing contexts within our mental representations. Jayne L. Walker recognizes the metonymic quality of nouns in Tender Buttons, despite the prevalence of repetition and puns that "reinforce the prevailing structural principle of similarity"; she goes on to explain:

But the nouns that are linked together in this text are not semantically equivalent; their relationship is what Jakobson describes as metonymic, not metaphoric. In a figural sense, they are all synecdoches, naming contiguous 'pieces of any day.' In this text all the connective links of syntax are pressed into service to 'splice' concrete nouns and adjectives together into new configurations that challenge our customary sense of the order of things. (133)

Likewise, Marjorie Perloff, quoting John Ashbery, calls attention to the way that Tender Buttons allows room for the reader's associations to fill in the gaps left by Stein's disruption of direct expression: "Gertrude Stein's fluidity of reference creates what John Ashbery, whose pronouns are similarly indeterminate, has called 'An all-purpose model which each reader can adapt to fit his own set of particulars.' The poet wants us to be able to fill in the gaps in whatever way suits us" (105-6). This "fluidity of reference" is far more characteristic of the potentially unlimited movement between contiguous terms in metonymy than in the two-way exchange of metaphor. At points in the text, Stein actually seems to be critiquing the limitations of metaphor: "Change a single stream of denting and change it hurriedly, what does it express, it expresses nausea. Like a very strange likeness and pink, like that and not more like that than the same resemblance and not more like that than no middle space in cutting" (SW 482). I interpret these lines as critical of the "single stream" exchange between metaphoric tenor and vehicle, the "same resemblance" that a reader would habitually expect to find in expressive lyric poetry.

Like Jakobson's basis for distinguishing metaphor and metonymy according to the principles of substitution and combination, descriptions of these tropes in cognitive theory typically define metonymy in terms of conceptual contiguity. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson define metonymy broadly as a case of "using one entity to refer to another that is related to it" (35). Thus whereas metaphor posits a relationship of similarity between apparently dissimilar objects, metonymy relies on conceptual proximity to imply significant associations between objects that are found within the same situations. Raymond W. Gibbs, Jr. proposes a rule of thumb for distinguishing between metaphor and metonymy by claiming that metaphors can be re-expressed as similes with no change in conceptual content whereas metonymies cannot: "A convenient way of distinguishing the two kinds of figurative tropes is to apply the 'is like' test.

Figurative statements of the X is like Y form are most meaningful when X and Y represent terms from different conceptual domains. If a nonliteral comparison between two things is meaningful when seen in an X is like Y statement, then it is metaphorical; otherwise it is metonymic” (322). Gibbs’s explanation that metaphor involves the postulated similarity of two terms from different conceptual domains implies the corresponding principle that metonymy primarily involves relationships between items typically found within the same conceptual domain. A similar view of metonymy is espoused by Ungerer and Schmid, though they substitute the idea of cognitive models in the place of conceptual domains. Their definition of the term cognitive model describes how the mind organizes cognitive categories into sets of interrelated contexts:

[. . .] for all kinds of phenomena that we come across in everyday life, we have experienced and stored a large number of interrelated contexts. Cognitive categories are not just dependent on the immediate context in which they are imbedded, but also on this whole bundle of contexts that are associated with it. Therefore, it seems quite useful to have a term which covers all the stored cognitive representations that belong to a certain field. We will use the term **cognitive model** for these knowledge bases (and indicate them typographically by using underlined small capitals) [. . .]. (47)

The notion of cognitive models is thus crucial to Ungerer and Schmid’s explanation of how both metaphor and metonymy function:

The main difference between [metaphor and metonymy] is that while metaphor involves a mapping across different cognitive models, metonymy is a mapping within one model. One category within a model is taken as standing for another category within the same model. The main function of metonymic expression, then, is to activate one cognitive

category by referring to another category within the same model, and by doing that, to highlight the first category or the submodel to which it belongs. (128-29)

The description of metaphor and metonymy that Ungerer and Schmid provide helps to explain how Stein's paratactic usage of nouns in Tender Buttons prompts the reader to form fresh conceptual connections between objects in everyday situations, as my close reading of the poem "A Shawl" below will demonstrate.

Before turning to this close reading, I want to consider two perspectives from cognitive theory that help us explain how metonymy functions in Tender Buttons not merely in isolated instances of this trope but as a general principle guiding the unexpected conceptual associations it prompts. Gibbs calls attention to the expansive role that metonymy plays in our thought and speech: "Metonymy is a widely used figure of thought whereby we take one well-understood or easily perceived aspect of something to represent or stand for the thing as a whole. Although metonymy has traditionally been viewed as a special rhetorical device in poetry and literature, it is a ubiquitous part of how we think of people, places, events, and things" (358). Stein's unconventional metonymies typically function on this more general level of representing metonymic processes of thought, rather than on a strict interpretation of metonymy as an individual instance of the rhetorical trope, as in the case where "The White House promised to veto the bill" operates on the conceptual metonymy THE PLACE FOR THE PERSON. Her paratactic, noun-heavy references to the objective world in Tender Buttons rely on a general principle of association by contiguity to imply novel connections between words that evoke related cognitive models. This pervasively metonymic quality of figurative language in Tender Buttons depends both on words' denotative references to the objective world and on the subjective connotations its readers attach to particular words in order to develop the networks of

conceptual association that it obliquely suggests. Drawing on the construction-integration model of cognition presented by Walter Kintsch in Comprehension: A Paradigm for Cognition (1998), Peter Stockwell explains the idea of an associative “knowledge net” as follows:

[The construction-integration model of cognition] offers a framework for understanding in terms of an associative **knowledge net**, comprising propositions, schemas and frames, which more loose and chaotically organised by associations. The meaning of any single element is a consequence of the number and strength of its links with other elements, and these associations arise differently on each occasion in each new act of context. The substructure out of which meaning is constructed is relatively stable and permanent, but the meaning of any given concept is highly flexible and constructed anew on each occasion of use. The illusion of stable meanings arises because meaning construction is based on the same (or a slightly experientially modified) substructure. It might take a radically different context or circumstance to shift the meaning of a familiar term. (154)

The unusual conceptual contexts created by the paratactic verbal matrix of noun-heavy poems in Tender Buttons creates just such shifts in the associations we attach to familiar terms. For the most part, the vocabulary of these poems could not be simpler; yet the strange arrangements of such familiar words labeling objects frequently encountered in common domestic situations call on readers both to re-think the stability of their meanings and to reflect on the functioning of the verbal and conceptual substructures that produce the illusion of stable meanings. By placing such concepts in a defamiliarizing network of fluid metonymical association, Stein urges the reader to consciously enact the processes by which words evoke the conceptual contexts that allow us to apprehend the situations comprising our everyday objective world.

The following passage from the poem “A Shawl” in “Objects” displays Stein’s reliance on conceptual contiguity to suggest metonymic connections between its constituent nouns and the objects to which they refer:

A SHAWL

A shawl is a hat and hurt and a red balloon and an under coat and a sizer a sizer of talks.

A shawl is a wedding, a piece of wax a little build. A shawl.

Pick a ticket, pick it in strange steps and with hollows. There is hollow hollow belt, a belt is a shawl. (SW 475)

The numerous assertions of equivalence, identity, or definition implied by the repetitions of “is” in this poem depend not on a shared essential quality of unlike objects that metaphor reveals but rather on various uses of a shawl that connect this object with other objects related to it in daily life, other objects that might be put to the same use in similar situations. Like a “hat” and a bridal veil worn at a “wedding,” a shawl can be worn as a head covering. Thus these items participate in the cognitive model HEADWEAR and potentially link items found within it to those found in the context of PLACES OF WORSHIP, a cognitive model suggested by “wedding.” This association of shawls with places of worship might also explain “a piece of wax a little build”; the decorative coverings that one often finds on tables and altars in synagogues and churches cover surfaces on which candles sit, and pieces of wax can form little mounds that build up from the drippings of such candles. If we narrow our cognitive model PLACES OF WORSHIP to JEWISH TEMPLES, the association of a shawl with a wedding might also call to mind a huppa, a canopy beneath which Jewish marriage ceremonies are traditionally performed, and a tallit, or prayer shawl, commonly worn by people worshipping in a synagogue. Since a shawl could also be

found amongst the items in the cognitive model WRAPPINGS, the word “hurt” might imply the potential use of a shawl as a bandage, and the blood that would then appear on the shawl could account for the appearance of the “red balloon” that follows. In windy weather a shawl might billow so that it resembles a “balloon” (suggesting OBJECTS THAT FLOAT ON THE AIR), though not if one wears it tucked “under [one’s] coat” like a scarf. Wearing a shawl as a scarf might explain the enigmatic phrase “a sizer of talks,” as a shawl worn wrapped around the mouth would muffle speech. The connection of shawls to the outside world links them with travel involving “a ticket” and “strange steps.” Finally, a shawl could be worn around the waist as a makeshift “belt” that is less substantial than a usual belt made of leather or canvas and which thus could be described as “hollow.” The last phrase of this passage reverses the word order typical of the copulas that fill the previous lines; here we have “a belt is a shawl” rather than “a shawl is a belt.” This change could emphasize the role that an object’s use plays in our definitions of that object. Is a shawl worn round the waist really a shawl or a belt? It is both and essentially neither; the uses to which objects are put ground our definitions of them and determine the categories into which they fit. The network of associations that I suggest above similarly depends on the usage to which its constituent objects are typically put, on Stein’s recollection of the contexts suggested by a shawl, and on my own experiences with related objects that I bring to the interpretation of this passage.

Stein’s writing in Tender Buttons calls on readers to follow conceptual links between different cognitive models by exploiting our familiarity with the contexts evoked by her simple domestic imagery. Her presentation of metonymical associations in the verbal matrix of her writing highlights how our ways of interacting with objects in everyday situations determine the conceptual contexts that form our mental representations of the world. Her reader is thus led

through figurative associations that dramatize the enactive nature of cognition, as each reader also largely determines his or her own path. What Varela, et al. claim regarding the role of perception in shaping the lived experiences of embodied action can also be applied to the experience that one undergoes in reading a text like Tender Buttons. Stein makes available to readers models of conceptual association that lead them to think in fresh ways about the objects that typically populate an urban, middle-class world. Confronted with familiar words in unfamiliar combinations in Tender Buttons, each reader must draw on his or her own individual experiences to form new associations suggested by Stein's choices; the particular associations that any reader will form depend on his or her unique reading of the potential connections that Stein's language makes available. This process, however, is only possible in the public medium of language that writer and reader both use as a means of conceptualizing the world. The dependence of Stein's metonymic associations on the outside world of objects and actions thus also highlights the common usage of language by communities of users to order the flow of experience and thereby construct the communal "composition" of living that Stein describes in "Composition as Explanation." In attempting to present the uniqueness of individual experiences by means of language, and not just descriptions of categories worn out in their familiarity, Stein requires that a reader treat the words that stand for such objects in her verbal compositions as themselves material objects with their own tangible reality. Therefore, her writing exemplifies the part that experimental poetry can play in cognitive approaches to literature; through its insistence on the materiality of language, it calls on us to remember the active role that we must take in deriving meaning from the verbal performances that largely guide our conceptualization of the world.

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Notes

<sup>1</sup> The most extensive application of Jakobson's ideas in Stein criticism remains Randa Dubnick's book-length study of Stein's formal correspondences to Cubist visual artworks, The Structure of Obscurity: Gertrude Stein, Language, and Cubism. In The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Typology of Modern Literature, David Lodge presents a theory of modernist and postmodernist composition grounded in Jakobson's analysis of language into the fundamental activities of selection and combination, and includes a reading of Stein's writing according to this model (144-55). Two works that succinctly explain Jakobson's relevance to reading Stein are Jayne L. Walker's The Making of a Modernist: Gertrude Stein (130-35) and Cyrena N. Pondrom's Introduction to Geography and Plays (xv-xxxv).

<sup>2</sup> In referring back to these factors myself, I will not hold to Jakobson's convention of printing them in capitals, as this convention is generally reserved for either cognitive categories or conceptual metaphors and metonymies in cognitive writings.

<sup>3</sup> Ungerer and Schmid introduce the notion of a "real world" in quotation marks, "in view of the age-old debate among philosophers as to whether there is such a thing as a 'real world' at all" (46). I am uncomfortable with this term for somewhat different reasons, in that it seems to imply that mental representations themselves are not "real." Since cognitive poetics, in my understanding of this approach, takes mental events of reading as the primary object of analysis for literary scholars, this distinction between a "real world" of objects and a less-real world of mental representations seems problematic. I will opt for the term objective world instead, though of course the word objective is fraught with its own problems. However, it still seems to stand in fruitful opposition to the subjective world of mental representations.

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<sup>4</sup> Stein uses this phrase near the end of “Poetry and Grammar,” p. 245.

<sup>5</sup> Of course, higher-order thought and communication would not even be possible without such categorization. Stein’s opposition to nouns and the categories that they represent should thus be seen as strategic, seeking to prompt individuals to re-see objects’ uniqueness apart for the general categories of experience into which they might fit.

<sup>6</sup> Dubnik includes this characterization of the Tender Buttons style as part of the following assertion: “It marked a change from mimesis of external reality to mimesis of the intersection of the present moment of consciousness with an object” (28). I disagree somewhat with the first part of this assertion. I take the heavily self-enclosed style of the final sections of The Making of Americans to depict the contours of an individual’s psychology, i.e., an “inside” that contrasts with the impulse to reincorporate non-psychological objects into her writing in Tender Buttons.

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