

A Critical Method for Understanding the Epistemological Stakes in the Poetry of Lyn Hejinian, Harryette Mullen, and Lisa Robertson

Prof. Linda Voris

Professor, American University, Washington, D.C., United States

Abstract

The paper briefly examines key aspects of Gertrude Stein's poetics and proposes that an understanding of her radical innovation can inform a new critical approach to the work of three notable and distinctive contemporary poets: Lyn Hejinian, Harryette Mullen, and Lisa Robertson. The paper explores the epistemological basis of experimental poetry that foregrounds the materiality and indeterminacy possible in language use and requires readers to adjust our critical strategies accordingly. We discover that challenging, experimental poetry is actively *making sense* through the compositional force of its combined formal methods including repetition with variation, indeterminacy, the propagation of difference, and the lateral linking of relations. Contemporary experimental poetry explores new ways of relating knowledge and experience and therefore offers a means to examine the way that problems (of race relations, of the everyday, of political activism) have been framed and may be newly constituted.

Keywords

Epistemology, materiality, indeterminacy, composition, predicate logic, experimental poetry.

