Qualified Hope

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GENDER

LESLIE SCALAPINO'S EXPERIMENTAL POETRY

> *Language is the liquid that we're all dissolved in. Great for solving problems, after it creates the problems.*
> —Isaac Brock, "Blame It on the Tetons"

Elizabeth Grosz's voluminous work on time and feminist politics does not offer up your run-of-the-mill, everyday feminism concerned with issues of choice, sexuality, financial equity, or women's access to positions of power and prestige. This is because she rejects a content-based, utopian approach to the future in favor of a radically unknown and even unimaginable future. Basing her futurism on Deleuze's virtual ontology, Grosz reasons that imagining the way we would like things to be hypostatizes politics, rigidly linking political decisions in the present to one's hypothetical vision of the future. By characterizing the future as a radical emptiness rather than as the location of possibility, Grosz avoids such stagnation and postulates a dynamic ontology "rooted in becoming rather than being." If "the possible" names that which has already been thought, then Grosz conceives the future as "the new" or, as the subtitle to one of her essays puts it, the "yet unthought."[1] Fully cognizant of the challenges involved in thinking something yet unthought, Grosz admits that the burden of her work requires her to "think of direction or trajectory without being able to anticipate a destination" (*Becomings* 19). This requirement becomes even more challenging when applied to the domain of politics, but Grosz does so anyway. Feminists, she maintains, should not be "forced, through a lack of viable alternatives, to accept a more pragmatic, expedient and internal relation to the structures of global patriarchy, corporate capitalism, inter-

national racism or local government regulation, working within them and accepting their conditions as [they] struggle against them" ("Deleuze's Bergson" 215). Representing what Grosz sees as a conservative politics of compromise and negotiation, such complicit political models do nothing but "anticipate a destination." They accept the terms of the debate—the limits of the possible—as "global patriarchy" structures them, thereby ensuring that their politics will never exceed the confines of that predetermined framework.

Take, for example, the "mommy wars" that continue to be fought between "stay-at-home" and "back-to-work" mothers. As second-wave feminists challenged women's confinement to the domestic sphere and made guilt-free work outside the home a reality for millions of women, the poststructurally inclined third-wave feminists argued that women should also be able to stay at home with their children without feeling as if they were betraying the feminist cause. The third wave's antiessentialism, which sought to retain feminism's political potency while grounding its politics in the historical, cultural, and performative construction of gender, allowed women to be "feminist" regardless of their postpartum childcare decision, the very decision that second-wavers found much less negotiable and, in turn, much more riddled with guilt.[2] Curiously, however, the third wave's expanded thinking about "the mommy track" has not solved the problem. At least a full decade after the shift from second- to third-wave feminism, for instance, Lisa Belkin argues in a 2003 article from *The New York Times Magazine* that an evolving definition of success and fulfillment—one not so overtly linked to power, wealth, and prestige—has led more and more women to stay at home with their children. While not exactly biological essentialism, Belkin consistently implies that differences between men and women are natural rather than constructed. Wondering why women do not run the world, for example, she concludes, "Maybe it's because they don't want to" (45). Countering Belkin's reporting, Linda Hirshman, a retired philosophy professor, published *Get to Work,* a Betty Friedan-esque manifesto which categorically claims that "childcare and housekeeping . . . are not occupations likely to produce a flourishing life" (2).[3]

Why does this problem continue to vex women and their families a full twenty years after the third wave ostensibly decoupled it from feminist politics? Grosz would probably contend that the problem will never be solved because the terms of the debate are overdetermined: it is a false dilemma that accepts and thus perpetuates a rigid either-or logic that has been fixed not just by generations of past feminists, but also by a "global patriarchy" that benefits from our inability to have any truly new ideas about the issue. The fact that we are still talking about the same problem in

the same language suggests that this politics is all "destination" and absolutely no "direction or trajectory." In effect, any such approach to feminist politics simply substitutes its own rigid designators for the core signifiers that belong to the phallogocentric heterosexism it seeks to subvert. For Grosz, however, feminism is not a matter of making the proper political decision—reaching the correct destination—when confronted with a given feminist issue; instead, feminist politics entails living and thinking in a way that will move beyond issues altogether because only there, in a radically empty future that accommodates the truly new, will politically significant change occur.

Regardless of "wave," Grosz clearly asks a lot of anyone invested in feminist politics. And as Grosz is a theoretician, not only is her work short on practicable examples, but it also describes the challenge of "thinking trajectory without anticipating destination" more than it actually does it—which is certainly no slight to Grosz. After all, if her own theoretical work resisted all destinations, then she would never be able to tell us that we should also do the same. This simply means that some other discourse besides the theoretical will offer a clearer picture of a feminist politics intimately linked to time's immanent flow; and this picture is precisely what Leslie Scalapino's experimental poetry, composed over the past three decades, gives us. A short piece in *The Public World/Syntactically Impermanence,* a collection of poetry and prose published in 1999, reveals the depth of Scalapino's commitment to writing without a "destination." In this passage Scalapino chastises Lyn Hejinian for pandering to an academic audience that presumably wants to leave Hejinian's presentation with a better sense of what her poetry is about—that is, what "issues" it addresses. Scalapino writes:

> I thought recently you described (at the university) your writing in terms of ideas—that it is "comparing cultures"—which will be accepted as description of the writing (its importance) but which are not the gesture that occurs *as* the writing (the mind coming up with whatever it is at that moment only). (Acknowledgement that it is perspective only.) Because you know the professors will tend not to like the 'idea' of the mind and only its action at a moment, because they don't trust that. It isn't "any thing." (42)

Poetry's "ideas" and Scalapino's rejection of them in favor of "the gesture that occurs *as* the writing" is equivalent to feminism's issues, goals, or destinations and Grosz's rejection of them in favor of a politics of the radically new. Both try to achieve something that "isn't 'any thing'" while expecting that "thing" to do significant work.

Scalapino's concerns do not stop at the aesthetic, however, as she also shares Grosz's expansive understanding of feminist politics. For example, she writes in *The Tango:*

> is subjunctive—the man starving dying lying in
> garbage?—there not being black dawn—?
>   no. not anyway—that is, anywhere.—or:
> subjunctive is *only* 'social.' both. (19)

We can see in just this short passage that Scalapino's interest in the relationship among ideas, poetry, and the temporality of writing comes with weighty political implications. Specifically, Scalapino's work rides on a foundational homology between the overdetermined logic of feminist politics and the overdetermined value of poetic language. Underdetermining the idea-based meaning of her poetry thus finds its political analog in a version of feminism unmoored from predetermined terms and choices. Scalapino's work, in fact, makes a wonderful counterpoint to Don DeLillo's *White Noise* in which media technologies force the text's characters, narrator, author, and reader to succumb to a frightening overdetermination of meaning in both the present and the future. Scalapino's poetry delivers the opposite experience, as the only meaning to be found rests in the immediate present of its apprehension. Indeed, if DeLillo's layers of knowing narrative preempt textual meaning and future knowledge, then Scalapino's non-narrative, nonsyntactic, and agrammatical poetry, with its absence of character, plot, and point of view, harmoniously unites time and knowledge without asking time to run ahead of itself. Not beholden to "meaning" in the same way that theoretical and narrative texts are, poetry has the option of signifying nothing but pure trajectory absent all destination. And yet, taken as an actualization of Grosz's ideal version of feminist politics, the radical underdetermination of meaning we find in Scalapino's poetry—its reduction to the present moment of apprehension—feels problematically distant from politics in general and feminism in particular, a tension that will constitute the primary focus of this chapter.

Scalapino's work offers a particularly rich exemplification of "trajectory feminism" because she does not simplistically argue for language's transparency and immediacy as we might imagine any such real-time production of knowledge would be tempted to do. Rather than merely reducing language to its signifying core, Scalapino acknowledges that there is no purely innocent or formless language use, and she instead develops and deploys extremely complex formal techniques that resist political and linguistic

overdetermination. Despite its frequent opacity, therefore, her writing is wholly literary; it is highly stylized, theorized, and mediated. In resisting a naively transparent approach to language, Scalapino effectively stakes out a position beyond the problem of linguistic mediation and immediacy. She does not fret about whether or not language's inevitable mediation of experience irretrievably blocks us from temporalized knowledge, nor is she searching for ways to deploy language for immediate effect. Instead, she so radically rejects reference, representation, and interpretation that the question of linguistic mediation no longer applies. Contending that the conceptual distinction between interior and exterior—based in the patriarchal epistemologies of Enlightenment thought—causes the problem of mediated knowledge in the first place, Scalapino's writing utterly dissolves this distinction. Creating works that have neither inside nor outside in turn allows her to assert that a text, its writing, and its reading are all coextensive with and determined solely by the temporal form of a reader's apprehension. For Scalapino, then, eliding the distinction between interior and exterior erases the problem of mediation; any charge of a naive drive to immediacy becomes a moot point. In a sense, and to make a bad pun, we might say that Scalapino is Grosz-er than Grosz since she would view Grosz's notion of temporal immanence as the residue of an internal-external logic that Scalapino rejects out of hand. Instead, she pursues an immanence beyond immanence, a poetics in which there is simply nothing more than what there is. Only when freed of the prescriptive norms of reference and representation—that is, of destination—will both reading and politics gain access to the truly new.

My primary aim in this chapter is to show exactly how Scalapino's writing does the things that she claims of it; secondarily, I will examine both the philosophical and political implications of those literary techniques. When considered as an intervention in the philosophical paradox of time and knowledge, Scalapino's work fails to make much headway. In claiming that inside and outside, identity and difference, are pseudo-distinctions that should be treated as unified phenomena, Scalapino dissolves but does not resolve the relationship between time and knowledge. Regardless, the fact that her literary language does successfully dissolve such distinctions suggests two related conclusions: literary form's flexibility continues to recommend it as a productive way to incorporate time into our understanding of and interaction with the world around us, and by extension, literary form's philosophical limits do not preclude it from delivering politically potent arguments, as I will ultimately suggest Scalapino's work does.

An Unrecognizable Poetics

In her attempt to manifest a radically underdetermined feminist politics, Scalapino strongly opposes recognition in all possible forms. After all, if her poetry contained ideas or objects that readers could recognize, then the interpretive die would be cast and readers would be well on their way to a specific destination. According to Scalapino, recognition implies a prescriptive politics of "ought" which presupposes the political ends against which any particular political decision or act of recognition must be measured. The prescriptive logic of "ought" relies on two processes that overdetermine politics. First, it requires women to connect the specific particularities of their individual political decisions to the general political ideals of a broader collective; second, if the move from particular to general is to be successful, then women must also momentarily stand outside the space and time of that particular political decision to ensure that it is properly generalized. In the politics of maternal childcare, for example, a woman who experiences her decision to return to work as a political choice must first presuppose a feminist politics in which work in the public sphere enhances the position of women in society at large. Second, this presupposition also requires her to temporarily inhabit a projected point in the future from which her generalization can be justified, effectively removing her from the present circumstances of her decision. Two different motions thus displace our hypothetical mother from the site of politics—the first moves from a particular experience to a general ideal, and the second moves spatially and temporally from the inside to the outside of an event. Taken together, these displacements instantly overdetermine the meaning and significance of political experience in the present.

Counter to such overdeterminations—by the general, the external, and the future—Scalapino wants to reclaim the radically underdetermined experience of the present for feminist politics. To do so, she attacks these two foundational displacements, describing the first move from particular to general as the movement of interpretation, and the second move from an event's inside to its outside as a fracturing of space and time. For example, when we interpret a book, we take the particular words we read on the page and generalize them into broader ideas, concepts, and concerns; and when we adopt a perspective external to an event, space and time must be multiplied and fragmented so that we can move from "here" and "now" to "there" and "then." Identifying these displacements as the two primary causes of political overdetermination, Scalapino thus writes poetry that both resists interpretation and unifies space and time into the present moment of reading. This section of the chapter examines her resis-

tance to interpretation, and after considering the political potential of such opaque and uninterpretable poetry, the chapter's third section considers the unique theory of simultaneity that she uses to dissolve the distinction between interior and exterior. Finally, I conclude with an explication of the broader political vision her writing entails.

Scalapino dismantles the particular-general relation that any act of interpretation requires by purging her poetry of relationality, causality, reference, and representation. The problem of relationality is most thoroughly addressed in her earlier texts which ask how things and events relate to other things and events, and what, if anything, those relations mean. In the "Bum Series" of *way,* for instance, various people and objects are written into relation with each other, and the poem implies a certain desire to have the constellation of people and objects mean something significant. Some of the people and objects are: "the men / on the street who'd / died—in the weather—who're bums" (51); "cranes" which lift "containers to or from / the freighters—as the new / wave attire of the man" who appears with baggy pants and dyed blonde hair (52); and "our present / president—who doesn't / know of the foreign / environs" (58). For ten pages Scalapino, whose "I" should also be included in this odd cast, arranges these people and objects in different relations to each other as if she were constructing a diorama. For example:

> the man in the new
> wave attire—as the relation
> of him
> being another person—as
> the freighter and
> his and its relation
>
>   the inverse
>   relation to the freighter
>   only occurring when that
>   person is living
>
> the man—who's
> accustomed to
> working in the garage—
> as having
> that relation to
> their whole setting (57)

Prepositions, scattered throughout the "Bum Series," forge the relations, but not in any coherent or intelligible pattern. Confronted with a tangled

network of asserted yet chaotic relations among a disparate collection of things, the reader desirous of meaning will be dissatisfied. For Scalapino the simple placement of the people and objects in the places that they are (various forms of "to be" dominate the series) suffices, and by the end of the series the people and objects remain as paratactically isolated as they were at its beginning.

Scalapino does allow that relationality per se might be unavoidable. Because she desires a writing that is purely its own phenomena, for instance, she still admits the facticity of structure into her poems. For example, she writes in *Objects in the Terrifying Tense,* "The relations between things, the structure, is the belief that there can be any 'relation' of it" (3). To prevent a reader from insinuating any exterior meaning or knowledge into a given relation, however, Scalapino uses ambiguous punctuation and slippery subordinating conjunctions to maintain the openness of her writing's relational structures—an openness Barrett Watten describes as a "disciplined avoidance of totality [that] traces a network of contingent relations in which subject and object have no fixed positions" (51). For example, dashes proliferate in Scalapino's poetry, standing in for conjunctions, conjunctive adverbs, prepositions, or any other kind of transitional part of speech which, if present, might better define the relations among the words. The relations among people in "walking by," the first section of *way,* demonstrate this drawing into relation that is also no relation at all:

made—to
be con-
vention in
the present
—their—my
by
myself

. . .

to make
—as
in—their
—it
with—
a person—in
a time (11)

Significantly, "my" and "their" are the two most commonly dash-connected words throughout the section, thus highlighting the difficulty in moving from particular to general, individual to collective, the crucial move of any act of political recognition.

The ambiguous relationality of "walking by" culminates with the temptations of causality in the poem's final section, entitled "END PART." This section investigates our propensity for finding causal connections between objects or events that might not necessarily be related in any meaningful way:

> a man in
> a city—when
> I'd been
> feeling intense anger
> —kicking
> me in a crowd
>
> a bird
> lit on
> my head
> when
> I was walking
> and was
> having the same
> thought (33)

How can she not think that the world is out to get her, that her anger somehow led the man to kick her, creating an aura of negativity which caused the bird to exacerbate the situation by landing on her head? Indeed, she describes the bird as "seeming / to have picked up / on [her] anger" (34). Confronted with causality's seductive lure, "END PART" forgoes the first section's gauzy relations and instead adamantly negates all possible relations among the events: the bird is "not necessarily" hostile to her, the occurrence is "not related" to her thought, the city is lovely "regardless of" her attitudes, and her anger has "nothing to do with" itself (35–38). The negative assertions continue throughout the section, resisting any desire to identify causal relations, an identification that would import presupposed ideas and explanations into what Scalapino insists must remain a radically underdetermined experience. Refusing to justify the move from the particularity of her experience to the generality of its meaning, Scalapino maintains that things just are; her experience of them just is.

Because any assertion of causality is also an act of reference, Scalapino treats language phenomenally rather than referentially. For Scalapino the fact that things are always moving through time entails that relations among objects or people exist only to the degree that those relations constantly change. Any depiction of relation or causality does violence to this fact, rigidly attaching a signifier to its signified meaning. Thus the only determinant relation in the poetry discussed above derives from the temporal pace and motion of her apprehension of the objects and events about which she writes (hence the name of the first section, "walking by"). Again, this does not indict the existence of the things that she walks by, but it does preclude her from identifying any relationality besides the Stein-like parataxis of "and"—"this and this and this and this and this"—in which the "and" signifies nothing more than time's passage.

Avoiding the referential value of language in turn undermines what *way* names "the representational situation" (129). Representation implies referential structures of reflection, and reflection suggests a withdrawal from the motion of life. Scalapino makes this point in multiple genres: in poetry in *New Time,* "(singular events have no reflection) / concentration has made them reflections of each other, but as vis- / ible?" (64); in prose in *Objects,* "When [the text] is subject to only its movement, it has no other reflection" (78); and in an interview with Elisabeth Frost, "A space of the text has a reflection that's only its own movement and not what is called a social perception. It's as if the perception were solely that—social" (4). The seamless coextension between an event and its representation thus constitutes Scalapino's view of reality. She does not, like a poststructuralist, claim that all reality is mediated by representation; rather, she demonstrates that all representation, regardless of mediation, is really just that much more phenomenal reality. The writing itself is history, the present, and motion.

Taken together, these various ideas about relation, cause, reference, and representation stymie the move from particular to general, thereby challenging the possibility of interpretation, an act that she views as a violent and oppressive relationship to the experience of reading. More than any other work, *New Time* is particularly interested in the tyranny of interpretation. Concerned about the temptation of retroactive interpretation that attends serial writing (i.e., the desire to synthesize what one has already read before moving on to accumulate more items in the series), Scalapino here argues that interpretation's retroactive reordering of a text destroys reading's spontaneous eventfulness. She writes, for instance, "interpretative—blue destroying—itself—their—structure in / being after only" (2); and more explicitly, almost doing the interpreting for us:

> interpretative is the 'fixing,' and as such distortion of phenome-
> nal activity (*per se,* not simply fixing the *view* of actions)

> an 'outside' outwardly-articulating 'social' interpretation which
> qualitatively changes the object of its consideration—as does the in-
> ner 'warp,' which warps in order to see its own reverberation—is
> there (8)

The dangers of interpretation, then, are internal as well as external: interior interpretation is "warped" by self-reflection, and exterior interpretation succumbs to the desire to generalize from a particular occurrence. More-over, these warpings represent more than just mild shifts in perspective ("the *view* of actions"); she suggests instead that they utterly undermine the core of experience ("phenomenal activity *per se*"). Just like any politics that requires one to recognize the "meaning" of a political decision before making it, interpretation also locks us into an idea before we fully experi-ence the interpreted event. In fact, interpretation ensures that the event will never be fully experienced. In both instances, political and interpretive, the move from recognizing a particularity to making generalized claims about it can be justified only through presupposition. Scalapino forthrightly names this kind of interpretation, which preempts a subject's access to real time and lived experience, interpretation "from the point of view of what one *should* think." "It seems puritanical," she writes (*R-hu* 62).

Private or Political Language?

Before moving on to Scalapino's attack on the second displacement of rec-ognition-based politics—the distinction between interior and exterior—I will look briefly at the more overt claims she makes for the political value of her poetry. How exactly does dismantling the epistemological structures that facilitate the interpretive move from particular to general enhance rather than undermine politics? At first glance it makes more sense to assume the opposite—that foreclosing the foundations of interpretation is tantamount to a rejection of the political. Nevertheless, Scalapino is very clear that her dismantling of this interpretive space is by design; she wants something more immediate, although again, this would be an immediacy beyond the problem of mediation and immediacy: "*One as the outsider sees oneself as observing actively and at the same time being inactive in the past event and the insider as active yet unobservant there. The event itself occurs*

'between' these. (My) intention—in poetry—is to get complete observing at the same instant [space] as it being the action" ("The Cannon" 9; Scalapino's italics, parentheses, and brackets). Contending that a particularized, internal perspective permits experience without critical distance while a generalized, external perspective permits critical distance but no experience, Scalapino here asserts that her poetry will do both, but only because it erases these perspectival differences (or what in a previous example she described as "warpings") and occupies external and internal, observant and active, positions all at once. Even if we allow that she does accomplish this aim, we must still ask whether the result offers us anything more than an opaque system of private language. Why should we care about her "*complete observing at the same instant [space] as it being the action*" if, by definition, no one else can experience the same event? How can her poetry mean anything to anyone other than her?

Scalapino's primary rebuff to such questions appears in a later version of "The Cannon" that appears in *Public World*:

> A characteristic of conservative thought is iteration of tradition for its own sake, valuable in that it *is* that. Social conditioning is transcended—there is no "other"—rather than perspective itself being seen being created. Without the conception of the social as phenomenological, actions that are rebellious in response to whatever conditions, are seen as 'personal' merely. Articulating outside's warp imitated as being one—is interpreted as one's being unable to comprehend, couldn't put things together. A syntax that is this dismemberment will be incomprehensible in the framework of conservative thought (one characteristic of which: conception of the past as entity to be preserved as being in the present). In terms of a conservative framework, 'dis-location' is seen as merely personal aberration or failure to comprehend the whole, rather than strategic and phenomenological. (20)

In effect, Scalapino tells us that any confusion over the ostensibly private language of her poetry is symptomatic of a failure of imagination—a failure to experience writing solely as the event of its own occurrence. Writing, for Scalapino, neither describes phenomena nor is equivalent to the phenomena it names; rather, writing constitutes its own phenomena. The private language argument, in other words, remains trapped in a representational paradigm. Because the thrust of its interrogation comes from its demand for meaning, when Scalapino fails to provide any, it contends that her writing is "merely personal aberration." Juxtaposed to this representational paradigm, Scalapino asserts her phenomenological ideas about language. If words are representations, then they either succeed or

fail at transferring meaning and understanding between the particular and the general; but if words are phenomenological, then they are not even concerned with the question of meaning. The "conservative thought" that demands representational meaning will be "unable to comprehend," but comprehension is not an issue for Scalapino. Consequently, she can write a "syntax that is this dismemberment" and feel well defended against the charge of private language. If we cannot understand this, we are relying too heavily on a conventional (and conservative) understanding of the relationship between author and reader. Scalapino's author has nothing to say, no meaning to transport; instead, her author writes as a way to experience occurrence and to incite others to do the same.

More specific to my concerns here, in defending against the charges of personalism and privacy, this passage also shows Scalapino making political claims that point to an externality beyond the phenomenological occurrence of her poetry. Concepts such as "conservative thought," "social conditioning," and the "other" bring a conspicuously political valence to her core distinction between a representational and a phenomenological approach to language. In the very next paragraph we read, for instance, "Phenomenological 'dis-location' in writing is strategic and specific, detail arising from or noting social conditions or background; which conservative ideology regards as without transcendence, transient. Yet such transience is change as writing's subject (in avant garde or radical practices)." Here even more externalities would appear to distance us from the phenomenological eventfulness of her poetry, as "strategy," "social conditions," and "background" all imply a process much more reflective and mediated than "*complete observing at the same instant [space] as it being the action.*" Nevertheless, in interview after interview, Scalapino asserts that despite writing very few poems that could be said to be "about" feminism, she is a feminist writer whose poetry speaks directly to social injustices both local and global.[4] In *R-hu,* for example, Scalapino expresses outrage at an argument Robert Storr makes during a 1998 lecture on theory-based art. Storr claims, "There are no issues in art. There are issues in private life and issues in social life, but there are no issues in art. We are living in a neutral time." Scalapino shares her response: "And there is no neutral time. Now with sixty or seventy (?) million people to die of AIDS, two million dying of starvation in Korea, girls sold into brothels, the homeless panhandling everywhere—there being no 'issues' is a variation on a seamless reality. And one can't be in that" (95–96). Similar socio-political content frequently appears in her poetry: bums freezing in the cold, oil rigs, social struggle, and Ronald Reagan form some of the primary content in "Bum Series" (51–61); the "social unit" plays a contrapuntal role to the mind

throughout *New Time;* and a starving, homeless man figures prominently in *The Tango.* Indeed, these political themes, combined with *R-hu*'s laundry list of social ills, suggest a polemic directed against an out-of-touch intellectualism: now, in a world with all of these problems, is not the time to be theorizing about the value of the aesthetic. And yet, this proliferation of "issues" appears to fly in the face of the intense presentism of her phenomenological approach to language; the politics and her insistence on issues would seem to be all destination and no trajectory, suggesting the kind of propagandistic poetry we might read in old copies of *The New Masses.* But this is not the kind of poetry that Scalapino writes: after all, lines such as "is subjunctive—the man starving dying lying in / garbage?—there not being black dawn—?" are certainly much more concerned with trajectory than with destination. So how can she rescind the differential gap between particular and general but also reject "seamless reality"? Isn't the phenomenological unity of her poetry "seamless reality" *par excellence*? How can her poetry be only what it is but, in being so, also be political?

Borrowing heavily from the Marxist impulse behind Russian Formalism's notion of defamiliarization, Language poets and their promoters developed the standard answer to these questions in the early 1970s. Basically, the opacity and unintelligibility of such literature foregrounds the materiality of language, prompting readers to reflect on the arbitrary and thus possibly manipulative relationship between the signifier and the signified. The alienating effect supposedly strips away one's illusions about the transparency of language and the world.[5] Although she is often interpreted according to this Language poetry platform,[6] Scalapino actually makes the opposite argument and devotes much of her critical work to getting out from under the yoke of Language writing's "radical artifice." According to Scalapino, it is not the fetishization of transparently signified meaning that is a problem, but a more pervasive inability to think beyond the transparency-mediation duality in the first place. Postmodernism's critique of authenticity, which, in the poetry world, Scalapino appropriately associates most closely with Marjorie Perloff's critical work, wants to expose the constitutive differences lurking behind our everyday interface with the world, such as those between reality and illusion or the signifier and the signified. But the same presuppositional logic that we have seen Scalapino resist in both political and literary realms also lies at the heart of this critique of transparency: telling someone that the world is not how they think it is presupposes that it actually is the way you think it is. Sickened by such prescriptive demands, Scalapino cannot abide the implications of Perloff's argument in *Radical Artifice* that authenticity does not exist and is only a "constructed domain of truth." (Even more maddening to Scalapino, Perloff

actually enlists Scalapino's poetry as supporting evidence for her claims.) Complaining of Perloff's logic, Scalapino states, "She's not allowing *any-thing* independent existence" (*R-hu* 100). Instead, Scalapino argues for a "radical transparency" in which critique and opposition are produced out of actual occurrence. For example, when describing her erotic trilogy, *The Return of Painting, The Pearl,* and *Orion,* Scalapino claims that her text simply "is: exactly that is 'social commentary on it' as only exactly the thing without separation" (107).

In short, Scalapino's writing is opaque, defamiliarizing, and often unintelligible, but she also claims that it is phenomenologically authentic and immediate, a tension that we can see in her simultaneous rejection of Storr's "seamless reality" and her assertion that there is no "separation" in her trilogy. The key to determining exactly how her poetry resolves these apparent contradictions, between the personal and the political, the opaque and the immediate, lies in discerning exactly what "radical transparency" looks like and how it functions. This is how she describes it:

> A syntactical rendering of such 'radical transparency' might be akin to imagining negative space as *only* a positive surface: e.g. subverting it from an '*inside*' where there is not *its* 'language-shape' existing:
>   *as if* genre (such as erotica), 'only' as language-shape, were a reflection of social convention (that language-shape). [It] *isn't* (a reflection)—in that it is to be *exactly that thing.* (107, Scalapino's brackets, parentheses and italics)

Having rejected Language poetry's argument for the political value of "radical artifice," "radical transparency" represents Scalapino's answer to my previous question: how can her poetry be only what it is but, in being so, also be political? As the next section will detail, these contradictions can be resolved only through a unique rethinking of time as pure simultaneity. In effect, Scalapino ultimately dissolves this tension between the phenomenological immediacy of her writing and the political externalities to which it speaks within the pure flow of time.

A New Simultaneity

Such dissolution erases all distinction between inside and outside, allowing Scalapino to decouple politics and recognition while asserting the political value of a real-time presentness. Of course, time's pure flow does not in and of itself erase the distinction between inside and outside since any conven-

tional understanding of the relation among past, present, and future treats the past and the future as temporally "external" to the present. To ensure that time's flow has no externality, therefore, Scalapino develops a complex notion of *temporal* simultaneity. If a conventional notion of simultaneity—two events occurring at once—stagnates time, reducing it to the instantaneous snapshot of a vertical cross section of time, then simultaneity for Scalapino entails the simultaneity of time itself: past, present, and future occurring all at once. This horizontal simultaneity constituted by time itself prevents the stagnation of a vertical simultaneity constituted only by detemporalized content. Thus, she explains in her essay on H.D., "In my writing I've worked on occurrence of simultaneous times in relation to the writing's structure, how time and events unfold or appear simultaneously as if existing vertically/ horizontally in a 'visual' field." Logic tells us that vertical and horizontal, simultaneity and duration, are mutually exclusive, but Scalapino's writing aims to prove otherwise: "In language horizontal and vertical time can occur at the same moment" (*The Public World* 3). She continues, claiming that "the future being in the past and present, these times separate and going on simultaneously, equally active . . . suggest a non-hierarchical structure in which all times exist at once" (3). She elaborates on these thoughts through a reading of Philip Whalen's *Scenes of Life at the Capital:* "Past, present, and future occurring at the same time (wreck one's mind) are the disjunction in which one cannot be in any instant" (7). "'[T]hen' is 'now,' the present is 'now,' and the future is the same 'now' (they occur at once, but not hindering each other, being entirely those times, separate from each other—in a 'present' as being disjunct)" (9).

Despite its philosophical implausibility, Scalapino's complicated syntax successfully produces the simultaneity of time that she postulates, and the first quoted description of Whalen's poetry—"Past, present, and future occurring at the same time (wreck one's mind) are the disjunction in which one cannot be in any instant"—aptly exemplifies how she does it. The disagreement in number between the singular subject ("Past, present, and future occurring at the same time") and the plural predicate ("are the disjunction") syntactically allows many different times to occur in one instant. Of course, the disjunction runs even deeper in that both the subject and the predicate contain both singularity and plurality: the subject is singular only because of the gerund "occurring" which reins the temporal plurality of "past, present, and future" into one gerund-nominalized instant of happening while also maintaining a sense of the permanent motion of all of three times. In the predicate the verb is plural, as if it really wants "Past, present, and future" to be its subjects, but the

predicate noun "disjunction" is singular. So the plurality of "Past, present, and future" agrees with that of "are," and the singularity of "occurring" agrees with that of "disjunction"; but when all of the syntactical pieces are combined into one sentence, the mind becomes rather "wrecked" trying to make sense of what does or does not agree with what. The temporal effect, which is quite similar to the one Pynchon achieves through narrative form, prevents readers from occupying "any instant" which would slice a vertical cross section from time's constant motion.

This highly temporalized version of simultaneity also conflates the many processes that occur "within" it. Specifically, the processes of seeing, thinking, writing, and reading all swirl together in Scalapino's essays and poetry so that each becomes identical to the others. Speaking of Whalen's use of *non sequitur* as an organizing and compositional principle in his poetry, for example, Scalapino explains, "It's only the way the mind works making fast disjunctions and connections; it is phenomena as being one's mind. 'Seeing' is not separate from action and these are only the process of the text/one's mind phenomena. Writing is therefore an experiment of reality" (8). Here, "it" refers to both Whalen's compositional process and the process of reading it, which, as the equivalence that she draws between "process of the text" and "one's mind phenomena" suggests, amount to the same thing. Logically, the writing and reading of a text cannot be identical unless past, present, and future occur simultaneously. There are plenty of ways in which writing and reading are similar, but Scalapino pushes the equivalency even further: "writing *is* the mind's operations *per se*"; the written poetry is nothing other than "a demonstration of one's mind doing this." The same equivalency also pertains to the reader's mind because the poetry's "syntax and structure duplicate the process that is the reader's own mind-phenomena" (4). Because of Scalapino's innovative notion of simultaneity in which all times occur at once, she can assert an equivalency among the writer's mind, poetic form, and the reader's mind. In the same way, Scalapino sees no contradiction between her claim that there is no "seamless reality" and that there is no "separation" in her writing. If all times occur at once, then the multiplicity of past, present, and future accounts for the "seams," while the simultaneous occurrence of past, present, and future accounts for the complete absence of "separation." In other words, the political can reside within the phenomenological without undermining the unified nature of one's experience of it.

But how does this happen in the poetry? To take just the tiniest sliver of an example from *New Time,* a 94-page serial poem in which anywhere from one to three stanzas appear on a page, we read:

the day—only—no
—night (which is delicate)
is

According to Scalapino's notion of simultaneity, the pace and process of reading these words on the page should map onto the process of writing them on the page and onto the words themselves as they exist there in that sequence. If Scalapino wants to create a temporal reading effect comparable to thought, her writing points out that we do not think in sentences or even in clauses. Her poetry rejects the grammar, syntax, and punctuation that make thought meaningful through subordination and coordination. In the above stanza "the day" simply appears on the page only to be interrupted by a dash, an interruption that isolates the day into the stated condition of "only"-ness. "[O]nly" not only renames "the day" but also refers to itself as it exists in its own isolated state, stranded between the two dashes—which then, following the second dash, suddenly seems wrong: "no." Following the mind's path, night appears, and then perhaps enough has accrued for a thought larger than a word—"(which is delicate)." In these halting lines, however, the words do not represent or reflect anything beyond the simple fact of their being, an "is"-ness that is itself complicated when a singularity of being (delicate-ness) is predicated of a plural subject (day and night). The short stanza never identifies relation or causality; we are given no "also," "in addition to," "on the other hand," or "instead." The stanza is as much a list of the things that jumped into Scalapino's mind as it is a meaningful statement about the day, or the night.[7]

Instead of common attributes or properties, Scalapino hopes that a common temporal motion produces the cohesive force of the poetry along with the equivalency among the writer's mind, the text, and the reader's mind. In her essay on H.D., for example, Scalapino discusses the important role that time's motion plays in her serial writing:

My sense of sequential or extended writing is that the present is in continual movement. It is not that the writing is fragmented; rather, events are "seen" again—first, before they occur.

For me, reading is "seeing" texts as if one sees on the surface of one's retina, where the action of reading is out ahead of one—*is* actions outside. Actions or events are "read," and . . . this action of reading is itself the present-time.

This sense of "reading" is interior scrutiny, which is at once observation of the outside. (205)

This unity of multiplicity appears whenever and wherever the grammatical logic of Scalapino's writing breaks down: how can an event be seen "again," "first," and "before"? To be seen again implies the past; to be seen first implies the real-time newness of the present; and to be seen before implies the future; but the sentence also implies (grammatically, at least) only one moment of seeing.[8] Moreover, this horizontal simultaneity appears alongside another dissolution of the inside-outside distinction. Just when she seems to suggest that there is an outside to reading ("the action of reading is out ahead of one—*is* actions outside"), she negates that externality by naming such reading "interior scrutiny" and conflating it with "observation of the outside." Scalapino thus asserts that the writing is not "fragmented," despite the complex whirl of ostensibly internal and external actions that she highlights in her description of the reading process.

In practice, then, Scalapino's texts offer no exterior scaffolding with which a reader might produce knowledge of the poetry. When Elisabeth Frost leadingly asks Scalapino in a 1996 interview if "the inside/outside dichotomy that dominates most Western thinking . . . is . . . basically a false distinction," Scalapino responds, "Yes. I think that it has to do with the fascination of seeing that your mind and an action really are the same thing. Even though someone else doesn't perceive you, they perceive their mind doing an action. It's like trying to get into the time you're in, as Stein was saying" (10). In other words, the act of perception supposedly distinguishes us from others and plunges us into the ethical problem that is other people. Because time constitutes the form of any such interaction, however, the inside and outside of an occurrence are always the same thing, united in a temporal experience of presentness that dissolves the problematics of the ethical encounter between self and other. Time ensures that people, their minds, and their acts of perception are not separate from occurrence; they are occurrence. Scalapino's most poetic performance of this idea comes in *The Tango:*

> the flesh is not asleep while one's sleeping. at *any*
> time?—no difference between 'apprehension'—
> it's the *same* in one?
> —blossoming trees—outside—or 'there not being
> memory at all' if the flesh is no asleep ever
>
> or that's rest as *not* sleeping
> the relation between 'no memory occurring' ever
> (only constructing—thought as motion—in anyone—)

> and the flesh not asleep ever (even while one's
> sleeping)—is blossoming trees 'outside,' that is *also* (13)

If the flesh here functions as a rim between internal and external, its ability to stay awake during sleep suggests the mutual imbrication of inside and outside. She makes the argument even firmer when she uses "is" to equate externally blossoming trees with "the relation between 'no memory occurring' ever / . . . / and the flesh not asleep ever." This equation, facilitated by the permanent motion of presentness, implies that inside, outside, and the rim between them are all one and the same. They are so much the same, in fact, that the first "between" in "no difference between 'apprehension'—" lacks a second term; without difference, there are not even two things that can create a relation of between-ness. Instead, all is only apprehension.

In place of distinction and difference, then, Scalapino offers a process of permanent motion that unites interior and exterior in time's passing. For example, Scalapino notes that in her preferred form of poetry "specific locations which are entirely inside appear to give rise to the outside." But, "This process is later seen to be the same as the outside" (*Phenomena* 106). Thus, "The speaker, the person writing the poem appears to be duplicating things, but these things are actually inside *him*" (109). She describes this process differently in *The Front Matter:* "I'm taking the outer culture *to be* the inner self drawing it in as one's core or manifestation—which it isn't. Then, it is externalized as oneself and is projected outward again as one's sense of real. That actually *is* one's inner self by acting upon its projection" (5). This process of projecting an internalized exterior as one's inner self, which, this passage suggests, it both is and is not, accurately describes what she refers to elsewhere as "reproduction at origin." What reads like a sequential process (i.e., reproduction) never escapes the permanent presentness of being (i.e., origin).

Scalapino names the outcome of this convolution "radical transparency." If transparency implies a representational situation in which inside and outside seamlessly align, then Scalapino pushes transparency further, claiming that inside and outside are so aligned that "transparent" becomes a senseless description—"being" would be more accurate. Curiously, however, such intense transparency does not translate into clarity; we must still contend with reality in all of its complications. Saying that inside and outside are the same is different from saying that the inside (i.e., mind, language, perception, emotion) is all there is. They are one and the same not because they are identical but because they are their simultaneous occurrence in and over time. Reading any of Scalapino's work firmly drives this point home: the words, the reading of the words, and the writing of the

words are coextensive and equal in their phenomenality, but that does not necessarily mean that we know or understand them; they are always, quite resolutely, external to us as readers.

A Politics of Impermanence

In many ways Scalapino's intensely presentist understanding of the reading experience strongly echoes Gary Saul Morson's ideas that I addressed in the Introduction. Both argue that literature provides a reading experience coextensive to the time of living, but they part company when it comes to the role that knowledge plays in the reading process. Morson needs a text that keeps the reader always in the present moment of acquiring knowledge about the work being read, and any past or future elements that slip into that present (such as reading the last page of the book first) ruin the entire effect. Scalapino desires that same sense of presentness, but she does not resist the intrusion of the past and future into the present. In fact, treating all times as simultaneous, she demands it, effectively making her version of presentness fully temporal. Despite their common advocacy of a model of reading that resists recognition and knowledge, then, Morson's version can happen only once per text, while Scalapino's occurs no matter how many times one reads her poetry. Even in its initial reading, therefore, Scalapino's poetry can only ever be reread, which is just another way of saying that each present moment of interaction with the text simultaneously contains its past and future.

In turn, this mode of readerly apprehension only ever grounds and justifies itself. In several different works Scalapino describes this as a condition in which reading and the meaning it produces is "not being sustained by anything." In *Objects* she even makes an explicit connection between this ungroundedness and the possibility of politics: "relations between people are not sustained by anything. . . . Writing is not being sustained also. The writing has to have nothing sustaining it. To find that place is duration. That is current time. We aren't sustained and fulfill community. For no reason." And a few paragraphs later she writes of the space created by duration "in which all actions are responsive to each other" (76–77). As a description of the "fulfillment of community," Scalapino here argues that the move from particular to general, which I previously characterized as one of two displacements that necessarily overdetermine political action in the present, can, in fact, produce a successful politics as long as it is sustained and justified by nothing more than temporal duration. Moreover, if we pursue Scalapino's parallel between the lack of sustenance between

people and the lack of sustenance in writing, we can conclude, rather para-
doxically, that the political potential of literature depends on its complete
unsustainability.

To be unsustained, writing must clearly resist the very epistemological
scaffolding so conspicuously absent from Scalapino's poetry: causality, rep-
resentation, reference, reflection, and interpretation. But the absence of
these things is not tantamount to the presence of duration—the one "thing"
that Scalapino contends actually does sustain both politics and writing. To
achieve such sustenance by duration, therefore, Scalapino not only rejects
language's referential function but also adopts a model of apprehension
wholly determined by its temporal form: "the form of my present and past
writing is 'the mind as literally action of events'" (Hinton Interview 58).[9]
And she favors other authors who similarly "stat[e] their own structures as
their forms which is *per se* scrutiny of the present" (*Objects* 1). (Notice here
that she speaks of scrutinizing the present, not of scrutinizing an object
that the present contains.) Because time functions as the unifying feature
of phenomenological experience, her writing always looks to temporal
form as its one and only mode of producing meaning. She expresses this
idea throughout her essays and critical writings: "Form is instructions for,
knowledge of the way of seeing, yet it is of a particular circumstance, loca-
tion: what it sees *is* it. No rules or social caste determine seeing if it's occur-
ring" (*Objects* 10); "The form is the occurrence" (75); and "the 'theme' of
the poems is its form" (*Public* 44). Scalapino thus indiscriminately makes
form the exclusive mode of apprehending her poetry and, by extension,
the world. Form is what teaches us how to see, what we see, what occurs
out there in the world, the very words that one writes, and the thematic
content of those words. Common to this array of definitions is the fact
that form is always of the current time, implying that writing and reading
reveal nothing beyond their own temporal phenomenality in the present
moment.

Of course, actualizing this in poetry is challenging; one's mind as form
must stand in for and be consubstantial with all occurrence. If a thought is
only occurrence, and vice versa ("the mind literally as action of events"),
then what does one write? Scalapino's *The Tango* goes some distance toward
answering this question, offering us the metaphor of the dance as one way
to think about how form may provide a work its sole referential value.
Scalapino leads us toward these ideas in the only syntactically clear part of
the poem, its beginning:

> (Astor Piazzola's tangos: the tango is relentless. The embrace
> —a couple?—entwining goes and goes. It skips, jumps

> ahead of a horizon—itself—resuming. The tango is a
> hopscotch 'ahead' of them, a couple, it's for convenience of
> maneuver, it's for intense love.) (15)

Here the tango seems to be a device that facilitates the exhausting task of making one's mind and its action tantamount to the form of occurrence, something it achieves by simultaneously constituting the couple's formal embrace while also jumping ahead of them, providing the formal duration that sustains the dance itself. Of course, knowing what we know of Scalapino's ideas about temporal simultaneity, we should also read what appears to be a temporality fragmented into past, present, and future (i.e., the tango can "skip" and "jump ahead of a horizon") as actually occurring all at once.

If this short passage offers a vague theorization of the referential capacity of form—specifically, the form of the dance—sustained solely by duration, then the remainder of the poem demonstrates what writing that is only its own unsustained form might look like:

> separation the *that's,* outside as *same* the interior only
> (separation) that's—. separation a to illumines
>
> 'live why?'—one some on dependent—illumines—no
> place
> ~
> and then—if there *were* that—there's 'no night' either
> ~
> as if from 'their' conception / view there were only 'that'
> 'one'—and only 'that' 'one' and only 'that' 'one'—an
> interior—and 'that' 'one' in it
>
> except no interior in 'their' view (*as* 'that' 'one' and 'that'
> 'one' only structure)

Scalapino wants to make sure that every time we read "separation the *that's,* outside as *same* the interior only / (separation) that's—. separation a to illumines," we "understand" it, but only while in the act of reading it. After the fact, we are perplexed, but because there is no difference between the formal phenomenality of the words that we read and the phenomenality of our minds apprehending and knowing them, reading and apprehending these words in real-time is like dancing a tango. In the same way, this passage presents both the interior perspective of the dancers ("as if from 'their'

conception / view there were only 'that' / 'one'—and only 'that' 'one' and only 'that' 'one'—an / interior—and 'that' 'one' in it") and the fact that their interior perspective of "that" and "one" is actually just the phenomenal form of the dance itself ("except no interior in 'their' view (*as* 'that' 'one' and 'that' / 'one' only structure)").

Admittedly, many will not find this to be a particularly rewarding or pleasurable reading experience, requiring, as it does, that readers accept a phenomenal realm of experience in which the only determinant content is a given mode, state, or condition of being—a kind of quasi-meditative space somewhere between being and doing where modality reigns. In *Phenomena,* for instance, Scalapino speaks of writing as "simply a mode of seeing what comes up in a time period" (114), a point she explains at greater length in her interview with Edward Foster: "I am trying to use the writing to be an examination of the mind in the process of whatever it's creating; and to have there be a distinction, or there not be any distinction, between that and actually being in the present time: to have the writing be that" (32). If writing is only a mode of being in and over a given period of real time—a text without context—then the reading of such writing will presumably have the same effect. Indeed, in the Foster interview Scalapino speaks similarly of reading, stating that she writes so that "you" (readers) are "always trying to be in present time; so that you'd be only concentrating in the place where you are"; "you're creating [the textual content] by reading it" (33 and 32). For Scalapino, then, anything more than being in the present time treads into the unjustifiable realm of "should" and "ought"; implicitly, political claims must always be made under the influence of the present time and its form because anything else results in a presumptive, overdetermined, and thus exploitative political mode.

In place of the overdetermined politics of "should," Scalapino offers a politics of impermanence, a model of political action and choice that remains coextensive with time's form in the present. But if time's form is all time occurring at once, then traditional syntax—that feature of language that makes reading feel like a diachronic event in which past, present, and future are kept nicely separated—will not suffice. Scalapino thus argues that "syntax or language-shape" must find new ways, independent of any presupposed categories of time's passage, to embody temporal simultaneity. During a discussion of her book-length poem *New Time,* Scalapino describes exactly how her syntax does this:

> The text is phrases separated by dashes which simultaneously relate and dis-connect (also, the phrases are simultaneously unrelated). The phrases are 'as' (the motion of?—by being separated, 'other than') 'being in the place

of'—freezing-red-sky-dusk-that-is-dawn. There is no relation 'outside.' At all.

Dawn is at the same time as dusk 'as' present time. Syntax 'there' (of the text) is relational as if a 'time' of (*because* 'other than'—as it does not reflect) (is occurrence of) muscular physical motion. . . . It is a 'time' not as speech or sound *per se*—but as the reader's experience of simultaneous relating and dis-connection only. There is 'to be' no basis. (*Public World* 35–36)

The simultaneity of relation and disconnection that she mentions at the beginning and end of this passage aptly characterizes the syntactical mechanism that Scalapino uses to create a reading experience in which all time is one. Any work written according to such a model demands a reader who is comfortable with constant impermanence and disconnection, a condition that the passage itself performs when "simultaneously relate and disconnect" is itself "disconnected" with the parenthetical assertion that "the phrases are simultaneously unrelated." The proliferation of quotation marks in this and other similar passages works to achieve the same effect, as they highlight the simultaneous presence and absence of concepts like "as," "outside," and "being."

The first pages of *The Tango* provide a more poetic example of how Scalapino's syntax elicits an experience of simultaneous relation and disconnection to produce a reader's experience of "present time *per se.*" If these opening pages can be said to be "about" anything, they broadly describe a shift from thinking linearly about the observed chronology of a given event to thinking about it simultaneously. For example, wondering if an observation in "present-time" actually occurs after a "real-time event (past)," Scalapino queries, "[F]irst seeing the ship or seeing the man dying?" (1). On the following page, chronological questions give way to simultaneity: "'in order'—in spring, later—both. / as it not being first, occurrence at all, but at the same / time." As we might expect, however, *The Tango* is not only about this move from a linear to a simultaneous sense of time; it also enacts this shift for its readers, making the reading experience both impermanent and always present. For example, the poem's first and second pages are not identical, but enough of the same words and phrases appear on both pages that one is forced, upon reading the second page, to go back and determine if they are actually the same, at which point the reader starts to notice small variations. We read on the first page, for instance:

pink roses—aren't the pink sun rising—are 'social'
only? both

> "night" on famine—as one—real-time
> (walking in garbage it wasn't night)—not in time
> either
> 'night' 'night' 'won't ever dis-place it'—it can dis-
> place it—where it occurs

And on the facing page we read, with an italicized "only" and different line-spacing:

> pink roses—aren't the pink sun rising—are 'social'
> *only?* both
>
> "night" on famine—as one—real-time
> (walking in garbage it wasn't night)—not in time
> either
>
> 'night' 'night' 'won't ever dis-place it'—it can dis-
> place it—where it occurs

This reading experience performs what the second stanza of the poem describes as ". . . observation / ('so' present-time) of a real-time event (past)—to make / these be the same 'in order' to dis-place 'them' and one" (1). The first version does not really occur first in our reading experience; it only occurs now. Reading the second page is "observation / ('so' present-time) of a real-time event (past)," which was the reading of the first page. The pages are virtually "the same" but also different and "in order"; they are simultaneously disconnected and related.

Of course, there are many ways in which one might dismiss Scalapino's ideas about time and her literary deployment of those ideas. For one, science would not just refute Scalapino's characterization of temporal experience, but would in fact challenge any phenomenological project—like my own—that views temporal experience as a relevant component of knowledge. Also, as I suggested earlier in this chapter, phenomenology itself would condemn Scalapino's project for simply dissolving the problematic relationship between time and knowledge without actually solving it. Finally, anyone with a little common sense might simply point out that past, present, and future cannot occur simultaneously by definition, and regardless of what science has to say, we live our lives as if the past, present, and future were separate panels of our existence. But that is exactly Scalapino's point: a life lived *as if* it has a connection to the past and a destination in the future is an overdetermined life precluded from adopting a mean-

ingful political posture. In other words, even if science, philosophy, and common sense all tell us that Scalapino's treatment of time runs counter to everything that we know and experience, perhaps that is exactly why it still has some value for the world of politics. Specifically, it establishes a model of political decision making in which the past and the future are irrelevant because they are only ever concurrent with the present moment of choice. In effect, Scalapino actually gives the past and future less determinate control over the present by bringing them into the present itself. This is a bit counterintuitive, as we might assume that the present would become increasingly underdetermined the less connected it is to the past and the future. Scalapino would argue, however, that regardless of how distant they are, as long as past and future are treated as hypostatized times separate from the present, they will always overdetermine the present moment of political decision.

To return to the postpartum mother wrestling with the idea of returning to work, Scalapino's notion of temporal simultaneity frees her from having to make the choice altogether. Rather than overdetermining her present choice by linking her present to the past (What would Betty Freidan say?) or to the future (What kind of world will my decision create for my daughter?), the woman can and should merely keep on living. Crucially, this is not the same as being paralyzed with inaction in the present. In fact, that is precisely why Scalapino includes the past and future in the present: if there were only present, if it were fully detached from past and future, then our hypothetical mother would be paralyzed. Scalapino instead offers a life free from the tyranny of having to choose at all—a life that continues to be meaningful and fulfilling despite having not chosen. Accordingly, this approach allows us to see that the truly oppressive aspect of global patriarchy does not involve confining women to the domestic sphere; nor does it involve bringing women into the public sphere and making them complicit with the imperialistic expansion of global capital. Instead, global patriarchy's actual power comes from forcing women to choose one way or the other, from the logic of choice that feminism has adopted for its very own. Of course, our postpartum mother will stay at home, or go to work, or do some combination of the two, but she can do these things without *choosing* to do them—without accepting the overdetermined meaning of the choice. We might call this feminism's fourth wave, a new stage that advocates life as it is lived in place of the third wave's obsession with difference and the choices it permits—choices that were supposed to liberate women from the second wave's dogmatism but actually just reinscribed difference as the "essential" component of identity. Moreover, if Scalapino has taught us anything, "life as it is lived" does not describe some naively

transparent existence beyond feminist politics; rather, it defines a position more feminist than feminism itself because it identifies all prior feminisms, with their focus on issues and choices, as just another tool of global patriarchy. Rejecting any attempt to stand outside or in opposition to masculinist hegemony as both second- and third-wave feminisms do, Scalapino simply collapses the inside-outside distinction altogether, making it impossible to overdetermine the political meaning and value of life as it is lived in the present.