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Poetry Machines: Repetition in the Early Poetry of Kenneth Koch

> One of the verbal inspirations I have had was from a big wooden box containing life jackets on a transatlantic steamship. There was a lifeboat drill and I ended up standing next to a big box on which was printed the big word BRASSIERES. This was the French word for life jackets—naturally, of course, I thought after a moment, *bra* (arm), something you put your arms through. But, for that moment, I was amazed. Why in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean was I standing, during a lifeboat drill, next to a huge wooden box of brassieres? Something about it seemed part of my poetry, but in fact didn't become so until two years later when (apparently out of nowhere) I thought of a line that combined the two meanings of the word: Arm in arm we fled the brassiere factory. The poem which I wrote, then, right away, turned out to be about an urgent, and finally satisfied, wish for sexual freedom: with the woman I love, I flee from the factory which is an emblem of physical restraint. This theme and this story hadn't been in my thoughts on the steamship...[1]

Perhaps with statements like these, and the fact that the poem he is talking about here is called "The Brassiere Factory," it is not hard to see why Kenneth Koch has become the least considered member of the New York School of poets, after starting out in the fifties as its most successful and influential member.[2] While his more famous contemporaries, Frank O'Hara and John Ashbery, are not averse to bouts of well placed kitsch, camp, and silliness, I think it would be fair to say that Koch is the only member of the group willing to go beyond irony and humour, into the field of the ludicrous. Yet look again at this shaggy-bra story and one finds a canny avant-

gardiste who is merely masquerading as Dr. Fun, his nickname during the heyday of the New York School. The daftness of being inspired to write a poem about a box of bras is, in fact, purposefully bathetic and designed to bring back down to earth the more lofty aspirations of the post-war American poetry scene. Apart from references as to his intention in interviews and articles, Koch is also very explicit about this in the poetry of his first collection *Thank You*, which contains a number of satires on the seriousness of poetry in the fifties and sixties. A much later poem, "Seasons on Earth" describes explicitly the atmosphere of serious high Modernism which dominated the American poetry scene of the nineteen fifties:

> It was the time, it was the nineteen fifties...
> Dread drafted all with its atomic clink.
> *The Waste Land* gave the time's most accurate data,
> It seemed, and Eliot was the Great Dictator
> Of literature. One hardly dared to wink
> Or fool around in any way in poems...[3]

However, beyond a very basic avant-garde rejection of establishment norms,[4] Koch's comments on how he came to write "The Brassiere Factory" also set up a poetic aesthetic based on found objects and chance encounters that would allow him to fit in easily with any number of the original European avant-garde groups. The transformation of found objects into art was a major facet of a number of European avant-garde movements not least that of Surrealism. Cubism's use of heterogeneous material was also a form of art made from what could be found, newspapers, labels and the like, while the choice of subject matter tended towards the randomly chosen encounter with objects in a room or a bar. Duchamp is clearly the master of this form of art but futurism is also full of art made from encounters, as is Apollinaire's early proto-avant-garde poetry such as "Zone." Koch has recently re-written "Zone," incidentally, under the title "A Time Zone."

The perfect expression of this kind of art is the found object encountered by chance, a central feature of surrealist art, discussed in detail by Breton and Dalí in their various art writings. The implications for an avant-garde art are numerous. The found object undermines the special, auratic status of the art object. It also brings art and everyday life closer together, the main purpose of the avant-garde. The random encounter undermines poetic agency, and makes the act of creation more mechanistic by reducing the artist to a kind of recording machine. One must also note that the probable origin of machine poetry is the work of Raymond Roussel. Koch's close associate in the School, John Ashbery, went to France with the intention of studying Roussel's work. Roussel pioneered a methodology of homonymical composition,[5] whose mechanistic, playful, rule-based mode of composition has since been picked up by more recent avant-garde groupings such as OuLiPo, the most celebrated exemplar of this style being Georges Perec who was a friend of Harry Mathews, an early member of the New York School. Koch's interest in French writing is well documented and it is almost inconceivable that the inspiration for his poetry machines did not originate in some form through a thorough reading of the European avant-garde.

Koch's avant-garde credentials are, therefore, hard to dispute, but not only does the passage ally Koch's compositional techniques very closely to those of his European avant-garde forebears, Koch's inability to see the difference between a random encounter, a box of bras, and his poetry—Dalí calls this "paranoid criticism"[6]—and how in fact he sees no difference between what happens to him and what happens in his poetry, makes the conception and composition of the poem a classical avant-garde act. Although he does not write "The Brassiere Factory" until two years later, he already sees the bra box as a part of his poetry, and even if the

inability to understand that there is a division between one's art and one's life is an example of poetic schizophrenia,[7] the *refusal* to accept that there is a division between art and life is Peter Burger's classic definition of the avant-garde:

> In summary, we note that the historical avant-garde movements negate those determinations that are essential in autonomous art: the disjunction of art and the praxis of life, individual production, and individual reception as distinct from the former. The avant-garde intends the abolition of autonomous art by which it means that art is to be integrated into the praxis of life.[8]

A careful reading of this casual reminiscence reveals, therefore, three clear features of the avant-garde in Koch's poetry: rejectionism; the technical side of found objects, chance encounters and semi-automatic writing (he finally writes the poem immediately based on a strange phrase from his unconscious); and the removal of the gap between art and life. There is also a fourth, critical aspect which is crucial to Koch's work, evidenced by his mockery of deep-themes—one cannot help but see the comic consonance between the physical restraint of totalitarian ideologies and that of bra straps—and of the Wordsworthian ideal of recollection in tranquillity.[9] It is fantastically silly but under the carefully paced surface, reminiscent of stand-up comedy, there is a real commitment, on Koch's part, to the radical tenets of the avant-garde.

Bra Machine

"The Brassiere Factory" would seem to many to be a minor, perhaps even politically suspect, poem by a minor poet. It *does* deal with the theme of sexual freedom, in its way, but it would be hard to convince many people of this with a straight face, yet to dismiss it as just a bit of fun would be a mistake. So why has the critical establishment missed the point so badly, why have they been so busy getting the joke that they missed the message? Partly it is because analysing even the surface

implications of Koch's work requires, on the part of the critic, a wide variety of analytical tools which the poetry itself might not seem to merit, and "The Brassiere Factory" is no exception. One can say that at the time of the poem's publication, 1962, there was avant-garde kudos to be got from writing a poem about the industrial process of making women's underwear, and in some ways Koch's association of the bra with sexual oppression is strangely prophetic, but this might seem all there is that is interesting to say about the poem. In fact, it is a very important moment in a certain strand of contemporary poetic practice due to its use of a mechanistic mode of composition and the manner in which this undermines certain dominant poetic ideologies of our day. However, to get to this one must utilise a carefully orchestrated synthesis of quite diverse analytical tools—generative grammar, stylistics, traditional prosody, a philosophy of repetition, and avant-garde aesthetic theory—and it should be clear at this point why few critics have bothered to put all these tools together just to get to the essence of a poem about the fabrication of bras.

To understand "The Brassiere Factory" in any kind of detail one must make these diverse, often seemingly incompatible, tools cohere into a single analytical practice. To do this I want to use the trope of the poem as a machine that is used by Koch himself. The reasoning behind this trope is simple. First, a machine is a repetitive engine and much of Koch's poetry operates along similar lines. Second, language as a machine is central to the poststructural theory that informs this essay. Third, modern linguistics has made the study of poetic language much more mechanistic. Finally, to make poetry into a machine is to undermine two central tenets of the ontology of western poetry since Romanticism: that it is a mode of subjective expression, and that it somehow represents something real. In contrast, if

poems are machines then subjectivity is irrelevant and a qualitative reproduction is negated in favour of quantitative production.

The poem begins with a clear avant-garde statement typical of the superficial avant-garde rejectionist pose that Koch takes up in *Thank You* (1962), his first collection which includes this piece:

> Is the governor falling
> From a great height?
> Arm in arm we fled the brassiere factory
> The motion-boat stayed on the shore!
> I saw how round its bottom was
> As you walked into southern France—[10]

However, while the reference to the falling governor is a charming version of the avant-garde attack on authority in general, it is the third line that is the "machine" which makes the poem. This phrase, "Arm in arm we fled the brassiere factory," is repeated in a variety of modified forms throughout the poem, each time altering the overall meaning of the phrase and causing the direction of the poem to alter, mutate, approach new departures. In this way the first instance of the phrase becomes the productive centre of all other versions in a pattern typical of Koch's poetry machine ethos. The machine is not something that one comes to understand as the poem develops, tying the disparate strands together. Instead, it is a decision taken at the beginning of the compositional process that dictates, to varying degrees of strictness, what direction the actual creation of the poem will take, as the story behind the poem illustrates. The Koch machine almost invariably consists of a phrase, a grammatical fragment, a lexical grouping, or an overall concept of poetry; which is decided on in advance and is repeated throughout the poem producing what stylistics calls *cohesion*. It is, therefore, a kind of grammar for the poem or a *deep structure* that exists before and also beneath the poem, and which controls and limits what goes on on the surface of the poem.

Once we have determined the basic *machine phrase* we can begin to look, in greater detail, at how it operates and what it produces. Within the thirty-five lines of the poem, there are six of what one might call *machine events* over seven lines, with the title adding a seventh event of slightly different status. The machine event is an instance of the machinery of the poem happening within the poem's production. Following on from poststructural theories of the event one ought to say that the term *event* in relation to the machine is highly instructive as to how the poem machine operates and why.[11] The content of the event is initially irrelevant, all that matters is that the event happens and can be seen to be happening in such a way that expectation is developed as to its happening again. Each event of a poem machine is, in the first instance, like each tick of a clock or each click of a cog, a discrete and unique moment that is not, however, distinguishable in form from its predecessors. The first machine event, which in Koch coincides with the actual machine phrase,[12] seems incongruous in relation to the opening "couplet" which precedes it, but is in fact quite coherent in that it refers both to the title and to the trope of "escape" typical both of poetry and of the collapse of authority which the governor's fall suggests. The second machine event a few lines later, immediately breaks the initial mini-machine repetition "arm in arm" in two, leaving us with just one arm:

> Upon the light hair of an arm
> Cigar bands lay!
> I kissed you then. Oh is my bar,
> The insect of your will? The water rose,
> But will the buffalo on
> The nickel yet be still?[13]

Such violent separation is contrasted, however, with a degree of sound cohesion in the assonance of the "a," an/ arm/ cigar/ bands/ lay/ bar, which has always been a very typical cohesive device in Koch's work. By line 15, the third machine event, "Darling, we fled the brassiere factory,"[14] we can see that Koch seems

determined to systematically erase all arms from the machine phrase as the phrase is returned to again and again through the machine of the poem, suggesting that the removal of the arms is one of the purposes of the machine perhaps. However, the arms then come back in the proceeding lines:

> Arm in arm,
> When human beings hung on us…
> but still we fled, away
> Into a dinner atmosphere
> From all we knew, and fall asleep this day...[15]

At this stage in the poem we can see that the original phrase has been subdivided into three parts in Koch's mind, in a manner not dissimilar to the parsing of a sentence in generative grammar into noun phrases (NP), verb phrases (VP), and prepositional phrases (PP). Using generative grammar at this stage we can see that our opening phrase consists of PP (arm in arm) NP (we) VP (fled the brassiere factory), and that this tells us something about Koch's own "parsing" of the machine phrase with each of the three grammatical elements allowing him to generate different kinds of meanings.[16] This central section of the poem is mechanistically important, therefore, as Koch is spreading out, over several lines, clues for the reader as to how the machine is actually working and importantly that it *is* actually working, as this is what allows for the degree of cohesion that machinery can provide for the poem. Whether Koch knows generative grammar or not, instinctively the differentials within the repetition of the machine phrase depend on his parsing of the phrase into its constituent elements based on deep linguistic structures.

The fifth machine event, "Then arm in arm we fled the listless factory,"[17] is an example of the kind of phrase augmentation again very typical in Koch's poetry machines. The "then" places the fact in a logical/temporal context, while "brassiere" has been replaced by a complex interaction of two examples of *anaphora*, an

important cohesive device highlighted by stylistics. Anaphora is the process of using substitutes for the subject of a piece of writing, to avoid repetition of the same words over and over, to augment the meaning, or simply for economy's sake. A simple example would be, "I went to the cupboard and it was bare." "It" here is an anaphoric substitute for the noun "cupboard," making the sentence shorter. Koch uses anaphora in a variety of profound and imaginative ways, but here we have a relatively straightforward example: tired of saying "brassiere factory" he has renamed it the "listless factory". As I mentioned these are really two anaphoric replacements for the price of one. In terms of stylistics the subject "brassiere factory" has been replaced by another version "listless factory;" however, grammatically the adjective of the NP part of the VP has been totally transformed: "Brassiere" has become "listless." The distance between these two adjectives is so great that one might even question if this is truly anaphoric and not a total rewriting of the phrase, and indeed this is one of Koch's greatest innovations: to walk the line of division between repetition and difference in our language, so as to question these categories and their relationship to language from the deep structure all the way to the discursive level of questioning terms like repetition and difference. Standing back from the parsed phrase for a moment one see that there is still cohesion as the reader does not think this is another factory, but there is also new meaning because the adjective of the NP part of the VP now interacts more with the dynamism of the verb itself.

To conclude we have the last machine event two lines from the end:

> Oh arm in arm we fled the industry
> Into an earth of banks
> And foolish tanks, for what bare breasts might be...[18]

The ejaculation "Oh" is typical of the kind of archaism we still associate with "real" pre-modern poetry and is an example of Koch's use of poetry already lying around, if

you will, acting as materials from which to make his new poetry machines. He calls the poetry of others, of the tradition, the "poetry base" and a large number of his more well-known pieces are clever collages of famous poems in an act similar to Duchamp's vandalising of the *Mona Lisa*.[19] We also have another interesting use of anaphora in this phrase, replacing "brassiere factory" with "industry," which actually takes the genus, industry, to stand in for the species, a type of factory, in one of the rare synecdochic occasions when the whole stands in for the part rather than the other way around. And there we have the whole machinery of the poem, generated by that first phrase and repeated and varied throughout the poem six times using seven of its thirty-five lines.

Thus far we have not seen much that does anything other than tell us that Koch writes in English and that his work is, therefore, subject to the same rules of deep structure and anaphoric cohesion as countless other texts. What we really need to establish is whether Koch's method here generates meaning and contributes to the development of the techniques of postmodern poetry. The first thing that can be established is that, probably unconsciously, Koch has designed for himself a poetic grammar based on what I am calling poetry machines. These machines are made up of key phrases which he comes upon, usually before he writes the poem, and which he repeats in a wide variety of ways from exactly to merely suggestively, and they regularly appear in Koch's work throughout his career from the very first poem he ever wrote to his most recent work.[20] A number of the effects of these machines are based on the rules of universal grammar and, if one parses the phrases, one can see better how the original phrase comes to reproduce and alter. However, they are themselves often used in non-grammatical ways, and certainly they work in what stylistics calls *deviant* ways in terms of the expected significance of ordinary *and*

poetic language. In other words, even when they make sense to a linguist they still make little sense to the reader. Yet, while these phrases alone seem often meaningless in the first instance, and usually disrupt the "rational" meaning of the poem as a whole, they are always the main cohesive devices in the poem, keeping the integrity of the poem body intact.

At this point one could describe the basic Koch poetry machine as a cohesive, mechanistic device that is repetitious, yet which repeats partly to question the idea of its being a repetition and whose distribution both undermines meaningfulness in a poem while being the main thing that keeps it together formally. This alone is of interest as it allows us access to one of the major compositional innovations of one of contemporary poetry's most important innovators. Yet beyond a localised interest, poetry machines have much wider ramifications for modern poetry and our overall understanding of how the language of poetry actually works. Before going on to describe in more detail the idea of "poetry machines" and their implications, however, let us briefly reconsider what the machinery of "The Brassiere Factory" has shown us about even Koch's most playful and simple work, following along the lines of our five analytical tools. In terms of generative grammar, Koch makes his own simple "deep structure" in these poems, or set of basic rules which determine the "syntax" of the poem as a whole. Staying with a linguistic analysis, through the use of repetition, Koch's poetry, which is otherwise quite insignificant in the terms of stylistics, attains a sophisticated level of cohesion which can be missed quite easily. He does this through a complex modification of anaphora, which is all the machine really is. In terms of prosody, and Koch is a very enthusiastic poetic technician, in fact, what he seems to be doing is finding new forms of *patterning* to replace traditional metre and rhyme schemes. If he uses a machine event in seven out of thirty-five lines, one could

say that the poem has a regular measure that occurs not at the level of syllables but at the level of phrases. I propose to call this *phrase measure*, and here the frequency of the *phrase measure* is five.

Whether or not this is a viable new form of prosody is yet to be determined, but clearly, Koch is trying to retain patterned verse in a post-pattern age. The real philosophical implications of what Koch is doing are too involved to summarise here, but one should keep in mind how Koch plays around with difference within repetition to the point where the idea of repetition is questionable, as this is the fundamental consideration of any philosophy of repetition.[21] Finally, while the poem tries revolution at the level of the signified with the quest for sexual liberation, Koch's real talent, as with all the New York School, is revolution at the level of the signifier. Every facet of the composition of "The Brassiere Factory" is revolutionary in terms of the avant-garde, and the machine especially is perfect for attacking the poetry's "claim" to express subjectivity and represent the world. A machine simply defeats all subjective agency in its quest not to represent objects in the world but to make objects to add into the world.

Poetry Ideas—Poetry Language—Poetry Machines

The theory of "poetry machines" comes from Koch's own theory of "poetry ideas" which he developed to teach children to write poetry. Koch explains:

> I taught reading poetry and writing poetry as one subject. I brought them together by means of "poetry ideas," which were suggestions I would give to children for writing poems of their own in some way like the poems they were studying...for the Wish Poem, starting every line with "I wish."[22]

Already one can see in this passage the mechanistic poetic technique that dominates Koch's own work, and although poetry ideas are not fully worked out, I think, in

Koch's mind, with little more in his prose work to really develop the concept, however one definite feature of the concept is repetition as a mode of cohesion:

> As for trying difficult forms, this was all pulverized into one form or variations of one form: repetition. I would say, "Start every line with 'I wish,'" "Put your favorite color in every line," "Start the first line with 'I used to' and the second line with 'But now,'" and so on. It was a children's version of what I had done with adults...When you write a poem, it's as if you are saying how you feel on a grid, and you are hanging flowers everywhere on it.[23]

The closing trope is especially illustrative of the basics of the movement of poetry ideas, Koch's concept, to poetry machines, my own. The machine consists of a fixed set of rules, which I am calling the grammar of the machine, rules that always revolve around instances of repetition. Beyond this grid of rules, pretty much anything goes in the Koch poem. What is interesting about this grid is not, however, that it makes his poems cohesive and so also in some ways coherent, although for a first time reader of Koch I think this is reassuring, but how the grid works critically to undermine certain ideas related to poetry, and also introduces certain other new ideas.

In his most recent book on poetry, *Making Your Own Days*, Koch veers away from poetry ideas in favour of trying to establish what he calls "poetry language." The dream of the poetry language, which finds its apotheosis in Mallarmé, comes about due to certain ontological questions as to the nature of poetry. As the poem sloughs off the generically protective skins of versification, its justification as an artistic thing in its own right becomes highly questionable, and so it is natural that poets and critics alike might then try to come up with making poetry into a language all its own and so reserve for it a kind of protected species status.[24] Koch's first thoughts on the project are that poetry is a language within a language, a special use of an existing language; he then goes on to explain how his first idea was that language was like a synthesiser: "you sat down at this instrument and played; you

didn't tap out a clear message in teletypical prose. Whatever you said would be accompanied by music,"[25] which he rejected because "it was too far from language."[26] Instead he decides what it is about poetry that makes it a separate language, coming up with the following definitions: that it is a language in which the sound of words is equal in status to their meaning, that this means it is "musically weighted," that the lexicon it uses differs from that in a dictionary, that it is processual and "can't hold still," and that the language finally consists simply in the ability to connect the emotion the poet feels with the music of poetry language's manifestation of that feeling.

Such a Romantic theory of poetry is disappointing from such an avowed avant-garde poet, but Koch is not a systematic thinker on poetics and besides there is a whole history of poets designing manifestos which do not match their own poems, so it may seem pointless to bemoan Koch's failings in terms of his theorising a "poetry language." However, with Koch the situation is somewhat different in that he has not actually betrayed his radical commitments in the way that this passage might suggest. Rather, he is so steeped in avant-garde aesthetic assumptions that he does not realise that what *he* means by emotions and what *he* conceives of as poetry's ability to represent them is very far from the Romantic ideological ideal which still is, I would suggest, the folk ideology of poetry.[27]

For example, returning to "poetry ideas" in his recent book he notes: "What I called 'poetry ideas' I realized later were something more like the elements of a sort of grammar of poetry," which provided "two ways of 'disrupting' the flow of ordinary prose: division into lines, and repetition of words. This disruption made music, gave a little lilt to what was said, and replaced the pleasure of continuity with the pleasure of repetition and variation."[28] Put poetry ideas together with the abandoned dream of

the poetry synthesiser, and you have my version of what Koch actually does in his work, namely design and operate poetry machines. From the mixed messages and the failed dream of a poetry language gleaned from Koch's prose, therefore, one can determine that his idea of poetry involves not a mode of expressing clear meaning but of executing language games, with poetry writing being an act of playing *on* language. The preposition is important here as most poets play *with* language; however, Koch proposes playing *on* it as if it was a pre-established keyboard.

Later he concludes that the keyboard is not an apt analogy as language has too many keys, but one could argue that the small ideas or machines around which he builds his poems act to reduce the huge number of "keys "available in English to something resembling an octave. However, the practice of describing poetic process in terms of other arts is aporetic and unhelpful in almost every case. Instead, the concept of poetry ideas as being a kind of grammar for poetry is much more fruitful and, as I believe I have shown already, to some degree is actually the case. Yet it is the final remarks on poetry ideas that are of greatest importance, for here Koch identifies that the role of the poetry idea is not to express or represent, but to disrupt through linear division and repetition. This is, if you like, the deep structure of all the poetry machines I am now going on to detail. These machines are nothing other than pre-established rules, simple grammars, whose role is not to establish continuity between subject and poem or between actual thing and poetic representation of the thing, but to disrupt these very ideological continuations.

Grammar Machines

It must be made clear at this point that the idea of a deep structure which may be said to be the grammar machine of Koch's poetry is, like the idea of the machine itself,

really just a figurative concept. The trope of the machine is something I am using, following on from a number of other poststructural thinkers, in particular Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Derrida, to better describe the mechanistic nature of much of Koch's work. Similarly, the use of the idea of a poetic deep structure is really only to allow us to better document the peculiarly mechanistic manner in which Koch composes his highly repetitious poems. To do this I will consider three very different poems from Koch's early career, *When the Sun Tries to Go On*¸ "Sleeping with women," and "Collected Poems," all generated in the same machine-like way in relation to the ideas of deep structure in generative grammar, cohesion in stylistics, and patterning in traditional prosody. The aim is first to break poetry machinery down into its basic components, before considering the different surface effects and combinatory strategies Koch uses, all produced by a basic "grammatical machinery."

The first component of a grammar of poetry machines is what one should call repetition of the same, which is the simplest form of all repetition. *Repetition of the same*, repeating the same word or same phrase over and over, is by far the most common example of poetry machinery in Koch's work. Interestingly, the most important example of this occurs, however, in *When the Sun Tries to Go On* which, over its 117 pages, is probably the least repetitious, least machine-like poem Koch has ever written. The example I am talking of is, in fact, just one line from the following "sentence:"

> Oat sad, it was a day of cursing blue
> Fish, they reunited so the umpire to finish
> The exhaustion of the Packard and tarantula
> Parallel excursion. O black black black black black,
> Under the tea, how a lid's munificent rotation
> Is that, he cries "The daffodil, tire, say-so,"
> O manufacture-clams building![29]

This is one of numerous sections in this poem that hint at the mechanisms at the heart of poetry—note the exhaustion of the Packard and the manufacture-clams—but what is most remarkable about this sentence is the line "Parallel excursion. O black black black black black." The importance of the line for poetry machinery rests in the fact that it illustrates the basic law of repetition: that of superfluity or of being in excess. Repetition of the same is the least well regarded form of repetition by all theorists of repetition from linguists to philosophers,[30] but it is the form Koch seems to favour. In this example one could say that the first two "blacks" are accommodated by the view of their being parallel, and that the third also fits because we are taking an excursion from the parallel or because the third undermines the idea of the parallel. However, the fourth and fifth repetitions are entirely superfluous and deviant, and could even be said to be threatening as, because they have been generated without rules, there is nothing to stop the rest of the poem continuing in this vein. At this stage a line break intervenes, but what if there were no line breaks in poetry, what then? The extreme nature of this repetition of the same raises some uncomfortable questions for poetry, especially in relation to the closure of subsequent structurings of form, to which the vast length and seeming lack of cohesion one finds in *When the Sun Tries to Go On* also contributes.

Repetition of the same, therefore, is one basic component of the grammar of poetry machines and is well in evidence in Koch's "Sleeping with Women:"

> Caruso: a voice.
> Naples: sleeping with women.
> Women: sleeping in the dark.
> Voices: a music.
> Pompeii: a ruin.
> Pompeii: sleeping with women.
> Men sleeping with women, women sleeping with women, sheep sleeping with women, everything sleeping with women.
> The guard: asking you for a light.
> Women: asleep.

> Yourself: asleep.
> Everything south of Naples: asleep and sleeping with them.
> Sleeping with women: as in the poems of Pascoli.
> Sleeping with women: as in the rain, as in the snow.
> Sleeping with women: by starlight, as if we were angles, sleeping on the train,
> On the starry foam, asleep and sleeping with them—sleeping with women.[31]

Throughout this long poem, the basic machine phrase "sleeping with women" is repeated many times, but this is not a simple example of repetition of the same. The use of the colon instead suggests that there is some form of significant relationship between the machine phrase and the phrase which accompanies it, but also that the second phrase follows on from and is somehow produced by the first. The equation is made clear for us in the first line with the subject, Caruso, being the producer of the thought which follows, a voice. The colon is used, therefore, in the same way that anaphora is often used for the sake of economic continuity and because of this each machine event, while containing within it an example of repetition of the same, also has a Deleuzian *repetition with difference*. This is further exemplified by the phrasal modifications which we also saw in "The Brassiere Factory," with the machine phrase parsed into its component parts and then the poet improvising with these elements.

Repetition with difference can produce marvellous opportunities for diverse meanings while always retaining for the reader a clear cohesion, and one can find at least eight levels, or possible meaning producers, within this apparently simple machine:

1. "Caruso: a voice," the pre-anaphoric moment with no real hint of the content of the machine but the form is repeated.
2. "Naples: sleeping with women," the basic machine—poetry phrase (PP): repeated phrase (RP)—whose order can be switched at will.
3. "Men sleeping with women, women sleeping with women," variations on the RP brought about by removing the colon.
4. "Asleep and sleeping with them," variations on the RP, which becomes a second or alternative RP as the poem goes on. Reaches its peak with "Asleep and sleeping with you, asleep with women / Asleep and sleeping with you, asleep with women, asleep and sleeping with you, sleeping with women."

5. "Greek islands sleeping with women, Nassos, Naxos, Kos, / Asleep with women, Mykonos, miotis / And myositis," variation on the PP, so that it is no longer random but motivated away from the cohesion determined by the RP, occurring in many complex ways as the poem goes on.
6. "And the iris peg of the sea / Sleeping with women," variation in the graphology and syntax of the phrase, here laid out like a lyric poem over several lines so that the graphologically imposed enjambment takes over from the colon.
7. "As with an orchid, as with an oriole," internal mini-machines like repetition of "as," references to place names, repetition of "The" at the beginning of the line.
8. The poem concludes with a combination of three internal machines: repetition of "the," use of colon, and variations on the RP.[32]

"Sleeping with Women" is perhaps Koch's most sophisticated example of the basic machine grammar that consists of repetition of the same, RS, and repetition with difference, RD. However, this basic deep structure, RS RD, with a number of possible parsings within each, although the potential for complexity in the RD far outstrips that of the RS, is not the sum total of grammatical rules. I would argue there is a third part that exists beyond the basic syntax of the machine which might be called the *repetition concept* or RC. A perfect example of this is the poem "Collected Poems" which is actually a sequence of thirty-eight "poems" consisting of little more than a title and one-line poem to follow. In poems of this kind the repetition is not of the same, nor of the tension between repetition and difference, but of a third order which places differentiation at the heart of the repetitious cycle. In taking a trope of totality, like the collected poem sequence, and reducing it down to its repetitive grammatical structure, title-poem / theme / first line, Koch indicates a critical self-awareness of the repetitious nature of the act of writing poetry which is the background against which poetry can be written. Within this meta-critical act, which is an act of conceptual poetics, there are still local interactions of the second level of repetition.

Some titles refer actually to the poem, as does the opening poem:

BUFFALO DAYS

I was asleep when you waked up the buffalo.[33]

Some relate only by imaginative association, such as

GREAT HUMAN VOICES

The starlit voices drop.[34]

And some do not relate at all, as in

PEANUT BUTTER CANDY

Ichthious.[35]

Clearly, Koch is using a repetitious machine structure to undermine one of the meta-structural assumptions behind poetics, that of a particular relationship between title and poem. His poems are so brief that the difference between title and poem is seriously questioned. For example in "The Green Meddler,"

THE GREEN MEDDLER

Aged in the fire.[36]

the difference between title and poem comes down to basic graphological issues of location, spacing and font, while the final poem,

ALABAMA

Alabama![37]

eradicates the difference between title and poem altogether.

"Collected Poems" puts the basic grammatical pattern RS RD against the fake backdrop of a meaningful overall pattern of meta-repetition and meta-differentiation. Such a backdrop is a vital component of our experience of reading, both in terms of the differentials and repetitions of each line's status within each individual poem, and also involving the same questions at the larger level of the differentiation involved in the act of collecting poems. This third facet of the poem, the RC, has a paradoxical function in that it exists to show that one poem is not another, while stressing that

although each poem is different they are still all similar in that they are all poems. The RC is, therefore, the facilitator of the complex mix of similarity and difference, not just in poetry but especially so because of the penchant for the selected and collected format, which I have called the basic RS RD pattern. A poem like "Collected Poems" differs from "The Brassiere Factory" because it comes at poetry as a machine not at the surface level of the syntax of repetition, nor the deep level of the grammar of repetition, but at the meta-level of how poetry is, in effect, always a repetitious mechanistic process. One chooses in advance a theme, one indicates it in the title, and one repeats it in further detail in the poem body, often through other machines such as rhythm, rhyme, devices of cohesion like logic or association, and so on.

We now have what I am calling the deep structure of poetry machines. Each machine consists of the following: RS RD RC. Every poetry machine in Koch's poetry has this basic grammar, I would argue: first, examples of repetition of the same words, the same phrase, the same idea; then a series of modifications bringing a certain degree of difference into the repetition; and finally an overall conceptual appreciation of what this means for poetry. It is the final point which is the most important in this instance, however, as it shows Koch is not developing poetry machines as just another mode of poetic expression, but that they are designed to question and criticise the very idea of poetry in a way that is truly avant-garde.

Cohesion Machines

While it is easy to see the significance of poetry machines at the level of linguistics or at the level of literary theory, to relate the two things together so as to fully understand the impact of Koch's work one needs an interim discipline such as

stylistics. Stylistics has a number of terms for the modes of repetition in literary texts but they fail in some respects as they are, on the whole, concerned only with cohesion while Koch's use of repetition is always deviant. Still, they are essential tools for understanding repetition in Koch's work and I have already mentioned anaphora, which is an example of the RD part of my grammar. In addition, we must consider Geoffrey Leech's foundational terms *free verbal repetition* and *verbal parallelism*, along with more general stylistic terms such as *parallelism*, *cohesion* and *deviance*.

Leech chooses a quotation from the bible to present his idea of free verbal repetition, a passage that resembles very much Koch's repetition of "black" five times: "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"[38] The tension between linguistic superfluity and grammatical significance which such free verbal repetitions show has always been a part of poetry, becoming most formalised in English poetry during the renaissance with the controlled use of rhyme and metre. David's lament for the death of his son, in fact, is an ancient piece of tribal art, going back to the earliest origins of poetic expression: the repetition of the names of the dead over their graves to give them a brief, extra life in language. In relation to this, Leech's comments on free verbal repetition are illuminating and misguided at one and the same time. He suggests that such "superfluity of expression…runs counter to one strongly held tenet of poetic composition: that to compress, to say much in little, is the means to poetic intensity, and the mark of great poetry,"[39] but adds that it is okay in this instance for the expression not to be "great" because the "repetition is almost involuntary to a person in a state of extreme emotional excitation."[40] As excitement has always been an important part of Koch's aesthetic we can assume that he was similarly excited when he wrote "Parallel excursion. O black black black black black." However, Koch's line

also illustrates another facet of free verbal repetition, not that the poet can't do any better, but rather that language can't, as Leech begrudgingly notes: "In a way, saying the same thing over and over is a reflection on the inadequacy of language to express what you have to express 'in one go.'"[41]

Clearly, linguistically, there are two types of poetic repetition and Koch's line hints at, maybe even mocks, Leech's classic differentiation between free verbal repetition and parallelism. Koch starts with a "parallel" excursion yet what follows is not an example of parallelism. Parallelism is the result of deviation from ordinary speech, with poetry being a set of rules which provide the so-called "warranty for a deviation."[42] Deviation for linguistics is a break in the normal flow of the processes of communication, opening a gap in comprehension. The gap is, in the first instance, at the semantic level that in linguistics does not suggest a gap in the meaning of the text but a gap in the grammaticality of the text. Deviation *foregrounds* certain elements of difference; repetition, on the other hand, foregrounds the very opposite elements in a poem, emphasising extra regularities within the text, rather than extra irregularities, so that when a poet is offered a number of options they always choose the same one. Parallelism differs from free verbal repetition because it is a repetition of rules or a poetic "deep structure," not the material repetition we poeticians call semiotics, and in this sense, poetically, it is "better" as there is more tension in parallelism between grammar and semiotics than in free verbal repetition. Parallelism foregrounds semiotics to such an extent that it goes deep, becomes a rule that allows one to segment the language in a way that differs from grammar. In effect, it competes with grammar, coming close to Koch's dream of a "poetry language," but it remains grammatical in every sense of the word as it copies grammar's deepest

structure, which is the desire to structure in accordance with certain rules of division and concatenation.

Koch's repetition, along with that of David, would seem on the surface not to be a parallel excursion but an excursion from the parallel. In a sense both texts foreground a poetic/repetitious deviation and so they both suffer from a semantic deficit. Free verbal repetition, then, is subject to a powerful rule: linguistic superfluity results in semantic deficiency. Replace the term "superfluity" with "excess" and one can see that free verbal repetition is tantamount to poetic deconstruction. Such a form of repetition is the exception that proves the rule of parallelism, the ungrammatical aspect that justifies parallelism as a form of poetic grammar. However, Koch talks of a *parallel* excursion and, in repeating "black" five times, he hints at how free verbal repetition can become parallelism. If free verbal repetition becomes the norm, then it becomes a law of repetitious parallelism which Leech names verbal parallelism, so that when the poet is confronted with a new option to repeat, and in poetry that is basically when the poet is given the option to write poetry, they choose in each case to repeat the same thing rather than another thing encased in the same rule.

In terms of "Sleeping with Women," for example, we have a perfect example of the median or liminal mode of repetition so carefully exploited in Koch's work. The exact repetition of the phrase is free verbal repetition while the repetition of the two phrases linked/separated by the colon would be an example of parallelism. However, what is most common is the way in which the unit of repetition is used structurally to generate various meanings stemming from differentiation, so that the same words are repeated as a kind of rhythm to make the confusing deviations cohere. Leech expresses well the substance of this kind of repetition when he notes, "Verbal parallelism resembles free verbal repetition in that it is *physically* sensible—i.e.

audible to the listener, and visible to the reader,"[43] however he manifestly fails to see the implications of such a method of cohesion. Verbal parallelism undermines the basic unit of repetition, RS, through its use of difference, yet it also questions the most general unit of repetition, RC, by always introducing a very basic repetition into the larger parallelism of the text as a whole. Again I may note how deconstructive this is, for if the many linguists and philosophers who have noticed the tension in poetry between the material cohesion and the overall coherent meaning of the text are right, then the reasoning behind Koch's favouring of verbal parallelism is clear. Verbal parallelism brings together repetition and difference at the sensible level, in a way that undermines both ideas at the conceptual level represented by such a poem as "Collected Poems", an attack which goes to the very heart of the basic assumptions of cohesion and coherence in language.

Stylistics is too simplistic conceptually to understand the implications of many of the effects it notes in literature, and yet without its analysis literary criticism's view of literature seems amateurish and incomplete. However, place the two disciplines together in this instance and we can see that the very devices which would seem to be designed for cohesion in Koch's work, which is otherwise very deviant in terms of poetic expectation, allow for an even greater deviance. Free verbal repetition, the RS of machine grammar, undermines the semantic level of poetry by an excess of sensible material, which also reminds the reader that this is, basically, what characterises all poetry. Poetic language emphasises materiality through repetitious patternings and deviation from the ordinary patterns of speech; Koch merely pushes this to its logical extreme. In contrast, parallelism, RC, suggests that such excessive patterning exists even at the most differential levels of poetry not in the area of the material of poetic language, but at the very heart of the existence of poetry as such.

Yet, most important is the mid-way verbal parallelism that combines material excess with conceptual cohesion. In doing so it indicates that repetition as such must always be differential, each "black" each "sleeping with women" is not the same. However, it also shows that even at the level of greatest differentiation, say between one poem and another in a poet's "Collected Poems," there is a very basic repetition. To put it simply, when Koch is repeating in the most simple way he is deviating from the standard ideas of poetry. What one finds, then, in Koch's machine grammar, RS RD RC, is in fact an act of *deviation as cohesion* that is truly radical and might be called the typical pattern of avant-garde poetics.

Patterning Machines: Towards an Avant-Garde Prosody

In traditional prosody, of which Koch is aware, there are three basic methods of sensible patterning: rhythm, rhyme, and spacing. Each of these is absolutely determined by repetition of the same *and* repetition as difference, the first two parts of machine grammar. Rhythm repeats the same stresses in a regular pattern called metre, rhyme repeats the same sound at the stage of the final syllable of a line, and lineation (imposed space at the end and so between lines) makes sure this happens after the same number of syllables, as well as organising complex variations of this. Yet, metre is a function of the mind which recognises regularity of stress through the regularity of non-stress in a binary fashion.[44] While all speech has stress, metre organises stress into an abstract pattern of similarity and difference. Rhyme meanwhile produces two exact sensible repetitions with divergent meanings, which means that repetition occurs at the sensible level and difference at the super-sensible or cognitive level. Finally, spacing orchestrates this at the purely material level,

distinguishing what is poetry from what is not in many ways too complex to consider here.

What is patterning but an expectation of repetition? Nevertheless, what is repetition without difference? All attention to patterning in poetry studies has tended to place the deviation of patterning at the level of actual deviations from the pattern: an extra syllable, a half rhyme, enjambment. What poetry machines do is draw attention to the difference at the heart of all repetition, or the deviation fundamental to the pattern. Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition*, effectively rewritten in *Anti-Oedipus*, makes just this point while going on to suggest that such a combination of repetition and difference produces a binary flow system common to all human beings or desiring machines.[45] Meanwhile, Derrida, who begins his influential collection *Margins of Philosophy* with an essay on *différance* and ends it with an essay on iteration/repetition, comes at the problem from another direction. He suggests that at the heart of every differentiation, every singular expression, there is an opportunity to defer truth, to have that original phrase repeated later in the mouth of someone else far from the original intended meaning of the piece.[46] Both philosophers are basically talking about a poeticisation of existence. The difference at the heart of every repetition means subjects always differ from their sense of themselves, undermining the ability of the subject ever to repeat in language his or her true being. At the same time, the repetition at the heart of every difference means that each act of representing truth by representing it as different from another truth results in an endless machine of iteration and repetition of the words, irrespective of the presence of the original meaning. Koch's poetry machines are the beginning of the return of these poetic ideas back to a deviant, post-significant, avant-garde poetry. However, is it feasible to talk of poetry machines in the terms of traditional prosody; is there evidence of

rhythm, rhyme and spacing in any of Koch's poetry machines, which still retains that radical, ontological questioning of the poetic, typical of avant-gardism and poststructural philosophy? It is a very big question but I would like to close in suggesting possible future avenues for investigation of this issue.

In terms of rhythm, one ought not to look, in poetry machines, for a traditional patterning nor a distribution across traditional units of syllable or measure. Instead, one ought to search for a new concept of what a pattern is, or patterning at the conceptual level, and how this concept is distributed at the sensible level. I have already noted that "The Brassiere Factory" has a stress pattern of seven, which comes from a patterning of *events* based on verbal parallelism produced by the initial machine phrase. I would call this mode of measure *non-linear measure*, or a mode of measuring not restricted to line-by-line counting and comparing. There are a number of examples of this kind of measure in the New York School poetry. Koch generally uses *phrase measure*, but there is also *word measure*, *line measure* (different from linear measure in that each line is a unit) and *sentence measure*.

If, in Koch's avant-garde prosody, measure is literally conceptual and marked by the counting of the instances of the occurrence of the *machine* behind the poem, then rhyme is his use of sensible repetition with differential meaning. Rhyme is traditionally a repetition of sound with a phonetic differential built in. Often the aim is consonance of semantics within divergent words suggested by consonance at the sensible or semiotic level. Koch's rhyme works in quite the opposite way. He repeats not phonetic sounds but the whole word or phrase. The sensible aspect of such repetition still exists at the aural level; if you say the same word over and over it will always sound the same, but its real sensible impact is at the visual level. You tend to *see* black repeated five times before you conceive that this could be a form of

rhyme. This sensible consonance exists, however, not to produce semantic consonance but rather semantic development and deviance. Instead of repeating the same sounds to produce semantic similarity in difference, poetry machines open up a semantic gap within the word or phrase, which is basic post-structural linguistics. While the meaning of a word might be fixed culturally, one cannot guarantee that in each usage of the word the same meaning will be reproduced. Sometimes black *is* black, at other times it is just the sound "black" or the overall concept of nouns such as "black."

Finally, spacing: Koch uses line-breaks in a challenging way and sometimes he does not use them at all, but innovations at the level of lineation are as much a part of traditional prosody as they are a part of an avant-garde prosody. Where poetry machines innovate spatially is at the level of what I would call semantic-conceptual spacing. I have already noted that rhythm occurs at the level of the mind, which suggests that all patterning is conceptual. In the same way as the mind conceives of gaps between words in speech when in truth there aren't any,[47] so the mind conceives of regular patterns in verse. In avant-garde poetry there are similarly false divisions; spaces which the mind imposes on the text. These consist of various differentiations and divisions, this being the basic function of all spacing. Within the poetry machine there is the conceptual space of RS where the mind imposes a division between the first "black" and the second. Both "black"s are in fact the same, which is why they are RS, but for RS to exist, RD must also be present. Without a concept of differentiation, as I have mentioned in relation to Deleuze, one cannot have a concept of repetition. There must be a kernel of difference between each repetition event for us to be aware that the same thing is happening over and over, and not just during an extended single instance. In a sense, it is like speech perception; false gaps are

imposed to differentiate the individual instances of repetition of the same thing. The sound "black" in speech is matched by the idea of black in the poem. At the level of RD it is somewhat easier to see the spacing. With each "black" a differing sense of the word is developed, meaning that each of the five blacks has a different textual meaning. Such semantic differentiation within semantic repetition is one of Koch's major breakthroughs.

Koch, like many members of the avant-garde, is not a semantically coherent poet and so there is a third gap that one might call the internal break, to contrast with the external break of lineation. The line break interposes the semiotic at the expense of the semantic, as Agamben shows,[48] and so the lack of semantic continuity within a Koch poem does the same. As I have noted the process of cohesion which poetry machines bring about is generally at the expense of coherence in meaning, and this becomes one of the meanings of a poem constructed by machine. Thus, the cohesive power of the poetry machine is meant to undermine critically our assumptions as to the power of formal cohesiveness to provide semantic significance. Yet, poetry machines can also generate new semantic avenues once they have broken the poem away from a traditional "patterning" of logical meaning. One might also mention a fourth possible spacing that we saw in "Collected Poems," which is spacing at the RC or conceptual level. If the other three forms of spacing question division and relation at the semiotic and semantic levels, spacing at the conceptual level has a wider field of vision, questioning spacing between poems, collections, even poets themselves.

These can only be tentative suggestions at this stage but in conclusion one can say that Koch's "poetry machines" are an overlooked but major contribution to the tradition of avant-garde aesthetic critique. They question poetic agency and representation in a clear and systematic fashion, while suggesting innovative

directions for a future, post-avant-garde poetics. While they are critical of post-pattern poetic ideologies, ostensibly Romantic ideologies, they also propose a new act of critical patterning, which could be termed an avant-garde prosody. In innovating patterning at the level of repetition of stress, repetition of sound, and repetition of spacing, they move towards poetic patterning in a post-pattern age. These patterns cannot be, in all conscience, new forms of patterning as this is not in keeping with the avant-garde project of critique; instead, such patterns could be termed, in the first instance, examples of the pattern of no-pattern. By this I do not mean chaos, but a patterning at the conceptual level of the blindspots and failings of patterning in terms of semiotics and semantics. Koch's poetry machines, in using cohesion to undermine coherence and a lack of coherence as a critical mode of cohesion, produce a systematic and mechanistic critical system. This system is a poetic machine, because it makes poems mechanistic, but it is also a critical machine. Whether or not the poetic avant-garde in the future will adopt poetry machines is impossible to say, but it is clear that this simple construct of Koch's ought to place him at the centre of contemporary literary studies, for not only has he produced a patterning machine of interest to those critical of non-deviant poetics, but he has also produced a new form of prosody that will be of interest to traditional rhetoricians and linguistics for decades to come.

Notes

1. Kenneth Koch, *Making Your Own Days* (New York: Touchstone, 1998) 91.
2. The original "members" of the New York School numbered six: John Ashbery, Frank O'Hara, Kenneth Koch, James Schuyler, Harry Mathews and Barbara Guest, although by the time of John Bernard Myers' collection of 1969 there were nine. Of these, the first four are the really significant figures. Mathew's interest in poetry was diminished by his commitment to OuLiPo and his experimental prose works, and Guest was really only ever a satellite member whose aesthetic has increasingly been towards the objective/modernist tradition of American poetry not the playful postmodernism typical of the New York School. Of the central four, Koch has not only been written on the least, he has hardly ever been written on, and yet his importance within the school and in his own right cannot be overestimated.
3. Kenneth Koch, *Seasons on Earth* (New York: Penguin, 1987) 7.

4. Rejection is one of a number of basic characteristics given to the avant-garde artist in Poggioli's seminal, but deeply flawed, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, MA: The Bellknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968).
5. Roussel's own description of this method *(procédé)* is fascinating: "I chose two almost identical words (reminiscent of metagrams). For example, *billard* [billiard table] and *pillard* [plunderer]. To these I added similar words capable of two different meanings, thus obtaining two identical phrases... 1. *Les lettres du blanc sur les bandes du vieux billard*...[The white letters on the cushions of the old billiard table...], 2. *Les lettres du blanc sur les bandes du vieux pillard*...[The white man's letters on the hordes of the old plunderer...]" Raymond Roussel, *How I Wrote Certain of My Books* (trans. Trevor Winkfield, New York: Sun, 1977). The two homonymical phrases were then made into the first and last sentence of a narrative, creating a machine generating the passage from the meaning of one to the alternative meaning of the other. This, of course, works better in French which is much more homonymical than English is for example.
6. For a full explanation and analysis see Maurice Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism* (trans. Richard Howard, London: Plantin Publishers, 1987) 183-87.
7. The definition of schizophrenia has never been straightforward and uncontroversial but here I refer to two versions of schizophrenia as it is used in literary theory. The first is the endpoint of glossolalia or nonsense speech, something which the New York School have been accused of indulging in. Julia Kristeva, in her study of avant-garde and deviant poetics, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (trans. Margaret Waller, New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), notes that while the undermining of rationality in art is a good thing, if it is allowed to pursue this "semiotic" plan it will become the speech of schizophrenics. Hers is a linguistic view of language and means simply utterances that cannot be made to concatenate in any way. Deleuze and Guattari, however, would encourage schizophrenia. They talk of it being the body without organs: "In order to resist organ-machines, the body without organs presents its smooth, slippery, opaque, taut surface as a barrier. In order to resist linked, connected, and interrupted flows, it sets up a counterflow of amorphous, undifferentiated fluid. In order to resist using words composed of articulated phonetic units, it utters only gasps and cries that are sheer unarticulated blocks of sound." Phillipe Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane, London: Athlone Press, 1990) 9. Taking schizophrenia to be a resistance to division and differentiation, they see in the illness a metaphor for revolution against the obsessive processes of division that typify capitalism.
8. Peter Burger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (trans. Michael Shaw, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984) 54.
9. As Wordsworth and Coleridge might put it: two years before, Koch saw the box of bras with merely the "aggregating" power of his fancy, but now as he writes the poem he is able to see the bras through the "transformative" power of his imagination.
10. Kenneth Koch, *Thank You, and other Poems* (New York: Grove Press, 1962) 11.
11. Lyotard is the most important modern philosopher of the event, which can be clumsily described as the irreducibility of the occurrence coupled with a realisation that this irreducibility cannot be described as it cannot be reduced in any form of representation and remain an event. Taking his lead from Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), Lyotard talks of the event as the "that it happens": "That it happens 'precedes,' precedes itself, because 'that it happens' is the question relevant as the event, and it then pertains to the event that has just happened. The event happens as a question mark 'before' happening as a question. *It happens* is rather 'in the first place' *is it happening, is this it, is it possible?* Only 'then' is any mark determined by the questioning: is this or that happening, is it this or something else, it is possible that this or that?" Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* (trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991) 90.
12. The machine *event* needs to be carefully differentiated from the machine *phrase*. The machine event is each individual occurrence of repetition in the text based on the machine phrase. The machine phrase is, instead, the specific features held within the phrase whose repetition will allow one to notice that a machine event has happened.
13. Koch, *Thank You,* 11.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. The PP allows him to play with the arms, producing associative meanings related to arms, meanings that relate to the act of being linked, and semiotic "meanings" from the repetitious assonance of the phrase. The NP is greatly reduced, just a "we," but is actually the heart of the poem which is, as we saw, about love and freedom, so that one can see that in this context "we" means both the two of us together and, by implication, us against them. Finally, the VP, which can be further parsed into V

(fled) NP (the brassiere factory), allows Koch to play around with the dynamism of the act of fleeing, while the NP part of the VP is further parsed into determiner (det) adjective (A) noun (N), (the brassiere factory), so that he can change the kind of factory for example.
17. Koch, *Thank You*, 11.
18. Ibid.
19. The "poetry base" also allies Koch with the classic division between the *bricoleur*, or odd-job man, and the engineer that was a formative statement of Levi-Strauss's development of structuralism. It is a small, but important, point to note, therefore, that while Koch makes poetry machines he is no engineer, because all of his machines are patched together out of bits of language left "lying" around his consciousness.
20. Of his recent collections, *One Train* (New York: Knopf, 1994) and *Straits* (New York: Knopf, 1998) are impressive in terms of contributions to the development of poetry as a mechanistic process. They contain examples of repetition of the same and repetition with difference found in earlier work, but, more importantly, they have many examples of repetition as a concept. In poems such as "One Train May Hide Another," "The First Step," "On Aesthetics," "My Olivetti Speaks," and "Artificial Intelligence," Koch manages to combine mechanistic composition with a sophisticated conceptual understanding of the mechanistic base of poetry. The poems, then, not only demonstrate poetry machines as a critique of traditional, non-deviant poetics, they also describe the critique.
21. This complex interaction is the subject of Deleuze's early, opaque work *Difference and Repetition* where he argues that every repetition contains difference as a mode of questioning philosophical, metaphysical mainstays such as identity, essence, and being. At one stage he states his position in the form of a question: "Does not the paradox of repetition lie in the fact that one can speak of repetition only by virtue of the change or difference that it introduces into the mind which contemplates it? By virtue of a difference that the mind draws from repetition?" Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (trans. Paul Patton, London: Athlone Press, 1997) 25. Earlier he expresses this through a useful analysis of rhyme as a form of repetition: "Take the example of rhyme: it is indeed verbal repetition, but repetition which includes the difference between two words and inscribes that difference at the heart of a poetic Idea, in a space which it determines. Nor does its meaning lie in marking equal intervals, but rather, as we see in a notion of strong rhyme, in putting tonal values in the service of tonic rhythm, and contributing to the independence of tonic rhythms from arithmetic rhythms" (Deleuze, *Difference*, 22).
22. Kenneth Koch, *The Art of Poetry: Poems, Parodies, Interviews, Essays, and Other Work* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1996) 104-105.
23. Ibid., 155-56.
24. This is the subject of Giorgio Agamben's intriguing *The Man Without Content* where he argues that modern art has become "without content" and so has increasingly taken this lack of content as its content: "The extreme object-centeredness of contemporary art, through its holes, stains, slits, and nonpictorial materials, tends increasingly to identify the work of art with the non-artistic product" Giorgio Agamben, *The Man without Content* (trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999) 50. Koch is guilty of this, I believe, and it is significant that Agamben identifies Mallarmé as the source of this modern malaise. As art has lost its intrinsic sense of itself, it takes this loss of self as its new subject matter, allying art with all things that are not art because art itself is no longer art as well. Hence Koch's attempts to make poetry a language. It also suggests that there is melancholia or an aspect of mourning to all such art, which adds a provocative slant to Koch's avant-garde reduction of poetry to a machine. The machine trope would almost be a classical act of denial, a way of distracting the world from the sadness the avant-gardiste feels in relation to art's loss of itself within their own work. Could Koch's obsessive humour also be a kind of sad-clown syndrome?
25. Kenneth Koch, *Making Your Own Days*, 20.
26. Ibid.
27. For more on the argument that the Romantic ideology has come to dominate the modern idea of poetry see Paul de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), Geoffrey Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry: 1787-1814* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1964), David Simpson, *Irony and Authority in Romantic Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1979), and Jerome McGann, *The Romantic Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983). Much of this work stems from Harold Bloom's conception that we are all Romantics. For an analysis of how the New York School undermines Bloom's imposition of Romantic aesthetics on modern poetry see the final two chapters of my own *In the Process of Poetry: The New York School and the Avant-Garde* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2000).
28. Koch, *Making Your Own Days*, 75-76.

29. Kenneth Koch, *When the Sun Tries to Go On* (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1969) 8. There are similar examples scattered through the huge poem such as "Gorilla / Youth. Fable. Detective. Fur fur fur, fur / Midnight. (Ibid., 14). A more sophisticated development of repetition of the same can be seen in the following passage: "'Roistering hint glove task phone / 'ache' factory hoop device?' / Spot, 'kee,' sun. My hand of devoted hands / Babel sick, yowl earnest 'bee'-boat, seven, connote / 'Yoohoo' of a gray, bad 'bat' disk 'bat' boat key / Helen, Sue, loss, sea 'hoe' 'doe look' / Of cancer. Yard! unbalanced…" (Ibid., 17). The machinery of the poem is referred to here, as it very often is throughout Koch's work, in the form of the factory hoop device which the rest of the passage reveals to be a device of endless repetition and variation. There are clear repetitions of the same here, Hand/hand, bat/bat, but there are also very clever repetitions of the same with sonic difference built in: 'kee,'/ 'bee,'/ –boat/ connote/ bad/ 'bat'/ 'bat'/ boat/ key/ Sue/ sea/ 'hoe'/ 'doe' and so on. This is a real advancement on the repetition of the same and yet it still is repetition of the same, revealing that even basic repetition can be presented in the form of fascinating variance.
30. Deleuze undermines the importance of repetition of the same by analysing the figure of a decorative pattern: "Consider…the repetition of a decorative motif: a figure is reproduced, while the concept remains absolutely identical….However, this is not how artists proceed in reality. They do not juxtapose instances of the figure, but rather each time combine an element of one instance with another element of a following instance. They introduce a disequilibrium into the dynamic process of construction, an instability, a disymmetry or gap of some kind which disappears only in the overall effect…it is not the elements of symmetry present which matter for artistic or natural causality, but those which are missing and are not in the cause; what matters is the possibility of the cause having less symmetry than the effect....For us, as the example of the decorative motif suggests, it is essential to break down the notion of causality in order to distinguish two types of repetition: one which concerns only the overall, abstract effect, and the other which concerns the acting cause. One is static repetition, the other is dynamic….One refers back to a single concept, which leaves only an external difference between the ordinary instances of a figure; the other is the repetition of an internal difference which it incorporates in each of its moments, and carries from one distinctive point to another" (Deleuze, *Difference,* 20).
31. Kenneth Koch, *The Pleasures of Peace, and other Poems* (New York: Grove Press, 1969) 11.
32. Ibid., 11-15.
33. Koch, *Thank You,* 39.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid., 40.
36. Ibid., 41.
37. Ibid., 42.
38. Geoffrey Leech, *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry* (London: Longman, 1969) 78.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid., 78.
41. Ibid., 79.
42. Ibid., 61.
43. Ibid., 85.
44. As Traugott and Pratt point out, "meter is essentially a conventionalized type of stress pattern. Stress is a perceptual phenomenon, internalized by the child with the linguistic system. Meter, on the other hand, is an abstract construct imposed on language; it is learned separate from stress." Elizabeth Closs Traugott and Mary Louise Pratt, *Linguistics for Students of Literature* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980) 73.
45. Talking of human beings as desiring machines, they ask the question: "In what respect are desiring-machines really machines, in anything more than a metaphorical sense? A machine may be defined as a *system of interruption* or breaks. These breaks should in no way be considered as a separation from reality; rather, they operate along lines that vary according to whatever aspect of them we are considering. Every machine, in the first place, is related to a continual material flow (hylè) that it cuts into… The term hylè in fact designates the pure continuity that any sort of matter ideally possesses…" (Deleuze and Guattari, 36).
46. As Derrida asserts: "To write is to produce a mark that will constitute a kind of machine that is in turn productive, that my future disappearance in principle will not prevent from functioning and from yielding itself to, reading and rewriting." Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy* (trans. Alan Bass, Brighton: Harvester, 1982) 316.
47. For the layperson, the best description of this is by Stephen Pinker: "All speech is an illusion....In the speech sound wave, one word runs into the next seamlessly: there are no little silences between

spoken words the way there are white spaces between written words. We simply hallucinate word boundaries..." Stephen Pinker, *The Language Instinct* (London: Penguin, 1994) 159.
48. See Giorgio Agamben, *The End of the Poem* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999) 109-115. The imposition of the semiotic as a feature of poetic language is also discussed in Derek Attridge, *The Rhythms of English Poetry* (London: Longman, 1982) 303-14.