

Production and Reproduction: Gertrude Stein (1874-1946)

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The identity of Gertrude Stein – high-modernist author, Paris salon-hostess and American celebrity – was the subject of much speculation throughout her career, especially in the wake of her bestselling volume *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933). While numerous mass-media journalists quoted her and speculated about her writing or her personality, and while her publisher would label her ‘the publicity hound of the world’, Stein herself would retreat inward, suggesting that as others increasingly recognized her, ‘Well you see I did not know myself [...] So many people knowing me I was I no longer.’¹ This tension between the private Stein and the public Stein – that ‘there are two Steins’, as a photograph she was sent would lead her to observe – provides the focus for a number of studies of her role in modernist culture both as author and celebrity.² Bryce Conrad (1995), Steven Watson (1998), Kirk Curnutt (2000), Alyson Tischler (2003), Loren Glass (2004), Karen Leick (2009), Deborah M. Mix (2010), Jonathan Goldman (2011), Timothy Galow (2011) and others have written about Stein’s self-staging, her persona as author or as central figure of modernism, or about her engagements with popular culture, mass audiences and the marketplace. That Stein was a major celebrity as well as an author of some of the most provocative aesthetic writings of the early twentieth century is clearly established in critical studies. But Stein as public figure has, not only now but even early in her career, attracted almost as much critical notice as her famous modernist style, to the point where a 2014 book carries the subtitle *Returning to the Writing of Gertrude Stein*.³ There are two figures, then: Stein

the writer and producer of literary texts and Stein the star author, a celebrity produced through recognition of her literary value and through her publicly-performed personality.

This understanding of celebrity as both a producer and product of promotional value in a mass-media age has also been well-documented. Graeme Turner uses the idea to structure the whole of his volume *Understanding Celebrity* (2004/2014), with separate sections on ‘Production’ and ‘Consumption’ to underline the celebrity as commodity. Richard Dyer, often credited with the formation of celebrity studies as a critical discipline, makes the same principle the foundation of his introduction to *Heavenly Bodies* (1986), using Eve Arnold’s photograph of Joan Crawford from 1976 to represent the various portraits of a celebrity – as one who labors to produce the star image, but also as one who is produced by the mediation of the image to fulfil the social expectation of an audience.⁴ That Arnold portrays multiple Joan Crawfords in a single image is crucial to Dyer’s description of a celebrity as defined simultaneously by the individual, by media and by the audience, for the celebrity ultimately plays multiple roles as producer, as means of production and as product itself. David Marshall cites Foucault’s ‘author-function’ as an important idea for understanding the meaning of the celebrity figure, recognizing the agency of the celebrity person and their capacity for producing their own meaning, but also the social discourse that sustains or denies the celebrity value of the individual person.⁵ The celebrity as both producer and as product has even been applied specifically to modernist authorship in relation to stylistic techniques, gender and the private-public divide.⁶

Indeed, this dual nature of the celebrity is actively played out in the career of literary modernists in general and Stein in particular. In the case of Stein, however, there appear to be numerous instances of contemporary recognition of the phenomenon. The idea that there were two Steins is not uncommon now, but was even more widely recognized at the time her career

was developing, evident in personal correspondence, in public writings and performances, in gossip columns and in cartoons and caricatures. Borrowing from theoretical ideas on the production of celebrity value from the critics mentioned above, and with special attention to Walter Benjamin's contemporary ideas on reproduction in an age of mass markets, this chapter seeks to reveal just how far Stein sought to establish her celebrity persona, how far this persona was proliferated and duplicated by mass-media representations and how far the representations of dual Gertrude Steins reflect the tensions inherent in celebrity authorship in more general terms. It is clear that Stein was always interested in an audience who would consume her work, reinforcing for her the value of her literary production; but it is also clear that she was disturbed by what resulted from her authorial celebrity. Once she was a product for reproduction, proliferation and consumption, new questions of identity, authenticity and value in the literary sphere arose. Before Foucault asked 'What is an Author?', Stein, faced with the very real problem of having her aesthetic production overtaken by a mass-reproduced persona of the celebrity author, asked: 'I am I why.'⁷ While the latter question might be asked by any human being, this chapter will argue that it certainly applies to literary celebrities surrounded by reproductions of their work, their styles, their persona and personal image, and that Stein in particular was subjected to repeated duplication and intense proliferation of her authorial, public and personal identities.

Stein's literary production and journalistic reproduction

Aaron Jaffe's *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity* (2005) mentions Stein a number of times, but primarily in sections of the study dedicated to collaborative and promotional networking, or what he calls 'Authorship to deliver Publicity'.⁸ Stein certainly belongs in discussions of this

sort, but she would equally provide a clear demonstration of what Jaffe terms the authorial ‘imprimatur’ in the modernist period, a trademark style or ‘textual signature’ that functioned by ‘hybridizing bodily agency and textual form’.⁹ Stein’s unique prose style was easily recognizable and widely quoted in mass media outlets, leading to the adjective ‘Steinese’ to describe her technique – a word already in use, as Alyson Tischler has shown, as early as 1914.¹⁰ Clearly Stein’s style of writing was not only capable of attracting notice, but distinctive enough to promote its author as a unique figure in early twentieth-century literature. It was also in 1914 that Stein’s second book, *Tender Buttons*, was first published, a volume which still appears *avant-garde* more than a hundred years later. Printed in a limited edition of 1000 copies, Stein’s experimental prose poems were so unlike anything then published that her remarkable style instantly became ‘news’. As Leonard Diepeveen has shown, during 1914, ‘every newspaper editor in the United States seems to have assigned someone to the *Tender Buttons* beat’.¹¹ This small volume of obscure modernist text became a national event, according to Diepeveen, because of new channels of distribution, the media sensation of a unique style and reportage based on expansive quotation. In other words, while Stein labored over the production of her unique and innovative style, her celebrity imprimatur, the mass media reproduced this unique trademark style through citation, parody, plagiarism and far-reaching distribution into places remote from the centers of modernist experimentation. The result was that Stein became a celebrity, not due to an interested audience reading her literary productions, but due to the highly mediated forms of their journalistic reproductions.

Tender Buttons could be described as a text that few Americans in 1914 wanted to read and even fewer could find, but one that was reviewed by an enormous range of publications across the nation, almost all of which warned their readers *not* to read it by offering a large enough

sample of the most obscure lines to intrigue and baffle readers. Stein was well aware of the fascination she induced, as evident from her lecture tour of the United States in 1934, where she recalls that ‘they wanted to know how I had succeeded in getting so much publicity, I said by having a small audience’.¹² Stein’s success follows the model of modernist mutual engagement with public culture and elite authorship established by Lawrence Rainey in *Institutions of Modernism* (1998), where the market value of modernist works is closely linked to how limited or obscure they are. However, as Karen Leick makes clear, there is still a tendency to consider her celebrity as a product of her bestselling *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, despite the fact her trademark prose had already made her a celebrity nearly twenty years before her bestseller was published.¹³ Stein may not have been widely read until her *Autobiography*, but she was certainly well-known before she was widely read. It was her imprimatur that allowed her work to be so extensively reproduced, despite its failure to appeal to a larger audience and despite the limited quantities available.

If the production of her stylistic imprimatur, however, allowed her to be quoted and parodied as a celebrated trademark style, its reproduction raised new questions about the value of her art, even after her celebrity had been confirmed with the publication of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. While one can trademark or copyright a brand or a publication, Stein’s technique – the distinctive style labeled Steinese – could be reproduced without sanction. In fact, the lampooning of Stein’s distinctive language, rather than the employment of serious review, was a popular pastime and the source of much journalistic humor, as Stein herself acknowledged in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*: ‘Getting reviews was a difficulty, there are always plenty of humorous references to Gertrude Stein’s work, as Gertrude Stein always says to comfort herself, they do quote me, that means that my words and sentences get under their skins although

they do not know it.’¹⁴ As this comment makes clear, Stein took comfort in her influence and her renown, but was troubled by the ridicule to be found in certain parodies. Still, as a majority of the reviews of her bestselling *Autobiography* were quick to point out, Alice B. Toklas’s voice was easier to read and more straightforward in syntax and punctuation. The imprimatur, previously underwritten by the name of Gertrude Stein, appeared to be undermined by the announcement that the autobiography belonged to Alice. The style, while easier to read, was still distinctive, however, and once it became common knowledge that the work was produced by the famous author of *Tender Buttons* and other obscure works, the tendency toward parody and imitation of style regained momentum in the popular press. Lucy Van Gogh, for instance, in the *Toronto Saturday Night* offers a whole review attempting to replicate Stein’s language from *The Autobiography*. She finishes with a typical run-on sentence, summarizing her intent in the review: ‘It is very confusing. When I began this review I was trying to make my sentences passionate and not bothering about paragraphs and I think the first sentence is rather good anyhow it is just the same as the first sentence of Alice only the place is different and a little better.’¹⁵ Whether the place or the sentence is ‘a little better’ than Alice’s is left ambiguous, but clearly this reviewer believes that Stein’s imprimatur is capable of duplication, if not improvement. And she is not alone.

In fact, it was a common enough reviewing tactic that one month after publication of the first edition of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, the publishing firm Harcourt, Brace felt obliged to put out a press release, announcing that the book was indeed ‘written in Gertrude Stein’s own and actually inimitable style’, but going on to claim that ‘every reviewer has partially or entirely, consciously or unconsciously, been influenced by that style. They imitate, echo, mock, applaud, experiment, perorate, and try again – in Gertrude’s style’.¹⁶ The tensions

between the production of a unique imprimatur and the reproduction of the more generic Steinese is readily apparent in Harcourt's advertisement, where the 'inimitable' style is not only a singular influence on popular culture but is subject to, in their own words, imitation. The question raised, then, is whether an inimitable style, a unique, trademarked literary voice, can be recognizably imitated, duplicated or otherwise reproduced? The truth is, Stein's style is both difficult to imitate (at least adequately), but so distinctive that even a poor pastiche is recognizable as hers. Yet this raises another question: if reproduced widely and regularly, can that style still be called 'hers'? Just as Stein comforts herself that 'they do quote me', indicating that her style is infectious and influential in the public sphere, there is the evident discomfort implied by her phrasing. Clearly, she is troubled to find that she is misunderstood or ignored, but also, perhaps, by the fact that the reproduction of her style is carried out in her name. Even the worst parody or mockery of her stylistic imprimatur is still carried out under the label of Steinese. It is as if, in getting 'under the skin' of the reviewers, Stein finds her own 'inimitable' style or authentic voice is overwritten by the proliferation and reproductions of the popular press.

A discussion of reproduction and authenticity during the continued emergence of mass media in the 1930s must draw on Walter Benjamin's famous essay, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'. It was first published shortly after *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and Stein's celebrity lecture tour of the United States, and just prior to her second autobiography, which reflects in depth on her identity, celebrity and popular reception. These contemporary texts in some ways speak to each other, particularly with reference to the production of works of art and the emergent mass media that threaten them through reproducibility and proliferation. While Benjamin refers more particularly to the reproduction of art through mechanical duplication, including photography and film, his comments on the aura of

the work of art and its authenticity when widely dispersed through the media are very relevant here.

In his essay, Benjamin writes: ‘The presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity.’¹⁷ In the case of Stein, however, the original was markedly *not* present, in more ways than one: her work was the product of an impersonal high modernist, resident of far-off Paris, and originally available only in limited quantities. As Diepeveen has pointed out, her earliest readers, facing the remarkable proliferation of Stein’s textual production, were regularly unsure how to read the original, openly questioning her sincerity or authenticity.¹⁸ The journalistic tactics of mass quotation and stylistic parody were ultimately the result of uncertainty as to whether Stein herself should be taken seriously as a producer of authentic art. Yet the light-hearted pastiche and mockery also had the effect of calling into question the authenticity of her celebrity imprimatur. For as Benjamin goes on to say, even when mass reproduction and proliferation ‘may not touch the actual work of art, yet the quality of its presence is always depreciated’.¹⁹ In other words, Stein’s style was promoted and celebrated by its wide distribution – even when the reproduction was in mockery – but often at the expense of her own production of authorial imprimatur.

Still, reproduction and the loss of authenticity or aura, as described by Benjamin, is hardly a uniform and consistent effect of the emergent media, and in some ways plays into the hands of authorial celebrity. For example, Marjorie Perloff quite rightly questions Andreas Huyssen’s assertion that ‘by exhibiting a mass-produced urinal as a fountain sculpture, Duchamp succeeded in destroying what Benjamin called the traditional art work’s aura, that aura of authenticity and uniqueness’, by pointing to the persistent aura of Duchamp’s mass-produced (and then reproduced) ‘Fountain’ in the world’s art galleries.²⁰ Naturally, Duchamp’s treatment of the

mass-produced object as a work of art called into question the authenticity or aura of art works in general, but simultaneously it sustained Duchamp's own authenticity as artist, elevating the art object that was originally indistinguishable from others produced by the same factory – first through the signature attached and the manner in which it was displayed at the Society of Independent Artists, then through the wider social recognition of Duchamp's status as artist and the place his work takes in the history of art.

In many respects, Duchamp was one of the first to call attention to the aura of the artist as producer of value, what Foucault would later call 'the author-function', as opposed to an emphasis placed on the work of art as product of artistic labor. Stein's prose style nevertheless works in an inverse manner: produced as a labored, trademark style, but then reproduced in the mass media in order to question its authenticity as the sincere voice of an artist. If Stein's style can be copied in such ignoble ways by such evident non-artists, one might ask, how can it be authentic? Benjamin would suggest that such mocking reproductions diminish the aura of Stein's work, the product she offers as author. One could also argue, however, that they manage to promote her image as authorial producer of artistic values through the proliferation of her imprimatur, and via her celebrity status as author. Thus, Stein's trademark style may be depreciated through its reproduction, but her name and image as author *appreciate* with every recurrence of someone else's tribute to or parody of Steinese.

In many ways, Stein herself called attention to this process of authentication in her manner of composition and presentation of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. In taking on Toklas's voice, she is already calling into question the authenticity of an artist's role in the discourse that supports the celebrity author-function. Stein is naturally the subject of the volume and her role at the center of modernism serves to promote her own authorial personality and positioning. Thus,

in two ways, Stein serves as author of the bestselling volume – both as writer and as the authorial figure serving as the book’s focus. But what is regularly missed by those parodists of the new volume of Steinese is that, though Stein’s celebrity underwrites the text, Toklas must be considered the author of her own autobiography, by definition of that term. There are questions, even, as to Toklas’s involvement in the composition or the style of the book, as Richard Bridgman has outlined.²¹ The question of authorship was an issue especially for the earliest readers of the book, as it was sent first to Stein’s agent, then to her publishers, and finally printed without reference to her own imprimatur; there was no mention of Gertrude Stein on the cover or the title page of the first-edition. Against this background, the parodying of the Alice B. Toklas style seems that much more perplexing, especially with the prevalent mood of the reviewers being summed up by the repeated observation across newspapers that, at last, Stein was lucid. Yet if the prose technique is neither entirely owned by Stein, nor overly obscure, nor subject for the kind of mockery reserved for more unorthodox texts like *Tender Buttons*, what is the purpose of the stylistic reproduction? Part of the answer surely has to do with journalistic habit; this is the mainstream response to a Stein work. But the parodies also signal that Stein has, after the publication of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, become more than a singular trademark style owned by her: she has turned into a larger brand of unorthodox style that belongs to everyone. Steinese is both a distinctive, original form of artistic production belonging to a self-professed genius and a readily-available mode of reproduction signaling a token engagement with the emerging cultural manifestations of the period.

The reviews of *The Autobiography* therefore continue to be written in long, loopy sentences making a show of reproduction of Stein’s style. Paul Rosseter, for example, has a column in *The Daily Journal* of Sturgis, Michigan, in which he offers a pastiche of Stein’s book

throughout, concluding with this: ‘After this comes the end of the book, which you know is definitely the end because the last page of the book is a facsimile reproduction of the first page of the book which leaves you exactly where you started with a cosy feeling about it all.’²² From an aesthetic point of view, this may be poor parody, but it does call attention to, firstly, how Stein’s repetitive style becomes lazily reproduced, and, more importantly, to Stein’s own use of mechanical reproduction in the first edition of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. If Stein refused to place her own name on the title page of her partner’s memoirs, the famous closing lines of the book do reveal her authorship, with Alice narrating Stein’s words: ‘I am going to write it for you. [...] And she has and this is it.’²³ The original manuscript of the *Autobiography*, however, reveals that she initially had in mind to include a signature line, ‘Sincerely Yours, Alice B. Toklas’, intended to effectively erase Toklas’s imprimatur as forged by Stein.²⁴ However, in the first edition, as Rosseter brings to light in his review, Toklas’s signature line is replaced with a photographic reproduction of Stein’s own autograph copy of the famous first page. This compels the reader who (Stein had hoped) had not yet determined the authorship of the volume to return to the *Autobiography* a second time in order to read the text previously narrated by Toklas in her voice, now under the sign of Stein’s authorship, as if in her handwriting. The production of the *Autobiography* thus ensured that Stein’s imprimatur, even from within the soulless journalistic reproduction of her style or the mechanical reproduction of her handwriting, retained a certain aura.

‘There are two Steins’: celebrity reproduction and duplicate images

That the publication of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* altered Stein’s public image and her reception is an understatement, and much of her literary production after her bestseller was

dedicated to working through the tensions of a public expectation for the engaging and accessible celebrity figure and her own need to continue her pursuit of difficult, often-unpopular literary arts. This was a tension Stein felt keenly, as Lucy Daniel outlines in her biography: ‘Later Stein would admit that in writing *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* she had “lost her personality”. Properly speaking Stein became a personality and lost her identity.’²⁵ This is an important distinction, as Stein’s problem with identity in the wake of *The Autobiography* was not that she had no personality, but that, as this section aims to reveal, she was sometimes subject to the public personality projected on her personal life. Instead of no personality, Stein had multiple, sometimes competing, reproductions of her personality played out in the press and other media. As Daniel goes on to say: ‘Stein packaged herself so successfully that she lost control of herself as a commodity.’²⁶ Stein as writer of *The Autobiography* had projected Toklas as author, as we have seen, but had staged herself using the celebrity author-function, setting up a proliferation of Stein figures in the process.

The multiple Steins are apparent in some of the earliest visual depictions of Stein’s popular success, as two newspaper cartoons demonstrate. Irma Selz’s cartoon, published in the *New York Post* from 14 September 1933, directly comments on the composition of *The Autobiography*, depicting Stein the writer facing Stein the authorial figure or literary celebrity. <FIGURE 6.1.> The caption, ‘Gertrude Stein interviews herself about “The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas”’, clearly plays on the dual nature required of Stein by the book’s approach, where authorship is not only the act of composing text but also that of performing the role of the author-function. The cartoon is more than a commentary on the author’s dual role within *The Autobiography*, however, for it also comments on Stein’s public self-promotion and her own involvement in the mediated celebrity image. Stein the writer, seated on the right in this particular image, is not the

stylistic genius of the Stein imprimatur, but merely a servant of the other Stein, the celebrity personality whose private self is made public by the scribe. The author, in interviewing herself, has now taken on the role of journalist, Selz appears to suggest. In adopting the new autobiographical style that appeals to a wider audience and promotes the celebrity figure who has already by this time become detached from her obscure writing, Stein is herself responsible for her own reproduction.

In another caricature commenting on the publication of the *Autobiography*, published in *Chicago Daily News* on 20 September 1933, Roy C. Nelson similarly reveals a duplication of Stein figures placed next to each other, emphasizing the dual nature of the author's image. <FIGURE 6.2> The emphasis has shifted, however, as there are no longer two equally animated, human figures, but one living Stein and one idol to which she pays homage. The accompanying text once more labels the author 'the inimitable Stein', despite the fact the caricature reveals the author bowing before a sculpted imitation of herself – the real Stein here subjecting herself to her own image, the celebrity author as object. Many reviewers focused on this objectified image of the genius, displaying ambivalence as to whether Stein's work was actually legitimate art or not, but certain that Stein was, as well as a self-absorbed egotist, an influential figure in modern culture, a powerful personality deserving of the public notice. As Sterling North writes in the review accompanying Nelson's caricature: 'There was a lady loved a lady and both ladies were Gertrude Stein. We hasten to admit that she had reason. She profoundly influenced the second and third generations of 20th Century American writers.'²⁷ North first calls attention to the dual roles Stein plays, both as object and as subject of veneration, but also reminds readers that she is a deserving object. This is not to say that North, who would publish his first novel the following year, affirms that her trademark style is the work of genius, but simply that she is an

acknowledged influential figure within the emerging literary history of the century – a public figure of literary value and a celebrity author of note.

This double role of literary genius and public celebrity was increasingly the part Stein was forced to play after the publication of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. Just as she had finally given in to write her memoirs, she relented at last to public demand and to the desire of her agent to tour the United States. As Stein recalls in *Everybody's Autobiography* (1937), she initially declined for a very specific reason: 'And Mr. Bradley said I was making a mistake and I said no, Jo Davidson always said one should sell one's personality and I always said only insofar as that personality expressed itself in work. It always did bother me that the American public were more interested in me than in my work.'²⁸ Here, Stein herself acknowledges the two sides of her personality, one represented by her work as writer, and one represented by her celebrity position as notable personality. She remembers being aware of the dangers of appearing in the media as celebrity author, a public image distinct from her textual body, even before the publication of *The Autobiography* had so profoundly placed her celebrated personality next to her personal expression in text, effectively separating and duplicating the public image of herself. However, the insight that this effect has everything to do with the nature of twentieth-century celebrity appears lost on Stein, as she ultimately offers her fame as the reason for her agreement to the lecture tour: 'I used to say that I would not go to America until I was a real lion a real celebrity at that time of course I did not really think I was going to be one. But now we were coming and I was going to be one.'²⁹ Once Stein's *Autobiography* had made her 'a real celebrity' through that text's promotion of herself as author/personality, in other words, she was willing to accept the invitation to tour America, somehow unaware that this would inevitably increase her chances of the American public being more interested in her personality than in her

work. In reality, she was not as prepared as she remembers here, for once she had arrived in the United States with ‘real celebrity’ fanfare she discovered that it was not her work that would be the center of attention.

It was not just print journalism that began to reveal the kinds of reproduction of Stein’s identity that would result from her position as celebrity author. For example, Stein was quite clearly shaken by her experience in Times Square, when she encountered the electronic moving sign repeating the phrase: ‘Gertrude Stein has arrived’. Still, it must be made clear that it was not the celebrity promotion of her authorial self that made her uncomfortable. As she acknowledges in *Everybody’s Autobiography*, there are many benefits of ‘being a celebrity and all the privileges of being that thing’.³⁰ She does not mind being recognized by strangers on the street, even when they have not read her work. She relates the man selling fruit in a store who knows her name and says: ‘How do you do Miss Stein [...] He was so natural about knowing my name that it was not surprising and yet we had not expected anything like that to happen.’ But recognition is only half of celebrity for Stein, as she goes on to say: ‘And then we saw an electric sign moving around a building and it said Gertrude Stein has come and that was upsetting. [...] Of course it happened to me pretty often [seeing her own name unexpectedly] and I like it to happen just as often but always it does give me a little shock of recognition and nonrecognition.’³¹ Recognition is a natural product of her self-promotional efforts in *The Autobiography*, but the unnatural reproduction of her name in electric lights, repeated endlessly in a parody of Steinese, leads to shock. Despite the fact that this shock too relates to her self-promotion and celebrity persona, Stein experiences it as ‘nonrecognition’, mainly because it is coldly detached from the direct, human interaction (‘How do you do Miss Stein’) that she desires. Stein the private person looks upon the public authorial name in lights and for a moment

does not recognize it herself, such is the power of celebrity reproduction to alienate the writer from the effects of their own imprimatur.

In his essay on the loss of aura in the age of mechanical reproduction, Benjamin writes of ‘the desire of contemporary masses to bring things “closer” spatially and humanly, which is just as ardent as their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction’.³² Stein’s experience of Times Square is an instance of the reproduction, not of the work of art, but of the artist herself, where the name Gertrude Stein signifies more than the private person, more than the authorial text, and reaches into the mass-produced signification of a public persona, constructed and owned not by the individual but by those who desire to get ‘closer’ to the celebrity author. Of course, Benjamin writes mainly about the work of art, but that his essay extends to the celebrity persona is clear from his discussion of film actors. In particular, Benjamin discusses the alienation effect of the film actor in front of the camera in terms that reflect Stein’s experience in front of her own name reproduced in lights. Benjamin characterizes the actor in terms of an ‘estrangement felt before one’s own image in the mirror’. Once captured on film, his or her ‘reflected image has become separable, transportable. And where is it transported? Before the public’.³³ Indeed, it is the public reproduction of Stein’s celebrity name and authorial image that most disrupts Stein’s expectations for her promotional tour, because her imprimatur is entirely removed from the textual page and reproduced electronically as a brand label and a sign of her public personality. Her image has become separated from her work, just as *Everybody’s Autobiography* claims she had predicted, transported by the electric sign before the public but rendered via this mediation into a persona alienated from herself.

Besides newspaper articles and electronic signs, there were other media that made Stein feel uncomfortable during her tour of the United States. Early on her tour she was asked to

perform radio and other media engagements, but since she was the subject of these live broadcasts, she could not encounter her own persona objectively through its reproduction. However, recorded film – the newsreel – was another matter. As she relates in *Everybody's Autobiography*:

When we first arrived in New York I did make an actuality of reading the Pigeons On The Grass and taking off my glasses and putting them on again while I was doing that thing, and it was given in the cinema theatres everywhere and everybody said everybody liked it but we had not gone. So finally Pathé asked us [when at Warner Brothers in California] when they heard we had not gone to come and see it all alone. We went to their place and there it was and when I saw myself almost as large and moving around and talking I did not like it particularly the talking, it gave me a very funny feeling and I did not like that funny feeling.³⁴

Stein appears to offer no regret for making the film, and she is happy when others enjoy the 'actuality' of her reading the famous, baffling lines from the opera *Four Saints in Three Acts* (as well as offering her own cryptic explanation, according to reports).³⁵ Yet once she is witness to her own mass-reproduced self, 'large and moving around and talking', she feels estranged from her own public image, just as Benjamin described the effect of film on the actor two years earlier. The two Steins, the writer and private person in the audience and the celebrity author mass reproduced through the newsreel, come together in a way unsettling to Stein, as the writer shrinks into the darkness of the theatre and the mass-reproduced personality brings the work

before a public far removed from the author's original mode of production. Even as the voice remains hers, it loses its aura through reproduction.

It is in this way that Stein felt she had 'lost her personality' just as it grew increasingly visible to the public. The aura of her literary production was first undermined by journalistic proliferation and parody, then erased by the mass reproduction of her celebrity personality. As Benjamin remarks about the personality culture surrounding the film actor: 'The film responds to the shrivelling of the aura with an artificial build-up of the "personality" outside the studio. The cult of the movie star [...] preserves not the unique aura of the person but the "spell of the personality," the phony spell of a commodity.'³⁶ Stein's celebrity was pleasurable to her when it meant increased attention from individuals, but disturbing when it transformed her into a mass-reproduced object before a public, at least when extended to the point where interest in her work was diminished and 'the spell of the personality' took over everything. As she would write in *Everybody's Autobiography*: 'You are of course never yourself.'³⁷ But despite the anxieties it caused her, Stein's celebrity led, both directly and indirectly, to some of her most fascinating writing about identity and the public/private self. Being a public figure is not always a burden, as she claims in *Everybody's Autobiography*: 'Everybody continued to know me and that continued to be a pleasure.'³⁸ In fact, as she goes on to say, her celebrity image led to an encounter with a stranger, Donald Vestal, stopping her on Michigan Avenue in Chicago. When she asked him about his 'satchel of a funny shape', he showed her his marionettes, then later writing to ask her for a 'marionette play' for his puppet theatre project funded by the Works Progress Administration (WPA).³⁹ Stein offered him 'Identity, or I am I because my little dog knows me', a spare, repetitive treatise on identity and recognition. As well as the 'characters' required by Stein's script, Vestal added two further marionette figures, one named 'Gertrude Stein, a

playwright' and the other 'Gertrude Stein herself'. <FIGURE 6.3.> Once more Stein finds herself in duplicate, reproduced this time in the art of modernist puppetry – designed by WPA puppeteers, hand-carved from wood, works of art decidedly not mechanically reproduced – to enact her own play, a text in the style of her more obscure utterances, twice performed in Detroit. Stein would later remember that Vestal 'sent me photos of it and they are rather touching, there are two Gertrude Steins and they are rather touching'.⁴⁰ In this case, she was neither entirely disturbed by her celebrity nor by her reproduction, as they were connected to her private self and her textual body in some fashion. But when her personality was detached from her work or from her person via mechanical reproduction or mass media representation, however, she felt estranged from herself and bound by an audience to the public image of her celebrity. One of Stein's most-quoted lines, first heard in 'And Now', but repeated in *Everybody's Autobiography* and giving her marionette play its subtitle, is that 'I am I because my little dog knows me'.⁴¹ Yet as *Identity: A Play* makes clear via the duplication of Stein puppets, identity can be reproduced in so many different manners that even a dog cannot be trusted to reaffirm one's sense of self. For, as Stein says in that play: 'I am I has really nothing to do with the little dog knowing me, he is my audience, but an audience never does prove to you that you are you.'⁴²

Conclusion: Stein's afterlives

Even if an audience was incapable of proving her identity to her, Stein became the kind of public figure whose identity was regularly reproduced before mass audiences, as we have seen, both during her life and after. Stein chose only one reproduction of herself to closely relate to her identity, her portrait painted by Pablo Picasso in 1906. She would say of this painting, only eight years before her death: 'I was and I still am satisfied with my portrait, for me, it is I, and it is the

only reproduction of me which is always I, for me.’⁴³ Stein, in her self-construction via *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, naturally makes this portrait central to the ongoing narrative of Stein and Picasso’s intimacy, but one of the earliest mentions of this portrait in the memoirs relates to the perception that the portrait does *not* accurately capture her identity – at least not at that time. Alice, having shared with Picasso that she liked the portrait, records his reply: ‘Yes, he said, everybody says that she does not look like it but that does not make any difference, she will, he said.’⁴⁴ This is a remarkable prophecy, for, of course, Picasso’s portrait would circulate as one of the most common public images of Stein leading up to her *Autobiography*, to the point where this single work of art was likely more widely known than the individual who sat for it, as Noel Sloboda has observed.⁴⁵ Picasso’s reproduction of his friend, painted before either have become celebrities, endures long after both are dead as a key illustration of Stein’s involvement in the early developments of modern art.

During her lifetime, Stein’s image was also captured by other painters, including Francis Picabia and Félix Vallotton, by the sculptor Jo Davidson and by Man Ray’s photography, all works of art that continue to represent Stein’s involvement in the Paris cultural sphere. In fact, one of the most intriguing representations of the endless reproduction of Stein’s image is the Man Ray photograph of Jo Davidson working on his famous sculpture of Stein, with the celebrity author herself observing from behind him, assuming the same squatting position as the stone object before her – a photograph apparently taken, according to Wanda Corn and Tirza True Latimer, while Man Ray was on assignment from *Vanity Fair*.⁴⁶ Stein’s death, however, hardly brought an end to her artistic reproduction. Corn and Latimer’s major exhibition ‘Seeing Gertrude Stein’ revealed the extent to which other artists continued to reproduce her celebrity

image long after her literary production had ceased. As Latimer suggests in a section of their book entitled 'Legacies':

Today, Stein's collaborators include global art stars, cultural critics, feminists, performing artists, and queers whose interventions have expanded her artistic authority. Many consider themselves Stein's progeny. They have interpreted, appropriated, cited, parodied, emulated, critiqued, and revitalized Stein's oeuvre and rehabilitated her persona.⁴⁷

Yet the nature of her rehabilitation is a significant question. Stein never fully faded from public attention and the value of her *literary* production is rarely the subject of these posthumous 'collaborations', as Corn and Latimer see them. Instead, we find Stein's celebrity image repeatedly reproduced in many works of art, from further caricatures and humorous sketches by David Levine (1966), Red Grooms (1975), Tom Hachtman (1979-84) and Edward Sorel (1988) to reproductions of Picasso's iconic image of her – the one which, he predicted, would one day represent her – reused in works of art by Robert Rauschenberg (1969), Deborah Kass (1991), Faith Ringgold (1991) and Devorah Sperber (2006).⁴⁸ The most famous reproduction of Stein's personal image in contemporary art is Andy Warhol's *Gertrude Stein* from 1980, using screen-printing techniques to reproduce a public image of her via her French identity card, as Edward Powers has shown.⁴⁹ While her celebrity value is regularly engaged by these posthumous works, there is hardly a rehabilitation of her individuality, her personality or her textual body.

Similar reproductions exist in popular film, including Woody Allen's 2011 romantic comedy, *Midnight in Paris*. Gertrude Stein, played by Kathy Bates, figures prominently as a

main character, center of the Parisian circle of artists and writers that time-travelling Gil Pender encounters at midnight while on holiday in that city. While various historical figures make cameo appearances, including Picasso, Djuna Barnes, Man Ray, Josephine Baker and a rhinoceros-obsessed Salvador Dali, Stein's character serves to carry forward the plot, obligingly reading multiple copies of Pender's novel and offering encouragement and managing to progress a number of scenes. Sadly, a casual viewer of *Midnight in Paris* would have little sense that she was herself a writer with a singular style. The character of Ernest Hemingway, who provides a role of comparable size to Stein's in the film, is allowed more than one moment of stylistic, literary expression, impressing the lines spoken by his character with his trademark imprimatur – and offering, at times, a recognizable pastiche of the Hemingway style. Yet Bates's Stein hardly conveys any particular style or aesthetic influence, offering none of the famous lines of Steinese that had originally made her famous, so that her celebrity imprimatur in the film is limited to personality merely. Consequently, she serves as little more than a symbol of 1920s expatriate life and salon art.

It appears this was Stein's fate after *The Autobiography*, when she had first packaged and produced herself as celebrity author. After this point, her mass-market image became increasingly linked to her celebrity personality rather than to reproductions of her trademark prose – to encounters with Picasso, to driving her Ford, sitting in a birdbath or wearing a basket on her head, as she is reproduced in both Roy Nelson's caricature and Sylvia Beach's memoirs. Stein the literary artist – the reason she had become a celebrity in the first place – had, and in some respects still has, disappeared behind the image she produced of herself, ultimately suffering an estrangement from her own persona as she watched it reproduced many times across a range of media.⁵⁰

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Figure captions

Figure 6.1. Cartoon by Irma Selz, 'Literary Possibilities No. 4: Gertrude Stein interviews herself about *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*', *New York Post* (September 14, 1933, Beinecke YCAL MSS76). Reproduced with permission of Beinecke.

Figure 6.2. Cartoon by Roy C. Nelson, 'At the Shrine of Stein', *Chicago Daily News* (September 20, 1933, Beinecke YCAL MSS76). Reproduced with permission of Beinecke.

Figure 6.2. Two Gertrude Steins in Donald B. Vestal's performance of *Identity: A Play*.

Photograph from the Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas Papers, Beinecke YCAL, Box 130,

Folder 2824. Courtesy of the Estaty of Gertrude Stein. Reproduced with permission of Beinecke.

Notes

¹ Cerf 1977, p.102; Stein 1974, p.63.

² Stein 1993a, p. 211.

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- ³ Boyd & Kirsch 2014.
- ⁴ Dyer 1986, pp. 1-2.
- ⁵ Marshall 1997, p. 57.
- ⁶ Jaffe 2005; Goldman 2011; Hammill 2007; Rosenquist 2013.
- ⁷ Foucault 1998; Stein 1993, p. 591.
- ⁸ Jaffe 2005, p. 94.
- ⁹ Jaffe 2005, p. 3.
- ¹⁰ ‘New York Letter’, a clipping from an unrecorded publication found in Beinecke’s Yale Collection of American Literature (YCAL), quoted in Tischler 2003, p. 16.
- ¹¹ Diepeveen 2008, p.199. On ‘Books and News’, see also Leick 2009, pp. 9-16.
- ¹² Stein 1993a, p. 292.
- ¹³ Leick 2009, p. 8.
- ¹⁴ Stein 2001, p. 262.
- ¹⁵ Van Gogh 1933.
- ¹⁶ Harcourt 1933.
- ¹⁷ Benjamin 1999, p. 214.
- ¹⁸ Diepeveen 2013.
- ¹⁹ Benjamin 1999, p. 215.
- ²⁰ Huyssen, *After the Great Divide* (1986) quoted by Perloff 2005, p. 1.
- ²¹ Bridgman 1970, pp. 209-217.
- ²² Rossetter 1933.
- ²³ Stein 2001, p. 272.
- ²⁴ Dydo 2003, p. 537.

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- ²⁵ Daniel 2009, p. 156. The actual quote is ‘I lost my personality’ in Stein 1934 (1974 reprint, p. 63).
- ²⁶ Daniel 2009, p. 156.
- ²⁷ North 1933.
- ²⁸ Stein 1993a, p. 51.
- ²⁹ Stein 1993a, p. 173.
- ³⁰ Stein 1993a, p. 172.
- ³¹ Stein 1993a, p. 180.
- ³² Benjamin 1999, pp. 216-17.
- ³³ Benjamin 1999, p. 224.
- ³⁴ Stein 1993a, p. 288.
- ³⁵ Leick 2009, pp. 166-168.
- ³⁶ Benjamin 1999, p. 224.
- ³⁷ Stein 1993a, p. 70.
- ³⁸ Stein 1993a, p. 209.
- ³⁹ See Bell 2006 for full details.
- ⁴⁰ Stein 1993a, p. 211.
- ⁴¹ Stein 1974, p. 63.
- ⁴² Stein 1993b, p. 593.
- ⁴³ Stein 1938, p. 8.
- ⁴⁴ Stein 2001, p. 16.
- ⁴⁵ Sloboda 2008, pp. 21-22.
- ⁴⁶ Corn & Latimer 2011, p. 45.

⁴⁷ Corn & Latimer 2011, p. 275. The exhibition at the Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco (2011) and the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institute, Washington DC (2011-12) provided an impressive range of images from Stein's life and into the present, still accessible at <http://www.npg.si.edu/exhibit/stein>.

⁴⁸ All these works are reproduced in Corn & Latimer's final section, 'Legacies' (2011, pp. 274-333), an invaluable resource for surveying Stein's afterlife.

⁴⁹ Powers 2014.

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