Box of Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas personal effects, Carlton Lake Collection, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin. Photograph courtesy of the Harry Ransom Center.

Personal Effects: The Material Archive of Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas's Domestic Life

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The photograph on the left shows a box of personal effects that once belonged in the household of Alice B. Toklas and Gertrude Stein and are now housed in the Harry Ransom Center (HRC) at the University of Texas at Austin. Its publication in No More Potlucks constitutes a form of exhibition, and this accompanying essay could be considered a form of extended caption. My desire to write about the box of objects stems from my ongoing interest in the queer "archive of feelings," but it also represents a bit of departure from my usual research habits and my previous attitude towards archives. When I wrote An Archive of Feelings, I was quite critical of institutional research archives such as the HRC because I felt that queer life lay elsewhere – in the stuff that would never be considered important enough to be collected by official institutions or in ephemeral experiences and feelings that couldn't be captured in an archive. But, inspired by artists who have been making creative use of the archives, I've been reconsidering my suspicion of conventional archives and returning to them myself in order to consider the value of elite and high literary archives for histories of queer intimacy and their everyday dimensions.

It's been easy enough to make this move since the Harry Ransom Center (HRC), which is right in my own backyard at the University of Texas, is a treasure trove for archives of high modernism, including ones that are lesbian and queer. I've gone there not so much in search of literary manuscripts and editions, a typical goal of archival research in such collections, but for traces of the cosmopolitan lifestyle that is their material foundation. The HRC's collections include Radclyffe Hall's scrapbook of clippings about the censorship of The Well of Loneliness, Sylvia Beach's subscription list forUlysses and photos of her and Adrienne Monnier with their dogs and in their kitchen, and a file of Alice B. Toklas's recipes, some of them written in her own hand, for items such as white cake.

Ever since my HRC archivist friend Gabby Redwine first showed them to me because they happened to be sitting in her office, I have been particularly obsessed by five boxes containing the personal effects of Alice B. Toklas and Gertrude Stein, which are part of the HRC's impressive Carlton Lake collection of French modern literary materials. The boxes include a handkerchief delicately monogrammed with a "G," a hand towel decorated with a poodle appliqué, and stationery imprinted with a rose circled by the text "A Rose is a Rose is a Rose." Indeed, this "logo" appears to have been quite popular throughout the Stein-Toklas household; it also appears on a wax seal, a set of cocktail napkins, and as part of a wallpaper design, as though Stein's experiments in repetition were a brilliant slogan for merchandising experimental modernism. The pièce de résistance is a literal "tender button," a miniature cream silk pillow, nestled in a bed of green velvet, with the "Rose is a Rose" logo delicately stitched on it. Placed in beautifully crafted archival boxes and swaddled in pale tissue paper, these objects make it hard not to indulge in archival fetishism. (One box, for example, contains just a hat and a lampshade, whose coordinating textures and shades of brown and beige constitute a form of surrealist collage, as much a manifestation of modernism as Stein's written texts.)

My fascination with this archive of material objects and the feelings they evoke stems in part from a developing interest in Gertrude Stein's life in Paris – her queer relationship with Alice B. Toklas, her love for her poodle Basket, her status

as a secular Jew and American expatriate, her role as an art patron, and especially through her famous salons, her extensive social network with artists of all kinds, including the celebrated male geniuses Picasso and Hemingway, the many gay men with whom she collaborated, and her more distant relations with the lesbian bohemian circles around Natalie Barney. Although lesbian life in Paris has been a staple for many queer scholars, as well as a source of enduring fandom and fixation for amateur historians of queer culture – especially given the lure of the City of Lights both then and now – I have been a somewhat resistant latecomer to this world. The lesbians of the Left Bank often seemed too rich and privileged to be my gender and sexual role models. But, I ultimately found my way to them through Monique Truong's historical novel The Book of Salt, whose point of departure is the brief account of Indochinese cooks in Alice B. Toklas's famous cookbook. Truong's rendering of the Stein-Toklas household through the perspective of an immigrant laborer who is himself queer offers a critical, although still loving, take on the eccentric American ladies, who are depicted as exoticizing the life of the man whose domestic labor supports their salon culture but also as largely oblivious to him. I like Truong's transnational and queer version of Paris (as well as David Eng's reading of it), which places its monied American expatriate artists in a context that includes colonial histories, racialized migration and labor, and multiple modernities.

Over time I have also been seduced into the Stein-Toklas archives by the ingenuity of queer scholars using them to excavate Gertrude and Alice's relationship and their extensive social networks. My friend Kay Turner's Baby Precious Always Shines, a collection of Toklas and Stein's love notes from Yale's Beinecke Library, makes a tour de force use of the archive to reconstruct their domestic life, and Esther Newton's essay on her quest for a girlfriend like Alice makes a compelling case for butch-femme coupling as the ideal foundation for a creative life. Laying to rest any doubts about its putative imitation of heterosexual roles, Turner and Newton offer novel takes on what was distinctively queer about the Stein-Toklas "marriage." José Muñoz testifies across race, class, and gender lines to a love for Gertrude as his "sapphic modernist hero," and Heather Love describes the appeal of the "fancy" lesbians who served as a point of identification for her own upwardly mobile educational

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trajectory. In a revelatory trip to Gayle Rubin's personal archive (orchestrated by Love), I was amazed to see her collection of Ladies Almanack first editions and to learn that in her early 20s, she too had followed the tracks of Natalie Barney to Paris to study in the archives of the Bibliothèque Nationale. This illustrious fan base (and debates about which salon is the most lesbian friendly) has encouraged me to drop my grumpy ressentiment. In recent years, I have also had the good fortune to spend some extended periods in Paris and have thus belatedly made pilgrimages to the sites that so many have visited over the years – the original location of Sylvia Beach and Adrienne Monnier's Shakespeare and Company on rue de l'Odéon, Natalie Barney's home on rue Jacob, and, of course, Gertrude and Alice's salon at 27 rue de Fleurus (as well as their graves at Père Lachaise). Although I remain convinced that the point of following in search of lost salons is to make one's own, there is still work to be done in excavating the queer modernities embedded in the ephemeral everyday lives and social networks of the famous and elite in Paris.

What does an archive of objects add to the legacy of Stein and Toklas, which is already so richly available both in written and visual archives and on the streets of Paris? I was delighted to see my dream of exhibiting the material archive realized in the "Seeing Gertrude Stein" exhibition, curated by Wanda Corn and Tirza True Latimer at San Francisco's Contemporary Jewish Museum (and also exhibited at the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery in Washington, DC). The visual archive of Stein's life not only reveals the domestic and social networks that accompany her legacy of written texts, but renders her more fully queer. Through photographs and paintings, Basket (and her successors) receive their due, including their own chapter in the catalogue's section on Stein at home. A vest from the HRC's collection was on display with a series of other garments as part of a discussion of how Gertrude and Alice transformed the conventions of female dress and how Stein established her own inimitable form of butch androgynous couture style to become a celebrity icon both then and now. Latimer and Corn show how Stein's creative output consists not just in her writing and other art productions but in her appearance, her friendship networks, and her domestic life with Alice. The exhibition makes imaginative use of photographs and other visual documents, along with the material artifacts that

conjure these ephemeral forms of creativity. (The minor objects and images of "Seeing Gertrude Stein" make for a telling comparison with the cultural cachet of the paintings by Matisse, Picasso, and other famous artists on display at the same time in San Francisco as part of "The Steins Collect," an exhibition that also aimed to recreate the Stein family's Paris salons.)

This is the kind of scholarship and exhibition that new archival work is making possible, guided by a sensibility that transforms the queer remnants of social worlds and publics into the object of archiving, exhibition, and history. Marked by the convergence of the affective turn and the archival turn, this strategy is also reflected in a range of very exuberant and utopian scholarly projects focused on the everyday life of queer affiliations and networks, especially those that link art, creativity, and cultural politics. In All We Know, Lisa Cohen compiles a collective biography of three minor figures – Esther Murphy, Mercedes de Acosta, and Madge Garland – through a creative approach to both archival research and writerly style that offers a queer modernism encompassing fashion, fandom, and failure. The Last Nude, Ellis Avery's historical novel about the painter Tamara de Lempicka and her imagined lesbian affair with the woman who posed for her paintings, presents a revisionist queer history of Paris in the 1920s. Like Paris in the 1920s, New York in the 1960s is a focal point for explorations of how bohemian art cultures have fostered queer ways of living in scholarship by José Muñoz and Ann Reynolds, among others, on the queer circles around Andy Warhol, but also those around supposedly more minor figures such as Jack Smith and Ray Johnson. A taste for queer collectivity also guides Lisa Moore's study of the eighteenth-century sister arts of poetry, visual art, and landscape gardening, which provides an earlier history of how friendships and salons enabled creativity in multiple genres and media. The archives used to reconstruct these histories are often unorthodox, including gossip, hunches, and fantasy, as well as queer readings of more traditional archival artifacts. And the minor figures being constructed as part of these histories, such as the collage artist Mary Delany, the British Vogue editor Madge Garland, or quirky correspondence artist Ray Johnson, were not only part of friendship networks whose reconstruction offers new understandings of the relation between art and politics, but were themselves

archivists, antiquarians, and collectors of various kinds, whose creative work itself gives rise to new theories of the archive.

I love to imagine that domestic objects, such as Gertrude and Alice's napkins, hand towels, and wallpaper, could lend themselves to histories of the intimate lives of lesbians, both famous and not so famous, including demystifications of the domestic such as in The Book of Salt's focus on racialized labor. These objects offer testimony to social relations – the cocktail napkins and hand towels for entertaining guests, the wax seals and engraved stationery that enhance correspondence, the décor of the room that provides space for the salon. Moreover, it's the box itself as much as the objects in it that fascinates me, the care with which potentially minor objects are preserved and framed as important. The charm of the archival object resides not only in its material and indexical relation to the social but also in its muteness, which merely hints at the stories it might tell. Even if we are allowed to touch the tender button, the miniaturized fetish whose text is barely visible, we are connected to a magic that cannot fully be named.

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