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WAYS OF NOT READING GERTRUDE STEIN

BY NATALIA CECIRE

To my wife, who typed three chaotic drafts of manuscript and offered endless advice on a subject for which she had no especial relish, the book is dedicated.

—Colin Manlove, *Modern Fantasy: Five Studies*

To my wife, who typed the proofs and kept the children quiet, this book is affectionately dedicated.

—Francis L. Coleman, *The Northern Rhodesia Copperbelt, 1899-1962*

And again, my wife, who typed every character and every correction of every copy from the first to the last page.

—John M. Holmes, *Thomas Jefferson Treats Himself: Herbs, Physicke, & Nutrition in Early America*¹

Distant reading is women's work, and Gertrude Stein shows us why. If distant reading is—avowedly—a compromised form of reading, then what does it mean to distant read Stein's *The Making of Americans* (1925), a work that is already reputed to be "unreadable," as Tanya Clement does in a 2008 essay?² Such a move could be viewed as the simple application of technology to another difficult problem, another tough nut cracked by Progress. I would argue, however, that when we situate Clement's approach within the history of ways of not reading Gertrude Stein—a history of media, women's labor, and the status of literature—something much broader emerges: how, counterintuitively, not reading Stein's texts can tell us something about them, and can tell us something about reading, too.

Let us begin, then, with one version of distant reading. In his 2009 essay "Style, Inc.," Franco Moretti asks, "How can a couple of words stand in for hundreds of pages?"³ To formulate an answer, he analyzes

the titles of seven thousand British novels from between 1740 and 1850 as part of a sociologically inflected literary-historical project that he calls “distant reading.”⁴ “Half sign, half ad,” Moretti writes, “the title is where the novel as language meets the novel as commodity.”⁵ When Moretti proposes to look at titles, he does so in order to solve a problem of unreadability: one cannot possibly meaningfully read the seven thousand British novels that he believes warrant our consideration when studying the history of the novel.⁶ This is a problem of scale: unable to read the texts, we opt to read and analyze something shorter instead.

But metonymic phrases can circulate around texts in other ways as well. Consider, for instance, “pigeons on the grass alas,” “there’s no there there,” or “rose is a rose is a rose is a rose.”⁷ Such phrases have long served as signifiers of Stein’s whole oeuvre, often deracinated from their specific sources. Rather than indicating a plot, setting, or genre, as Moretti’s titles do, phrases like “rose is a rose is a rose is a rose” represent a recognizable Steinian *style* that was both utterly distinctive and endlessly imitable and imitated—the style that has been so widely identified (judged, deprecated, defended, celebrated) as “unreadable.”⁸ Stein’s is a different kind of unreadability: although she was indeed terribly prolific, it is not scale but rather something about her style that is an impediment to reading; not the how much but simply the how.

Yet Stein’s unreadability has something to teach us about the unreadability of Moretti’s corpus, too, for beneath the problem of scale lurks a problem of style. Part of the reason these seven thousand British novels cannot be read is that the vast majority of them have not been canonized, which is in the aggregate, if not in every particular case, a matter of style: avowedly or not, hardly anyone now actually *wants* to read these books, much less seven thousand of them—they’re too generic; too, perhaps, boring. Indeed, it is the premise that these novels are generic and stylistically unremarkable that lends Moretti’s claims their weight: he argues that a trend toward short, abstract titles like *Patience* and *Moderation* constituted a “perceptual shift” that “made readers look for a unity in the narrative structure” of novels. “And mediocre conservative writers,” Moretti concludes, “did more to make it happen than anyone else.”⁹ As his title, “Style, Inc.,” suggests, scale itself is revealed as generative of style. The historical upshot thus extracted, the procedure of attentively not reading these novels makes a persuasive case for continuing not to read them.¹⁰

Not reading is of course the only logical way to handle something unreadable, which is why Moretti has elsewhere enjoined critics to “learn how *not* to read.”¹¹ Yet the problem of Steinian style discloses a reciprocal problem of scale, insofar as the hallmark of Stein’s stylistic unreadability—repetition—mimics the repetitive quality of reading stylistically unremarkable books in quantity. In both cases, the question of whether reading would be “worth it” is up for debate, revealing that the status of not reading depends crucially on a question that is always pressing for literary critics: whether and under what circumstances reading counts as work.¹²

The last few years have seen increased critical interest in nonreading and compromised forms of reading, including a notion of “surface reading” inspired in part by Moretti’s research.¹³ Concomitantly, conceptual writers such as Kenneth Goldsmith, Vanessa Place, and Rob Fitterman have achieved prominence with a plagiarism-oriented “uncreative writing” that “negates the need for reading in the traditional textual sense.”¹⁴ Not-reading seems to be very much of the moment. Yet the very possibility of Moretti not reading those seven thousand British novels but having something useful to say about them all the same is predicated on the work of a historical moment—roughly, Stein’s moment—in which the possibility of machinic, outsourced, or otherwise cognitively displaced reading was a site of intense investigation in industry, the arts, and media. Thus, while work by Moretti and others has recently used machines to challenge the status of reading in literary criticism, Stein has been challenging the status of reading for a hundred years.¹⁵

The relationship between not reading and the unreadable, then, is not simply a matter of logic (unreadable texts should be not-read), but rather embedded in an early twentieth-century history of compromised reading, whether performed by machines or by women. That history, moreover, everywhere marks the reception of Stein’s writing precisely on the grounds of her unreadable style. Stein’s repetitive, “unreadable” style, I wish to argue, points up a history of female labor that not only evokes but literally made possible the machine-aided nonreading practices of recent decades. Clement’s 2008 distant reading of *The Making of Americans* uses algorithmic methods explicitly modeled on Moretti’s—methods notionally developed to address a problem of scale—in order to address Stein’s different, stylistic unreadability, what Clement glosses as the widespread critical sense that Stein’s “constant repetition represents a style of writing that is chaotic, unsystematic, and virtually impossible to read” (“T,” 362). In effecting this redirection

toward stylistic unreadability, Clement's distant reading reveals the reciprocal relationship between scale and style in which both Stein's reception and distant reading are implicated. Consequently, rather than merely applying an autonomous method to yet another corpus, Clement encounters Stein's writing on its own terms and brings those terms to bear on contemporary distant reading. And in order to understand the significance of Clement's intervention, we must first examine the historical terms of Stein's unreadability.

I. "STEINESE"

Edmund Wilson, in his influential 1931 monograph *Axel's Castle*, became one of the earliest and most prominent critics to declare Stein "unreadable," principally on the basis of her use of repetition. "I confess that I have not read [*The Making of Americans*] all the way through," he writes, "and I do not know whether it is possible to do so."¹⁶ Stein's unreadable style has been taken as evidence of her genius and of fraud in equal measure. Indeed, it has been praised as innovative and condemned as nonsense on exactly the same formal grounds: a simple vocabulary, the elevation of sound-sense above semantic sense, and above all, repetition. As Jennifer Ashton has noted, "[w]hen juxtaposed with the more recent celebratory accounts . . . the early, dismissive accounts of Stein become especially useful as markers in an extended critical tradition, if only because they are so consistent with their later counterparts in the stylistic features they single out as evidence of Stein's fundamental unintelligibility."¹⁷ In the 1935 Fred Astaire film *Top Hat*, for example, Stein serves as a humorous pop culture reference when an Italian dressmaker, Beddini (Erik Rhodes), reads Ginger Rogers's character, Dale, a hard-to-read message in the form of a telegram: "Come ahead stop stop being a sap stop you can even bring Alberto stop my husband is stopping at your hotel stop when do you start stop." Poor Beddini confesses, "I cannot understand who wrote this," and Dale returns, "Sounds like Gertrude Stein."¹⁸

To "sound like Gertrude Stein" is, as the joke in *Top Hat* suggests, to be self-evidently impossible to parse. Yet the conditions of that self-evidence are important. As I will suggest below, it is no accident that what makes Dale's telegram sound like Gertrude Stein is the repetition of the word "stop," which indicates that the telegram *is* a telegram, composed expressly to be mediated by unseen telegraph workers, likely women.¹⁹ The joke in *Top Hat* turns on the alleged ease of confusing Stein's style with the unwilling repetitions produced by telegraphy.

The joke from *Top Hat* also demonstrates another important condition of Stein's unreadability: that it is best illustrated through metonymic samples of Stein's writing, especially the phrase that Stein would embrace as an official signifier of her style: "rose is a rose is a rose is a rose." The popular circulation of this phrase in lieu of sustained readings of Stein's texts is one form of nonreading (you read it in lieu of reading whole works by Stein), anticipating the more sophisticated meta-analysis that Moretti will later perform on the titles of British novels. Stein has always been not-read. More importantly, perhaps, Stein's embrace of this circulation reveals her stylistic disposition toward compromised reading practices: Stein has also always been not-readable. This unreadability, then, is not so much an absence as an active feature of Stein's writing and reception. Moreover, that unreadability has a history that will bear on how we understand Clement's distant reading of *The Making of Americans*. The repetition and circulation of "rose is a rose is a rose is a rose" continually reenacts a concern with compromised linguistic practices that its source, the 1922 poem "Sacred Emily," locates in a form of work whose status as work is compromised in advance: the work of wives.²⁰

Before elaborating on its connection to the work of wives, I wish to specify what I see as the most important ways that that repetition and circulation operated. During Stein's lifetime and since, "rose is a rose is a rose is a rose" has functioned powerfully as a self-sufficient signifier of both Stein's writing in general and her unreadable style in particular; one 1935 article even tautologically names Stein's style "her 'a rose is a rose is a rose' style."²¹ Indeed, the phrase was used almost talismanically to counter any suggestion that Stein might be readable after all. The *Time* magazine book review "Stein's Way," a review of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, for example, confesses that "*The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* is a perfectly comprehensible, eminently readable memoir"—but only after rehearsing at length Stein's reputation for stylistic opacity.²² Indeed, the review suggests, we might never believe that the readable *Autobiography* was written by the unreadable Stein were it not for "the circular motto on the book's cover—a signature . . . peculiar to Gertrude Stein."²³ The review then reproduces the circular "rose is a rose is a rose" motto that elsewhere decorated Stein's dishware, various gifts, and an Ascher scarf designed by Sir Francis Rose.²⁴ Although the style of the memoir's text is uncommonly accessible, and although the metonym for that text that Moretti might examine (the title) may mislead readers into supposing that its author is Alice, the circular motto lets us know that there is

something fundamental about the *Autobiography* that still makes it what contemporaries, playing on the alienness then associated with Chinese languages, called “Steinese,” and that Stein is really unreadable no matter what evidence the *Autobiography* might provide to the contrary.²⁵ The phrase “rose is a rose is a rose,” really a logo here, rehabilitates the readable *Autobiography* and brings it under the sign of Stein’s unreadable style.

The proliferation of “rose is a rose is a rose is a rose,” then, simultaneously signifies Stein’s unreadability and instantiates the practice of not-reading her texts. Indeed, one of the Bancroft Library’s first-edition copies of the volume in which it first appeared, *Geography and Plays*, now widely available through the nonprofit Internet Archive, bears a handwritten mark next to “Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose,” as if to suggest that the main reason to read the poem “Sacred Emily” might be to look at the famous line.²⁶ Yet the poem seems to anticipate this reading (or rather, *nonreading*), I would suggest.

“Sacred Emily” opens thus:

Compose compose beds.
 Wives of great men rest tranquil.
 Come go stay philip philip.
 Egg be takers.
 Parts of place nuts.
 Suppose twenty for cent.
 It is rose in hen.
 Come one day.
 A firm terrible a firm terrible hindering, a firm hindering
 have a ray nor pin nor.
 Egg in place.
 Egg in few insists.
 In set a place.
 I am not missing.
 Who is a permit.
 I love honor and obey I do love honor and obey I do.
 Melancholy do lip sing.
 How old is he.
 Murmur pet murmur pet murmur.
 Push sea push sea push sea push sea push sea push sea
 push sea push sea.
 Sweet and good and kind to all.²⁷

This opening reveals that “Sacred Emily” is a poem of *oikonomia*, one interested in particular in the household management undertaken by the “wives of great men.”²⁸ It is, in other words, about a particular kind

of work, the repetitive work in the home that is often construed as non-work. The poem begins with an imperative to “compose,” a “Sing, muse!” that is quickly deflated into the making of beds (“Compose compose beds”) and then into a busy, interwoven tapestry of household noises, of eggs and place settings, of the saying of marriage vows and the minding of children. Repeatedly recurring to the idea of placement—“Come go stay”; “Egg in place”; “In set a place”—household management is indeed revealed as continually requiring acts of composition, casting irony on the second line’s assertion that “Wives of great men rest tranquil.” Such wives are constantly composing the materials and people around them, and in so doing compose poems like “Sacred Emily”; thus the opening imperative to compose poetry is fulfilled in the course of composing beds, place settings, and the like. Does this make the wife of a great man great herself? This is unclear: around the middle of the poem, Stein writes, “So great so great Emily. / Sew grate sew grate Emily.”²⁹ Homophony turns praise of Emily’s greatness into an incantation of repetitive household drudgery, the repeated motions of sewing alternating with the repeated motions of grating and the /o/ and /e/ sounds relentlessly oscillating, both—after the homophonous “so great” line—sounding as if they have been going on a long time. Hints of wifely greatness dissolve in repetitive housework. The wives of great men thus compose, but are also themselves composed by, the poems—like “Sacred Emily”—that literally circumscribe their worlds.³⁰

The theme of the wives of great men is one that Stein would take up again in the book that secured her celebrity and came sealed with the circular “rose is a rose is a rose” motto, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. Stein uses her life partner’s voice as a medium for composing the memoir, and while it is quite clearly Stein’s memoir—that of a self-proclaimed “genius”—the book’s title and running conceit centralize Alice, the *wife* of the “great man,” as the one deserving of an autobiography. The Alice character in the *Autobiography* self-consciously posits the memoir as a substitute for the book she always thought she would write—one about the wives of geniuses she has known, at once holding out the possibility of wife-as-author and marking her own status as the wife of a genius:

Before I decided to write this book my twenty-five years with Gertrude Stein, I had often said that I would write, The wives of geniuses I have sat with. I have sat with so many. I have sat with wives who were not wives, of geniuses who were real geniuses. I have sat with real wives of geniuses who were not real geniuses. I have sat with wives of geniuses, of near geniuses, of would be geniuses, in short I have sat very often and very long with many wives and wives of many geniuses. (A, 671)

The Alice of the *Autobiography* extends the premise of a book about her own wifehood (“my twenty-five years with Gertrude Stein”) and proposes it as a substitute for another book about wives of great men, “The wives of geniuses I have sat with.” Since she will in a moment start discussing Fernande, the on-and-off partner of official genius Pablo Picasso, the Alice character in effect proposes “the wives of geniuses” as a reading of the *Autobiography*.³¹ Just as Stein’s life and work are offered through the medium of Alice’s voice, many of the stories about the visitors at 27, rue de Fleurus will be mediated through stories about their partners. The founding conceit that the *Autobiography* is Alice’s is more than a funny trick (although it is that too): the wife is a medium, but a necessary medium. Indeed, in combinatorially pairing different degrees of wifehood with different degrees of genius, the voice of the Alice composed by Stein is revealed as very much a medium: it is one of the many moments where the *Autobiography* is marked by Stein’s distinctively repeating, permuting “‘a rose is a rose is a rose’ style.” In the *Autobiography*, as in “Sacred Emily,” authorial voice is always somehow traceable back to the “genius” of Stein’s celebrity persona. Yet that style, I wish to suggest, itself formalizes (or, perhaps, appropriates) the wifely labor of “Sacred Emily,” insofar as it invites its own reception as compromised and “unreadable.” Stein thus makes literary composition functionally indistinguishable from *oikonomia*.

II. STEIN’S CORPUS

Stein’s appropriation of a wife’s voice is of course as problematic as it is provocative: the very act of pointing to Alice stylistically points right back to Gertrude. Yet we should also take seriously the ways in which Alice’s disappearance is thematized, for the very propensity of wifely labor to disappear or be credited to someone else, I would argue, is the basis of Stein’s stylistic unreadability. *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* insists on Alice’s role as a medium and a facilitator, present but always receding. Thus the first edition self-consciously plays on the author’s identity, with the Harcourt Brace dust jacket proclaiming that “Since the first announcement of the forthcoming publication of this book, innumerable questions have been asked about Alice B. Toklas. Who is this author? What is this extraordinary book that she has written? Does she really exist?”³² Moreover, correspondence between Stein’s agent William Bradley and the *Atlantic* editor Ellery Sedgwick further reveals that Stein at first desired to publish excerpts of the *Autobiography* in *The Atlantic Monthly* unsigned, as if by Alice. Over

a series of telegrams and letters, Sedgwick firmly denied the request on the grounds that it would render the material “*unintelligible* to our readers. Imperative that we use name.”³³ “Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose,” which the *Time* review identifies as the mark of Stein’s authorship, thus renders the *Autobiography* intelligible by tethering it to Stein’s by-definition-unintelligible style. Or, to put it another way, the project of the *Autobiography* is only intelligible through an ostentatious substitution of Stein’s voice for the fictive Alice’s. Stein’s unreadability lies in the disappearing act of wifely labor, in the slippage between “so great” and “sew grate.” As I will argue in the next section, this is, too, the disappearing act that underwrites distant reading.

One of the most fundamental bases of Stein’s unreadability, then, is corporeal. Stein’s texts invoke female labor—forms of labor that are *a priori* understood to be bodily and compromised, and which cannot be seen or read. In doing so, those texts invite their own identification with bodies, which must be approached in ways other than reading: testing, sampling, diagnosis. As we have seen, for example, the style of “Sacred Emily” is paratactic and repetitive, drawing on a domestic, largely monosyllabic and bisyllabic lexicon. Familiar phrases are evoked sonically without being named outright, like the “if you insist” suggested by “in few insists,” the “eggbeaters” suggested by “egg be takers,” or the “placemats” suggested by “place nuts.” With its repetition, its logic of sonic resemblance, and its difficulty supplied by syntactic rather than lexical cues, it is fairly typical of the unreadable style associated with Stein and emblemized by its famous excerpt, “Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose.”

Wilson would describe this style as Stein’s “soporific rigmaroles, her echolaliac incantations, her half-witted-sounding catalogues of numbers.”³⁴ It is, of course, no accident that Wilson’s description is pathologizing: “soporific,” “echolaliac,” “half-witted.” Reading Stein is represented as a physical impossibility, such that Wilson must substitute diagnosis as a strategy of engagement. Indeed, the diagnostic gesture of selecting arbitrary samples of Stein’s style, much as I did with the passage from “Sacred Emily” above, and as has been done even more widely with the line “Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose,” is typical of a reception history that has always understood Stein’s writing as an emanation of her body.³⁵ Wilson is explicit in describing Stein’s unreadability in terms of bodiliness; he continues, as if by way of concession:

Yet, remembering especially her early work, we are still aware of her presence in the background of contemporary literature—and we

picture her as the great pyramidal Buddha of Jo Davidson's statue of her, eternally and placidly ruminating the gradual developments of the processes of being, registering the vibrations of a psychological country like some august human seismograph whose charts we haven't the training to read.³⁶

As Wilson frames it, the reading of Stein (for which we "haven't the training" in any case) is substitutable by the image of her body—a fat body, Wilson unsubtly points out—whose very thought processes are interpreted as "rumination"—literally a form of digestion. Nor is Wilson alone in this interpretation; indeed, there is a small but choice class of medical articles on Stein's writing, the most famous being the behaviorist B. F. Skinner's *Atlantic* article "Has Gertrude Stein a Secret?," to which I will return below. In the *British Medical Journal*, W. Langdon Brown, Regius Professor of Physic at Cambridge University, singled Stein out as a "notorious" practitioner of what he calls "the 'cocky-locky, henny-penny' style of writing," writing that, he argues, is obviously "fishe[d] up from the unconscious," a production of the body unshaped by intellect.³⁷ And a 1934 editorial in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (*JAMA*) went so far as to diagnose Stein with "palilalia," "a form of speech disorder in which the patient repeats many times a word, a phrase or a sentence which he has just spoken."³⁸

Such accounts approach the problem of Stein's unreadability by imagining a scene of writing whose pathology explains the output. While the medical literature is often openly hostile to Stein's claims as an artist (Skinner is, interestingly, an exception), the projection of an imaginary scene of writing is a strategy that has been undertaken even by notionally sympathetic projects, such as Janet Malcolm's 2007 double biography of Stein and Toklas. In it, Malcolm avers in an oddly disapproving tone that Stein's "literary enterprise was itself almost entirely work-free. . . . Stein didn't even type her work; she just oozed into her notebooks and Toklas did the rest."³⁹ Here, typing is set up as kind of marginal or minimal labor, but Stein's writing, as Malcolm describes it, is not "even" that; it's something closer to excretion. The pathological scene of writing is bodily but not medicalized; instead, Stein's corporeal "ooz[ing]" is a failure to *work*. As Catharine Stimpson argued in an important intervention, to designate a work "unreadable" is often to strangely implicate the work with the author's body. "Inevitably," Stimpson writes, "detractors of Stein's body conflate her mind and body. They then disdain and fear her work. They seek to neutralize the threat that her potent combination of nature and culture

offers: the body that she lived in; the family religion she more or less abandoned; the writing she never abandoned.”⁴⁰ As Stimpson argues, Stein’s body—fat, female, lesbian, and Jewish—is conventionally seen as the source of her (unreadable, not worth reading) writing.

For Stimpson writing in the 1980s, this bears on Stein’s canonicity; in that moment of feminist recovery, Stein’s writing was perhaps at risk of becoming like Moretti’s seven thousand British novels: unreadable, unread. This was an important project in part because the recovery of female writing as writing was a critical and political counterpart to the recovery of female labor as labor, as in Arlie Russell Hochschild’s pointedly titled 1989 sociological study *The Second Shift*. Women in the workforce, Hochschild documented, continued to perform most domestic labor in addition to their paid labor outside the home, thus taking on a “second shift” of unshared and unpaid work in the home.⁴¹ As the Wages for Housework movement of the 1970s stipulated, “the difference with housework [as opposed to waged work] lies in the fact that not only has it been imposed on women, but it has been transformed into a natural attribute of our female physique and personality, an internal need, an aspiration, supposedly coming from the depth of our female character.”⁴² The feminist project of literary recovery, of which the Stein boom of the 1980s was a part, is also a project of remuneration, of giving “value” back to the female labor that has been unfairly considered not-valuable.⁴³ Just as female labor, especially when repetitive, domestic, or reproductive, was prone to being naturalized and thereby rendered invisible, female writing was prone to being described as a mere emanation of the body and erased from the literary canon.⁴⁴ To be sure, Stein’s own purposes are unknown and must especially be distinguished from uses to which her literary persona and texts have been marshaled, both by the feminist recovery projects of the 1980s and by me. Stein was famously uninterested in political feminism, and her writing, in important contrast to much 1980s criticism, seems less interested in “recovery” than in the moment of effacement.⁴⁵ Yet her texts consistently engaged the deeply gendered question of whose reading and writing counts as real work, which, as I will argue below, always powerfully informs the history of digital reading.

Since that critical moment, and thanks to scholars like Stimpson, Stein seems in no danger of falling into obscurity, and it therefore seems less important to defend against the disdain and fear that Stimpson is so concerned to isolate. Yet even as dismissal and mockery have given way to valorization and canonical security, at least in academic discourse, a

trope of unreadability rooted in bodiliness has remained and, I would argue, reaches its logical conclusion in Clement's very sympathetic 2008 distant reading. In particular, the unreadability trope conventionally projects out from Stein's texts imagined scenes of reading (undertaken by an inevitably baffled and often physically stricken reader) and writing (undertaken by a fictive Stein). Stein's "unreadability" is typically understood as a formal property of her texts, detectable solely through the experience of an imagined reader, and signifying the scene of writing imagined to be its cause. Or rather, unreadability is not so much a particular formal property as a style, what Wilson specifies are "sentences so regularly rhythmical, so needlessly prolix, so many times repeated and ending so often in present participles." By this description, "Steinese" is a consistent quality that can be sampled arbitrarily (any given chunk of it will do to make the point) and that always produces the same result—in Wilson's estimation, that "the reader is all too soon in a state . . . simply to fall asleep."⁴⁶ As Clement summarizes with respect to *The Making of Americans*, "critics agree that the reader's usual processes of making meaning through narrative are rendered useless."⁴⁷ "The reader" invoked here is of course a hypothetical or fictive one, but one who keeps reappearing and sits at the center of numerous critical accounts of Stein's writing. Susan McCabe notes how Stein's repetition "calls for supreme attention by the reader"; Priscilla Wald writes that "nearly one thousand pages of unremitting wordplay [in *The Making of Americans*] leave most readers longing for a story."⁴⁸ Meanwhile, Richard Bridgman sympathetically opens his important 1970 monograph on Stein with another fictive account of reading: "Reading Gertrude Stein at length is not unlike making one's way through an interminable and badly printed game book."⁴⁹ It is as if Stein's texts compel the ghostly projection of bodies engaged in frustrated or failed acts of reading and writing. In Bob Perelman's words, there are moments when Stein's words are "something *Stein* is telling *me*: there is no literary distance involved."⁵⁰ Text nearly evaporates in the presence of a conjured Stein and her conjured readers.⁵¹

With so many imaginary bodies at play in imaginary scenes of reading and writing, the readings that sample Stein's language as if it were a homogeneous substance, too abundant to examine comprehensively but possible to treat metonymically, are deeply textual in comparison. Yet this, too, is a strategy for bypassing the impossible demands of reading Stein; passages are excerpted to show that Stein's writing is *like this*; it is not there to be read but to exemplify. "For those who are unfamiliar with the writing of Miss Stein, we mention the following

examples from the book called “Tender Buttons,” writes the same JAMA editorialist who diagnoses Stein with palilalia.⁵² Similarly, the 1933 *Time* reviewer writes, “If [readers] are sufficiently curious to look up some of her wilder work, this is the *kind of thing* they may find.”⁵³ An arbitrary chunk of Stein’s writing is sufficient to illustrate the “kind of thing” that’s meant, and knowing the “kind of thing” is as good as knowing the thing.⁵⁴ Such treatments establish a tight loop between the unreadable text and the nonreading of that text: the unreadable text precludes reading, while the conventions of nonreading (diagnosis, sampling, viewing) produce the text as unreadable—indeed, as, in a certain sense, not text. Like the body itself, Stein’s writing cannot be read, only sampled, tested, anatomized, and diagnosed—treated quite literally like a corpus.⁵⁵

I am arguing, in other words, that the persistence of this trope in Stein criticism—well into Stein’s canonical security—suggests that unreadability is more just than a sexist excuse to ignore her.⁵⁶ If a fictional confused reader continually reappears in Stein criticism, and if critics constantly invent ways to engage with Stein that circumvent the act of reading, then perhaps such projected scenes of failed reading and writing are genuinely important features of Stein’s texts. I would suggest that Stein courts the charge of unreadability with a form of writing that is, as Malcolm’s disapproving account registers, not work, or that is at least only ambiguously work. Stein’s writing conjures up its own scene of composition as bodily, nonlaborious, naturalized or mechanized, even digestive or excretory—not thereby recuperating such phenomena as “productive,” but rather travestying the very terms of production.

Malcolm’s image of Stein’s wrongly- or under-Taylorized, word-oozing body has its antecedents, of course, in Stein’s own archive, with a specificity that reveals how tightly Stein’s unreadability is tethered to machine-age discourses of automation. In a now much-studied 1896 *Psychological Review* article titled “Normal Motor Automatism,” Stein and her collaborator, William James’s graduate student Leon Solomons, sought to induce automatic writing in what they called “normal subjects,” who were in fact themselves. (That is to say, they were their own experimental subjects.) In contrast with the model of automatic writing associated with surrealism, which attempts to access a psychoanalytic unconscious, Solomons and Stein set out to disprove a reigning theory that the symptoms of hysteria are evidence of what they term a “second personality.” They do this by attempting to show what the body of a “normal” subject can accomplish without the

participation of consciousness.⁵⁷ Automatic behaviors, they argue, are latent in all human bodies, and hysteria, far from being the result of a “second personality” asserting itself, is merely a defect in willpower or “*disease of the attention*”; there is, in other words, only one personality, a conscious personality, but in the case of the hysteric, it is a weak one that fails to control the body’s natural automatic behaviors.⁵⁸ “[M]any of the acts which we usually do quite consciously,” Solomons and Stein assert, “might really be done without consciousness.”⁵⁹

The principal behavior that Solomons and Stein choose as a test case—the behavior that might plausibly be the product of a second personality, that seems to demand conscious participation, and that therefore ought to demolish the theory of second personality if found to be producible “automatically” in normal, non-hysterical subjects—is of course writing. Since Stein is known principally as a writer, accounts of her psychology papers have typically taken this choice of test case (that is, writing) as a matter of course, and indeed the choice goes unremarked and undefended in “Normal Motor Automatism.” But the choice is really rather notable, since it sets writing up as an activity so quintessentially conscious as to stand in for the whole alleged “second personality.”⁶⁰ The consequence of this choice over the course of the study is, of course, to render writing an artifact of the body and, indeed, something sensed by the body before cognized by the mind: in one experiment, “[s]ometimes the writing of the word was completely unconscious, but more often the subject knew what was going on. His knowledge, however, was obtained by sensations *from the arm*. He was conscious that he just *had* written a word, not that he was about to do so.”⁶¹ Solomons and Stein can demolish the “second personality” only by demolishing the assumed causal link between authorial personality and writing. They thus produce a body that is simultaneously automatic and potentially capable of producing art works.

These experiments would become the basis for the most notorious pathologization of Stein’s writing, Skinner’s 1934 *Atlantic Monthly* article “Has Gertrude Stein a Secret?” Skinner argued that Stein’s unreadable writings were produced by the forms of automatism under scrutiny in these experiments, making them (to his mind) essentially nonwriting. In proposing these experiments as the “secret” of Stein’s unreadability, Skinner strips Stein of her role as experimental scientist, and recasts her solely as an experimental subject. (That is to say, the fact that she is formally investigating these phenomena disappears, leaving behind only an experimented-upon automatic writer.)⁶² Skinner thus renders Stein’s body a double disqualification from authorship: first, she

is not really the author of works like *Tender Buttons* and *The Making of Americans* because they are written by her body, and second, Stein is not really the co-author of this study, since it is only relevant as an explanation for her later publications. This would seem to be a clear instance of female intellectual labor being naturalized, located in the body, and rendered as nonwork in just the way that Stimpson points out. For that reason, Skinner's assessment has been much repudiated by Stein's admirers.⁶³ But Stein's own response, given in a letter to Sedgwick, the Atlantic editor, was curiously more ambiguous: "it is not so automatic as he thinks."⁶⁴ As I have argued elsewhere, there are any number of reasons to question the explanatory value of "Normal Motor Automatism" for Stein's later writing, not least of them Stein's own revisionary accounts of the project in *Everybody's Autobiography* and in interviews and letters.⁶⁵ Yet the consonance between Solomons and Stein's word-producing bodies and those continually offered up by critical accounts of Stein's writing—hostile and sympathetic alike—suggest that, whatever the motives behind the searches for explanatory scenes of compromised, overly embodied reading and writing, they are scenes that interested Stein too.

III. THE SECOND SHIFT

Stein thus seems to invite the identification of her writing with a body, and not a laboring body so much as a body functioning automatically—machinically or naturally, but at any rate not consciously. As Solomons wrote of one experiment with Stein, "The first thing to disappear is the feeling of effort. . . . The writing seems perfectly voluntary, but there is no sense of difficulty, of 'something accomplished.'"⁶⁶ Stein's unreadability is thus founded on imagined scenes of reading and composition whose status as work is compromised or denied. And if it is not work, the reasoning goes, then it may not be a linguistic act at all; the mind absent, the body serves as a mere passive conduit for words—a medium or a "Steinese room."⁶⁷

We are by now some way toward understanding how Stein's unreadability anticipates the conditions of distant reading, for this historical, gendered, and ambiguously laboring body has played a crucial role in the history of media and information. "A medium is a medium is a medium," the media theorist Friedrich Kittler quips, playing on Stein's most quoted line in order to insist on the interchangeability of female-operated media technologies and the female mediums of nineteenth-century occultism.⁶⁸ And indeed, the female typewriter, computer,

telephone operator, telegraphist, and programmer that emerged in the early twentieth century are particularly notable for their notional ability to serve as conduits of information without altering it or being themselves altered by it; as Jennifer Fleissner writes of the incessantly typing Mina in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, "This is, then, a different sort of female body: one that can receive marks . . . without being branded for life . . . a body that permits good bourgeois women to safely enter, and to exit, the men's corporate realm."⁶⁹ Female information workers at the turn of the twentieth century enact a reading that is not reading and a writing that is not writing.

The new role of the female information worker rested in part on a long-standing (and still persisting) suspicion that women are bad readers—especially when they are reading voraciously. Feminine-coded and woman-targeted mass market novels simultaneously keep the publishing industry afloat and, in the aggregate, are continually at risk of becoming the equivalent of Moretti's seven thousand noncanonical British novels.⁷⁰ What is interesting about the stereotype is not so much the imputed badness itself or the sexism on which it relies, but rather the form that the badness takes: women read too much; they read things that are not worth reading; they are unseeing and indiscriminate. This stereotype has persisted alongside a wide diversity of real women's reading practices, and in spite of the ways in which so-called women's genres often explicitly lampoon and contest the construction of their readerships as undiscerning and merely escapist.⁷¹ The rapt female reader is thus imagined as an automaton, not so much reading as scanning, taking in words in enormous quantity without the will or critical acuity to "master" them. And in return, the literature destined for her "consumption" is equally automatic in quality: formulaic, repetitive, predictable.⁷² It is as automata that the female writer and female reader alike are imagined as ideally suited for information work.⁷³

It is in this context that Kittler argues that the typewriter "inverts the gender of writing," rendering it feminine.⁷⁴ Famously, female typists took on an occupational title identical to the name of the machine they operated (that is, the typewriter). Christopher Keep has suggested that the typewriter was "domesticate[d]" through comparisons to other, conventionally "feminine" machines like the piano and the sewing machine in advertising and in typewriting manuals.⁷⁵ Such comparisons suggest women's domestically trained suitedness for this labor, projecting domestic forms of labor into the corporate workplace: "the type-writer is especially adapted to feminine fingers," one manual averred; "The type-writing involves no hard labor, and no more skill

than playing the piano.”⁷⁶ This identification with the machine and the denial of her work as “hard labor” renders the typist an apparatus herself, rhythmically and repetitively moving her fingers as she serves as an unmarked conduit for another’s words.

These characterizations are familiar, but they are important for understanding how closely the gendering of early twentieth-century information work maps onto the gendering of reproductive labor of the kind famously described by Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One’s Own*: “all the dinners are cooked; the plates and cups washed; the children sent to school and gone out into the world. Nothing remains of it all. All has vanished.”⁷⁷ Repetition, the form that characterizes Stein’s “unreadability,” describes the motions of the female domestic worker as easily as it describes the Taylorized factory worker—“sew grate sew grate,” as Stein puts it in “Sacred Emily.”⁷⁸ The female information worker is neither, yet kin to both: through its cultural figuration as an extension of the domestic and through its formal qualities as both repetitive and literally reproductive (of another’s words), information work, though often paid, overlapped significantly with unwaged domestic labor, and indeed, for the many wives who typed their husbands’ manuscripts, such work *was* a form of unwaged domestic labor.

I have quoted dedications to a few such wives as epigraphs to this essay, but few dedications to the typing “wives of great men” have subsumed the entire work, as in the case of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. Stein’s memoir is, in a way, *all* dedication to the typing wife, a thorough centralization of the wife of the great man, even as Alice’s ventriloquized voice serves as a medium for narrating Stein’s life and career. The fictionalized Alice, moreover, emerges as a virtuosic reader of Stein’s works precisely through her typing, in a passage that Clement adopts as the epigraph for her first distant reading article: “I always say that you cannot tell what a picture really is or what an object really is until you dust it every day and you cannot tell what a book is until you type it or proofread it. It then does something to you that only reading can never do” (A, 776; “T,” 361). The compromised information work of typing and proofreading take on a status that exceeds “only reading.” Moreover, Stein explicitly identifies the unremunerated information work of typing and proofreading with the mundane domestic labor of dusting, the repetitive, tactile task of fending off a layer of grime that will always return tomorrow, no matter how thoroughly one cleans today. Stein thus characterizes the ideal nonreading of typing and proofreading as, like “Sacred Emily,” a matter of *oikonomia*, and “[t]he wives of great men rest tranquil”

by definition, even as they “compose.” In the case of the real Toklas, whose second shift included typing most of Stein’s writings, including *The Making of Americans*, that composition was quite material—and, Stein suggests, better than reading. Stein’s ideal reader, it would seem, is something very like a machine.

It is with this history in mind, I would suggest, that we should understand Clement’s distant reading of *The Making of Americans*, first published in *Literary and Linguistic Computing* in 2008 and reframed for a less technical audience in *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* in 2012. There, Clement uses algorithmic methods to detect, map, and visualize repetitions with variations in *The Making of Americans*, deliberately literalizing the machinic (non)reading that Stein everywhere provokes, and placing the nonreading of Stein in direct contact with Moretti’s inquiries into methods for engaging unreadable corpora. Clement borrows the term “distant reading” from Moretti, citing his injunction to “learn how *not* to read” texts (“T,” 361). The baffled reader of world literature for whom Moretti’s distant reading methods are a solution is implicitly kin to the baffled reader of Stein, and of the insistent repetitions of her long opus *The Making of Americans* in particular. “[I]s the confusion the repetition engenders a byproduct of reading meant to deconstruct processes of identity construction by making meaning through methods that ultimately elude meaning-making?” Clement asks.⁷⁹ “Or, alternatively, is the confusion the repetition engenders the result of a *misreading* and simply a byproduct of our inability to read the text?” (“T,” 361-62).

The importance of Clement’s contribution, I would argue, lies in its challenge to reading, a challenge that has special significance in the context of Stein’s reception. Importantly, Clement never disputes that Stein’s repetitive style engenders confusion or that “we” (the hypothetical reader again) are ill-equipped to read it. Reading Stein at all, Clement proposes, is “*misreading*,” even if, or perhaps because, that confusion is as tightly determined by the texts as critical tradition has suggested. Yet Clement also proposes a corrective for the reading-that-is-always-misreading, a machine reader—a nonreader—that is not confused. “I will use a critical reading with digital methodologies,” she writes in the 2012 essay, “to show how Stein combines narrative (story and plot) from the first half of the text with nonnarrative elements (such as accumulated, repetitive grammatical structures) in the second half of the text to create a mimetic experience of history in the making.”⁸⁰ Crucially, given that it can only be accessed via “digital

methodologies,” this is a “mimetic experience of history” that no one is having. Or rather, it is an experience that no *human* reader is having.

It would not be accurate, of course, to suppose that the Clement’s method consists simply of feeding a text into a machine; human analysis is crucial to the process. It is not so much that nothing is being read by a human as that *The Making of Americans* must first be translated, via frequent pattern analysis algorithms and co-occurrence visualizations, into several data sets that are themselves readable by humans in a way that the novel is not. Clement reconstitutes a problem of style—the repetition that characterizes Stein’s “‘a rose is a rose is a rose’ style”—as a problem of scale, to which counting and graphing are a good solution. Thus the nonreading that Clement performs here is a translation or remediation that “does something that only reading can never do.”

“It was over a thousand pages long and I was typewriting it,” the fictionalized Alice says of *The Making of Americans*, thus emerging once again as Stein’s best nonreader (A, 776). And indeed, the *Autobiography* stages the legible copying of images and texts as recurring work crises; thus, after Stein’s *Three Lives* is completed, the problem emerges: “And then it had to be typewritten” (A, 712). Where composition itself seems to present no particular challenge, typing is something that Stein simply cannot do: “Gertrude Stein tried to copy *Three Lives* on the typewriter but it was no use, it made her nervous, so Etta Cone came to the rescue” (A, 713). The scene of delegated labor mirrors a story of childhood authorship that is narrated soon after, about a school assignment for which the young Gertrude writes a description of a sunset: “[I]t was one of the half dozen in the school chosen to be copied out on beautiful parchment paper. After she had tried to copy it twice and the writing became worse and worse she was reduced to letting some one else copy it for her” (A, 736–37). Though in each case she “trie[s],” the Gertrude Stein of the *Autobiography* is unable to copy—or rather, unable to copy legibly. “[H]er handwriting has always been illegible,” the fictional Alice writes, “and I am very often able to read it when she is not” (A, 737). What comes out of Stein is literally unreadable, that is, illegible, until transmuted by her typists. Touching, dusting, merely (so to speak) processing, allowing the text to pass through the fingertips: these modes brook no bewilderment, and are not the scene of “*misreading*” that Clement’s work seeks to correct—rather, they are the scene that the distant reading restages.

Clement’s distant reading thus meets Stein’s particular, historical unreadability on its own ground, in part, I would suggest, because computational methods and contemporary information work came from

that ground. As is now fairly common knowledge, the first “computers” were young women who performed computations for engineering and research, and early programming—physical programming, which was effected by the resetting of switches and wired circuits—was conventionally done by women, only becoming a masculinized profession after automatic programming was introduced.⁸¹ Computing was, in other words, a specialized subset of the early twentieth century’s landscape of information work, the technoculture that eventually makes it possible to do a literally machinic reading of *The Making of Americans*. But as Wendy Hui Kyong Chun has observed, there is a deep ambivalence in this gendered history. To delegate programming the computer to women was to delegate responsibility and knowledge as well as to delegate what was often very tedious and repetitive labor.⁸² Early, physical programming could well be seen as drudgery much like housework; indeed, the first “bug” in computer code was famously a moth that disrupted the physical functioning of the machine, so that “debugging” was literally cleaning. Thus the development of so-called automatic programming or “pseudocode”—what we now simply call “programming”—empowers the programmer to imagine her or his word as logos, something like a form of authorship that, in speaking, makes things happen. But as Chun emphasizes, programming can only function as logos at the price of knowledge of the physical operations that underlie it.⁸³ The merely repetitive labor of physical programming is made into a black box; we ask the computer to do laborious cognitive tasks on our behalf, and this is both empowering and disempowering, sacrificing one form of knowledge in the service of another.

These gestures parallel the models of not reading that continually crop up in Stein’s reception: Stein’s typing-as-reading and the outsourcing of reading to various people’s wives re-enacts the black-boxing of routine and repeated processes common to the information work that was conventionally gendered feminine during the machine age. And there is certainly something routine about the reading of Stein’s repetitive texts; in some passages it is efficient to look not for repeated words but for new ones, the difference that makes a difference; this is what makes Stein’s writing so amenable to sampling and diagnosis. In computing, as Chun notes, “there is no difference between access to and understanding of the record, between what would be called, perhaps symptomatically, ‘machine reading’ and human reading and comprehension. . . . The difficulty supposedly lies in selecting the data, not in reading it, for it is assumed that reading is a trivial act, a simple comprehension of the record’s content.”⁸⁴ In the world of the

machine, seeing is reading. Considered in this light, Clement's distant reading reveals how *The Making of Americans* operates as the kind of text for which such a radical model of reading could be apt.

IV. NONREADING AND UNWAGED WORK

What kind of work is reading? And what kind of work is reading Stein? I have so far outlined a variety of ways that Stein's texts have been reconstituted as scenes of reading and composition described in the terms of feminine-gendered, compromised work or nonwork: the scene of "automatic writing," the diagnoses of mental or physical pathology, the bafflement of imagined readers, and the necessity of an algorithm that can read on critics' behalf. Proxy bodies that are *all body*, their cognitive processes shut down or nonexistent in the first place, are continually conjured as shields against the text—interpretive lenses that are completely opaque, functioning by obviating the possibility of interpretation altogether.⁸⁵ This reception has one further feature that I wish to unfold, namely a moralization of work and, in particular, a recurring language of fraud or economic unfairness—the accusations, in short, that Stein, and anyone taking her writing seriously, is a charlatan, perpetrating what the *JAMA* editorialist calls a "hoax."⁸⁶ "[I]s she 'kidding' her readers or is her stuff just 'nerfs'?"⁸⁷

The compromised status of Stein's and readers' labor undergirds the accusation of charlatanism; thus Bridgman fends off the threat of Skinner's diagnosis of "automatic writing" by pointing to Stein's "arduous" development as a writer, an insistence that she was working hard after all.⁸⁸ And the alternate explanation of Stein's unreadability holds that she is not impossible to read, but rather "difficult." One must be willing to put in the work.⁸⁹ "Clearly, reading *The Making of Americans* is difficult work," Clement writes ("T," 362). But does that work "pay off"? Not really, Clement's project suggests—not so well, in any case, that we aren't better served by automating it. The history of not reading Stein is a history of recognizing the potential unfavorability of the economic exchange on offer, your time and attention for Stein's writing, all guarantees withheld. We know in advance that the reading will be repetitive, lengthy, and thin on narrative progression, much like housework and potentially as unrewarded—so great so great, sew grate sew grate. What is so unsettling is how resolutely Stein seems to resist defending her writerly legitimacy in the terms of deliberate, waged or wage-eligible work. Even the alternative to the charge of automatic writing that she offers remains in the register of the mechanical: "if anything it is xtra consciousness"—as if cranking up a dial.⁹⁰

More recently, Helga Lénárt-Cheng has argued that repetition in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* serves as a manipulative advertising ploy, “a powerful means to influence the audience’s opinion about [Stein] herself.”⁹¹ Lénárt-Cheng’s reproach is implicit but clear: repetition’s subtle persuasiveness renders the audience unable to evaluate Stein’s oeuvre accurately—an audience imagined as susceptible, subliminally worked upon by repetition and thus *practiced upon* (that is, deceived). “Conscious of the powerful influence of repetition,” Lénárt-Cheng writes, “Stein actually carried out her own self-promoting advertising campaign under the guise of character development.”⁹² Though I do not share Lénárt-Cheng’s indignation, I believe that she has a point when she flags the congruences between the repetitions of Stein’s continuous present and the repetitions of advertising—between antiwork and work that might be construed as quite venal, even economically fraudulent. As Sara Blair has elaborated with respect to the salon at 27, rue de Fleurus, avant-garde formations are coextensive with and at times productive of commercialized domestic spaces, participating in a “cultural work” that continually challenges the distinction between “domestic” and “public” arenas.⁹³

Blair’s thesis is borne out in the way that “rose is a rose is a rose is a rose” serves as the metonymic sign of Stein’s unreadability, its logo-like function remaking readable prose (the *Autobiography*, or Stein’s 1939 children’s book *The World Is Round*) over as unreadable poetry.⁹⁴ Stein famously explained after one of her Chicago lectures: “Now listen! I’m no fool. I know that in daily life we don’t go around saying ‘. . . is a . . . is a . . . is a . . .’ Yes, I’m no fool; but I think that in that line the rose is red for the first time in English poetry for a hundred years.”⁹⁵ We can certainly read Stein’s signature phrase as avant-gardist defamiliarization of the word “rose.” Yet its relentless propagation also reinforces the suspicion that careful reading might not be “worth it”:

Speaking of the device of rose is a rose is a rose is a rose, it was I who found it in one of Gertrude Stein’s manuscripts and insisted upon putting it as a device on the letter paper, on the table linen and anywhere that she would permit that I would put it. I am very pleased with myself for having done so. (A, 798-99)

The *Autobiography*’s Alice cites “one of Gertrude Stein’s manuscripts” as if ostentatiously uninterested in understanding its source, “Sacred Emily,” as an integral work; selecting this piece of handwritten text, she not only transcribes it once but, like a photocopier run amok, causes it

to be reproduced all over the household furnishings. Stein represents a wife's bad reading, the reproduction of text, and good housekeeping as conspiring to produce the virulently propagating commercial success that is her own perpetually suspect persona. "Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose" is avant-garde *and* kitsch—that's the worry.⁹⁶

Stein's poetics engages the public and the market, then, by centralizing feminized, typically unwaged labor, especially repetitive labor including housework and information work. This is a poetics effected not only in the texts "themselves" but also in the scenes of compromised reading and writing that they continually propose, and in the propagation of phrases like "rose is a rose is a rose is a rose" and "pigeons on the grass alas" that stand in for such scenes of compromised reading and writing—that is, for Stein's unreadability—as much as they stand in for any other aspect of the texts. The suspicion of fraudulence or theft has something to do with the impression of remunerating (with cultural prestige, with attention) the by-definition wage-ineligible labor of a wife—and more than that, the labor of the wife of a great man, where the great man is a woman. Will Fisher has argued that counterfeiting and economic fraud have long been closely associated with sexual queerness, as in the term "queer money" for counterfeit currency; since the early modern period, he writes, "unnatural sexualities and unnatural economics were coded through each other."⁹⁷ Putting Alice in plain sight and making her labors the explicit medium of Stein's unreadability foregrounds the unease with which we credit certain kinds of work. "Has Gertrude Stein a secret? The answer is of course 'yes' and by the way, it's not about sex," Mark Goble writes, except that Stein's past as a research subject (for it is in that capacity, not as a researcher, that Skinner describes her) is a past of inhabiting the wifely, repetitive role of the information worker, and is in that sense exactly about sex—and gender too.⁹⁸

The perpetual question of whether it "pays" to read Stein's unreadable writing anticipates contemporary disciplinary questions about whether "distant readings" like Moretti's or Clement's constitute "worthwhile" scholarship.⁹⁹ In a response to Moretti's "Style, Inc.," for instance, Katie Trumpener suggests that there are alternative responses to the problem of scale posed by Moretti's seven thousand British novels. "[T]here is obviously a labor-intensive way to find answers," Trumpener writes, "by . . . reading individual manuscript drafts in rare book libraries . . . Such investigation would involve real footwork—and probably more commitment to specific novels than Moretti would want to make."¹⁰⁰ In his own response, Moretti

points to the model of labor imagined here. After quoting Trumpener, he adds, “*Real* work, not like databases.”¹⁰¹ If a little unfair about the specifics, Moretti is perceptive about the stakes: Trumpener suggests that analyzing a database of titles instead of reading books erroneously reinterprets of the problem of *too many books* as a problem of *too much work*—or rather, and more insidiously, a problem of too much of the wrong kind of work. In other words, while not reading is the only possible response to what is unreadable, designating a corpus “unreadable” always amounts to a judgment about the kind of labor that would go into reading it: a suggestion that that reading would be drudgery, a kind of worthless work, unrewarding or unremunerable or both. Is the only alternative to a canonical literary history of “so great so great” a literary history of “sew grate sew grate”?

Stein’s unreadability discloses that the relationship between scale and style—between quantity and quality—is always a negotiation of value, one that continues to play out in the nonreading of distant reading. Stein aggressively, self-aggrandizingly insists on her own importance while refusing to affirm that her writing is “work” in the sense of being “wage-eligible,” instead continually aligning her writing with housework and with information work and (maddeningly, to many contemporaries) meeting with her greatest commercial success by posing as a typist’s amanuensis, effecting an authorial chiasmus and masquerading as her own lesbian wife.¹⁰² Stein’s unreadability, then, is always ready to risk (and receive) the charges of “fraud” or “hoax”; it insists on the value of repetitive labors without presupposing that that value must come on capital’s gendered terms (as wage-eligible “hard work”). Not reading Stein, as Clement does, is a historical act, one that responds to the compromised status of reading itself. “Why don’t you write the way you talk?” a reporter once asked Stein, to which she replied, “Why don’t you read the way I write?”¹⁰³

Why not, indeed?

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NOTES

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¹These arbitrarily selected examples of male authors thanking their wives for typing their manuscripts were obtained using the Google Books Ngram Viewer, via the Corpus of Historical American English interface available at <http://corpus.byu.edu/coha/>. My thanks are due to the machines that read these books on my behalf, and to the (notionally) unreading humans who scanned them in.

²Tanya E. Clement, “‘A Thing Not Beginning and Not Ending’: Using Digital Tools to Distant-read Gertrude Stein’s *The Making of Americans*,” *Lit Linguist Computing*

23.3 (2008): 361–81. All references to this text are hereafter cited parenthetically by page number and abbreviated “T.” Clement followed this analysis with a 2012 article aimed at a less technical audience. See Clement, “The Story of *one*: Narrative and Composition in Gertrude Stein’s *The Making of Americans*,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 54 (2012): 426–48.

³ Franco Moretti, “Style, Inc. Reflections on Seven Thousand Titles (British Novels, 1740–1850),” *Critical Inquiry* 36 (2009): 145.

⁴ Moretti, “Conjectures on World Literature,” *New Left Review* 1 (2000): 56. Ten of Moretti’s essays on distant reading, including “Conjectures” and “Style, Inc.,” have recently been collected in the volume *Distant Reading* (London: Verso, 2013).

⁵ Moretti, “Style, Inc.,” 135.

⁶ I use “unreadability” in this essay in contrast with the visual problem of “illegibility,” on which see Craig Douglas Dworkin, *Reading the Illegible* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 2003).

⁷ Gertrude Stein, “Four Saints in Three Acts,” in *Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein*, ed. Carl Van Vechten, Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 533; Stein, *Everybody’s Autobiography* (New York: Random House, 1937); Stein, *Geography and Plays* (Boston: The Four Seas Company, 1922), 187. “Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose,” originally from the poem “Sacred Emily” in Stein’s 1922 book *Geography and Plays*, is frequently quoted even by Stein herself with little regard for detail. It seems to matter neither on which word the repetitions begin nor how many repetitions are cited, although it is usually at least three.

⁸ “To begin with a commonplace,” Catharine R. Stimpson writes, “Gertrude Stein’s texts have exemplified ‘difficult’ and ‘unreadable’ writing in English for the twentieth century” (“Review: Positioning Stein,” *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 27 [1994]: 318). On imitations and parodies of Stein’s style, see especially Alyson Tischler, “A Rose Is a Pose: Steinian Modernism and Mass Culture,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 26.3 (2003): 12–27.

⁹ Moretti, “Style, Inc.,” 151.

¹⁰ Promotional online material for Moretti’s *Distant Reading* literalized the simultaneous celebration of and determination not to read these seven thousand British novels: quoting Moretti’s claim for the importance of “mediocre and conservative writers,” the press’s blogger writes, “Though Verso currently has no plans to publish the works of mediocre conservative writers, it turns out that they have accomplished something remarkable—at least from a very distant perspective” (Jennifer Pan, “The Methodology of Moretti: Graphs from an Iconoclast Literary Scholar,” *Verso Books*, 1 March 2013, <http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/1248>). Ironically, then, while works by mediocre conservative writers should not be read, the existence of the new Verso collection suggests that Moretti’s previously published essays about not reading them should be read twice.

¹¹ Moretti, “Conjectures on World Literature,” 57.

¹² The academic’s eternal lament is that she no longer has time to read, reading seeming inefficient and less productive than writing. See, for example, John Corner, “A Very Peculiar Practice,” *Times Higher Education* (11 June 2009), <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/features/a-very-peculiar-practice/406902.article>.

¹³ The volume that touched off the debate around “surface reading” is a special issue of *Representations* on “The Way We Read Now,” and especially the guest editors’ introduction. See Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, “Surface Reading: An Introduction,” *Representations* 108 (2009): 1–21. Best and Marcus cite in particular “the recent turn

toward computers, databases, and other forms of machine intelligence across a range of fields and practices, from book history to distant reading" (17), "distant reading" being Moretti's term. A notable response is Ellen Rooney, "Live Free or Describe: The Reading Effect and the Persistence of Form," *differences* 21.3 (2010): 112–39. On 11 March 2013 a "Surface Reading" symposium held at New York University explicitly engaged "digital humanities" by pairing a panel in which Best, Marcus, and Heather Love theorized surface reading with a panel on various forms of digital or digitized reading, with talks by Mara Mills, Bill Blake, and Rita Raley. For another notable recent contribution, see Matthew Lee Jockers, *Macroanalysis: Digital Methods and Literary History* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2013).

¹⁴ Vanessa Place and Robert Fitterman, *Notes on Conceptualisms* (Brooklyn: Ugly Duckling Presse, 2009), 27.

¹⁵ Computational approaches to literary criticism have a long history in concordances, indices, and the like; in recent decades, however, such approaches have encountered mainstream theorization and—with Moretti's Stanford Literary Laboratory, numerous digital humanities centers and initiatives around the country, and recent hiring trends—institutionalization. On the "digital humanities moment," see Matthew K. Gold, "The Digital Humanities Moment," in *Debates in the Digital Humanities* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2012).

¹⁶ Edmund Wilson, *Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), 239.

¹⁷ Jennifer Ashton, "Gertrude Stein for Anyone," *ELH* 64 (1997): 331n35. A revised version of this essay appears in Jennifer Ashton, *From Modernism to Postmodernism: American Poetry and Theory in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2008), 30–66.

¹⁸ "All Business with Beddini," *Top Hat*, directed by Mark Sandrich (1935; Hollywood: Paramount), DVD.

¹⁹ See also Mark Goble's related account of female telephone operators in Stein in *Beautiful Circuits: Modernism and the Mediated Life* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2010).

²⁰ I wish to point out in passing the foreignness that was often attributed to Stein's style. Stein herself recounts how the Grafton Press, publishers of her 1909 *Three Lives*, sent an emissary to ascertain whether she was indeed fluent in English—a worry that Stein turns back into a question of style, assuring the visitor that "everything that is written in the manuscript is written with the intention of its being so written" (*The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, in *Writings 1903-1932: Q.E.D., Three Lives, Portraits and Other Short Works, The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, ed. Catharine R. Stimpson and Harriet Chessman [New York: Library of America, 1998]: 727; hereafter abbreviated A and cited parenthetically by page number). Much later, in an important 1983 monograph on Stein, Marianne DeKoven would call it "a different language" (Marianne DeKoven, *A Different Language: Gertrude Stein's Experimental Writing* [Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1983]).

²¹ Jane Stafford, "Gertrude Stein Explained," *The Science News-Letter* 27.725 (1935): 134.

²² "Stein's Way," *Time* 22.11 (11 September 1933): 57.

²³ "Stein's Way," 57. The circular motto appears on the covers of both (Bodley Head and Harcourt Brace) first editions, as well as on the dust jacket of the Bodley Head edition. It also appears on the cover of Stein's 1939 children's book *The World Is Round*. See Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, 1st ed. (New York: Harcourt,

Brace, 1933); *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1933); and *The World Is Round*, ill. Clement Hurd, 1st ed. (New York: William R. Scott, 1939).

²⁴ Francis Rose, *Gertrude Stein*, ca. 1946, Ascher scarf, silk twill, Beinecke Library YCAL MSS 77, Box 35, Folder 570, Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas collection, 1901-87. This is available for online viewing through the Beinecke Digital Collection, <http://brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/Record/3567470>.

²⁵ The name “Steinese” suggested that Stein’s style was unreadable because it was perhaps simply not English. The association of Chinese languages and cultures with a constitutive alienness, particularly in this period, is widely documented. In particular, the Chinese Exclusion Act was in effect 1882-1943, dates roughly coincident with the modernist period and closely included by Stein’s lifetime (1874-1946). See, for example, Ronald T. Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (New York: Penguin, 1990). Eric Hayot offers a telling archival anecdote of nonreading from 1935: a doctor, disclaiming knowledge of an unpaid bill from a Chinese-owned pharmacy, writes jokingly to his colleague, “How would you expect me to interpret a Chinese manuscript? I thought it was a new form of art after the fashion of Gertrude Stein’s poetry” (*The Hypothetical Mandarin: Sympathy, Modernity, and Chinese Pain* [Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009], 173). Despite the existence of other “difficult” Anglophone writers of the moment who engaged Chinese culture directly (notably Ezra Pound), “Gertrude Stein” stands in for all of modernism’s alterity. The term “Steinese” continues to circulate, apparently uncritically, as in Adam Gopnik, “Understanding Steinese: Gertrude Stein’s Blunt, Beautiful Peculiarities,” *The New Yorker Blogs* 24 June 2013, <http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/books/2013/06/gertrude-stein-style-understanding-steinese.html>.

²⁶ Stein, *Geography and Plays*, 187.

²⁷ Stein, “Sacred Emily,” in *Writings, 1902-1932*, 387.

²⁸ On the relationship between *oikonomia* and twentieth-century economics, see Angela Mitropoulos, *Contract and Contagion: From Biopolitics to Oikonomia* (New York: Minor Compositions, 2012), 56-59, 148-52.

²⁹ Stein, *Geography and Plays*, 182.

³⁰ What is obscured by this discourse around wifely labor is the labor of servants, taken up most explicitly in Stein’s *Three Lives* (1909) and reimaged in Monique Truong’s 2004 novel *The Book of Salt*.

³¹ That Picasso is, like Stein, a genius is one of the first things that Alice explains in the *Autobiography*. See A, 661.

³² Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, 1st ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1933). The 1933 Bodley Head edition centralizes Alice’s body and personhood less flamboyantly, but nonetheless insists on the front flap that “Alice B. Toklas really exists.”

³³ Ellery Sedgwick to William Bradley, 31 January 1933 telegram, Beinecke Library YCAL MSS 77, Box 15, Folder 245. Emphasis added. Provenance of strikethrough (in pencil) unknown. The excerpts were eventually published under Stein’s name.

³⁴ Wilson, 252.

³⁵ This is a familiar assumption about writing by women, but exaggerated, I would argue, in the (non)reading of Stein. See for instance Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2000).

³⁶ Wilson, 252.

³⁷W. Langdon Brown, "We Have Reason to Think. . .," *British Medical Journal* 3861 (1935): 4. The article reprints an address Brown gave at St. George's Hospital in 1934.

³⁸"Palilalia and Gertrude Stein," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 103 (1934): 1711. Some related and derivative medical articles on Stein include Stafford, "Gertrude Stein Explained"; "The Psychology of Modernism in Literature," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 104 (1935): 401–2; "Writings of Gertrude Stein Those of Woman Without Past," *The Science News-Letter* 26 (1934): 374.

³⁹Janet Malcolm, *Two Lives: Gertrude and Alice* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2007): 41. Malcolm is borrowing (and apparently endorsing) the image of "oozing" from an earlier description by Stein's frenemy Mabel Dodge Luhan.

⁴⁰Stimpson, "The Somagrams of Gertrude Stein," *Poetics Today* 6.1-2 (1985): 68.

⁴¹Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Second Shift* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003).

⁴²Silvia Federici, "Wages Against Housework," in *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Oakland: PM Press, 2012), 16. See also Juliana Chow's brilliant analysis of various kinds of work in Stein from the perspective of late nineteenth-century vitalism, in "Motion Studies: Vitalism in Gertrude Stein's Work," *Arizona Quarterly* 69.4 (2013): 77–109.

⁴³The "Stein boom" in the 1980s may also be attributed to a renewed interest by Language writers, especially Lyn Hejinian. See Hejinian, "Two Stein Talks," in *The Language of Inquiry* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2000), 83–130.

⁴⁴Federici offers a particularly valuable account of the link between the regulation of women's bodies and the appropriation of their labor. See Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004).

⁴⁵In the *Autobiography*, Stein dismisses "the cause of women" when she drops out of medical school, saying, "you don't know what it is to be bored" (A, 743). Stein's account of the end of her time at the Johns Hopkins Medical School should not be taken as historically authoritative. For a recent contextualization of feminist recovery, see Anne E. Fernald, "Women's Fiction, New Modernist Studies, and Feminism," *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 59.2 (2013): 232.

⁴⁶Wilson, 240.

⁴⁷Clement, "The Story of one," 426.

⁴⁸Susan McCabe, "'Delight in Dislocation': The Cinematic Modernism of Stein, Chaplin, and Man Ray," *Modernism/modernity* 8 (2001): 442; Priscilla Wald, *Constituting Americans: Cultural Anxiety and Narrative Form* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1995), 237.

⁴⁹Richard Bridgman, *Gertrude Stein in Pieces* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970), xiii.

⁵⁰Bob Perelman, *The Trouble with Genius: Reading Pound, Joyce, Stein, and Zukofsky* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1994), 130.

⁵¹On the identification of Stein's texts with Stein herself, see also Liesl Olson, "'An Invincible Force Meets an Immovable Object': Gertrude Stein Comes to Chicago," *Modernism/modernity* 17 (2010): 331–61, esp. 340–41.

⁵²"Palilalia and Gertrude Stein," 1712.

⁵³"Stein's Way," 58; emphasis added.

⁵⁴That, in the case of the *Time* review, the offered sample is borrowed from Wilson, the only critic cited in the review, indicates another instance of not reading Stein—the reviewer's. Much of the review is plagiarized or paraphrased from Wilson's chapter on Stein.

⁵⁵ It is worth pointing out Ashton's theorization of what we might call Stein's sampleability in *From Modernism to Postmodernism*; Stein, Ashton argues, abandons the strategy of accumulation (or extension) that she uses in the exhaustive *Making of Americans* (1925) in favor of a tight "definition by intension" exemplified by *Tender Buttons* (54). Ashton's argument is persuasive on its own terms but does not go very far toward explaining the stylistic continuities between *The Making of Americans* and *Tender Buttons*—the style associated with Stein's celebrity—nor the ways in which the strategy of allowing a small excerpt to stand in as a sufficient metonym for a whole work is applied across Stein's oeuvre. See Ashton, *From Modernism to Postmodernism*, 30-66. On Stein and embodiment, see also Stimpson, "The Mind, the Body, and Gertrude Stein," *Critical Inquiry* 3.3 (1977): 489-506.

⁵⁶ The trope of unreadability has, of course, been invoked to sexist ends, and indeed, as this essay argues, Stein's unreadability depends on powerful sexist structures surrounding female labor and women's writing that are still very much in effect today. But this is not a matter of individual sexist critics, I am suggesting; it is a matter of the essentially compromised, illegible, and therefore appropriable quality of female and feminized labor under capitalism.

⁵⁷ Leon Solomons and Gertrude Stein, "Normal Motor Automatism," *Psychological Review* 3.5 (1896): 511. Emphasis in original. As has been much remarked, the "normal" subjects are Stein and Solomons themselves. On the implications of Stein and Solomons's self-experimentation, see Friedrich A. Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1990).

⁵⁸ On the significance of attention in this period, see Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999): 60-65. Crary mentions Stein's second (1898) publication in passing (62n148).

⁵⁹ Solomons and Stein, 492.

⁶⁰ The only other activity that attains this status in "Normal Motor Automatism" is reading, which Solomons and Stein also investigated, if secondarily to writing. See Solomons and Stein, 503-5.

⁶¹ Solomons and Stein, 496.

⁶² B. F. Skinner, "Has Gertrude Stein a Secret?," *The Atlantic Monthly* 153.1 (January 1934): 50-57. Subsequent writers, notably Kittler, have supported this stripping of authorship; indeed, for Kittler, a gendered argument turns on the possibility that Solomons was the sole experimenter and Stein was the sole experimentee. But while this is a possible interpretation, the evidence for it is—as Kittler himself notes—ambiguous. See Kittler, 227. In her retrospective description in *Everybody's Autobiography*—an account that, like all of her accounts, should be taken with a grain of salt—Stein writes that "Solomons tried me and I tried him" (*Everybody's Autobiography* [New York: Random House, 1937], 266).

⁶³ For examples, see Richard Bridgman, *Gertrude Stein in Pieces*, 135-36; Michael J. Hoffman, "Gertrude Stein in the Psychology Laboratory," *American Quarterly* 17.1 (1965): 129; Barbara Will, "Gertrude Stein, Automatic Writing and the Mechanics of Genius," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 37.2 (2001): 172. Critics frequently characterize Skinner's essay as a vicious denunciation; for all its vehemence, however, it reads to me more like an attempt at recuperation brought by a reader holding narrow (and not uncommon) notions of literary evaluation. He certainly reads more of Stein, and reads it more attentively, than many critics of his moment. By the end of the essay, Skinner seems to take comfort in the idea that *some* of Stein's writing can be written off as automatic writing, leaving her more accessible work open to enjoyment.

In a way, “Has Gertrude Stein a Secret?” resists the branding of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* with “rose is a rose is a rose” and its consequent public restyling as difficult “Steinese.” Skinner thus concludes, “I welcome the present theory because it gives one the freedom to dismiss one part of Gertrude Stein’s writing as a probably ill-advised experiment and to enjoy the other and very great part without puzzlement” (57).

⁶⁴ Gertrude Stein to Ellery Sedgwick, February 1934?, Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas Collection, YCAL MSS 77, 15: 248, Beinecke Library, Yale University. Will erroneously identifies this letter as being addressed to Lindley Hubbell; see Will, 172.

⁶⁵ See Bridgman, 135-36 for a useful account of these revisions. See also Gertrude Stein to Lindley Hubbell, 17 December 1932, Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas Collection, YCAL MSS 77, 10:128, Beinecke Library, Yale University.

⁶⁶ Solomons and Stein, 498.

⁶⁷ I am of course referring to John Searle’s notion of the “Chinese room,” an argument seeking to distinguish between “strong” and “weak” notions of artificial intelligence and, in particular, preserving a distinction between being able to speak Chinese and being able to simulate that ability through the following of rules (“Minds, Brains, and Programs,” *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 3 [1980]: 417). For the role of Chinese as an index of inscrutability in Searle’s argument, see N. Katherine Hayles, “Distributing/ Disturbing the Chinese Room,” *On the Human*, 26 May 2009, <http://onthehuman.org/2009/05/distributingdisturbing-the-chinese-room/>.

⁶⁸ Kittler, 229.

⁶⁹ Jennifer L. Fleissner, “Dictation Anxiety: The Stenographer’s Stake in *Dracula*,” *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 22.3 (2000): 440-41. On female typewriters, see Christopher Keep, “The Cultural Work of the Type-Writer Girl,” *Victorian Studies* 40.3 (1997): 401-26; Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1999); and Pamela Thurschwell, “Supple Minds and Automatic Hands: Secretarial Agency in Early Twentieth Century Literature,” *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 37.2 (2001): 155-68.

⁷⁰ On the feminine-codedness of mass culture, see Andreas Huyssen, “Mass Culture as Woman,” in *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1986): 44-62. On women’s relationship to the romance novel in particular, see Janice A. Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1991).

⁷¹ See especially Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader, 1837-1914* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993); Belinda Elizabeth Jack, *The Woman Reader* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2012); and Alix Ohlin, “Reader, You Married Him: Male Writers, Female Readers, and the Marriage Plot,” *Los Angeles Review of Books* (7 February 2013).

⁷² On women’s reading as food consumption, see Belinda Elizabeth Jack, *The Woman Reader*, 2.

⁷³ On female automata, see especially Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1986): 65-81 and Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1995), 19-20.

⁷⁴ Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, 183.

⁷⁵ Keep, 405.

⁷⁶ Quoted in Keep, 405.

⁷⁷ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2005), 88.

⁷⁸ Stein, *Geography and Plays*, 182. As numerous critics have noted, Christine Frederick's "domestic Taylorism" neatly reveals the consonances between factory and home. See Christine Frederick, *The New Housekeeping: Efficiency Studies in Home Management* (1912; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1913); Chow, "Motion Studies"; Suzanne Raitt, "The Rhetoric of Efficiency in Early Modernism," *Modernism/modernity* 13 (2006): 835–851; Janice Williams Rutherford, *Selling Mrs. Consumer: Christine Frederick and the Rise of Household Efficiency* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 2003); Jean Walton, "Female Peristalsis," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 13 (2002): 57–89. As Walton and Raitt argue, female bodies in the modernist moment were the sites of a new emphasis on efficiency and streamlining. Female and domestic bodies were understood as problematically kinked and curved, and required straightening out—sometimes, as Walton documents, surgically.

⁷⁹ Clement uses "deconstruct" in a nontechnical sense here.

⁸⁰ Clement, "The Story of one," 428.

⁸¹ On women in the history of computing, see Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Programmed Visions: Software and Memory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011); Nathan Ensmenger, *The Computer Boys Take Over: Computers, Programmers, and the Politics of Technical Expertise* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010); David Alan Grier, *When Computers Were Human* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2005); Jennifer S. Light, "When Computers Were Women," *Technology and Culture* 40 (July 1999): 455–483; and Ruth Oldenziel, *Making Technology Masculine: Men, Women and Modern Machines in America, 1870–1945* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam Univ. Press, 1999).

⁸² We see a similar outsourcing of information work to the wife when John Lane, of the Bodley Head Press, begins endorsing Stein's work. "John Lane had copies of *Three Lives* and *The Portrait of Mabel Dodge*. One did not know why he selected the people he did to show it to. He did not give either book to any one to read. He put it in their hands and took it away again and inaudibly he announced that Gertrude Stein was here." The material book seems to substitute for Stein's body—"Gertrude Stein was here." As Lane later reveals, "Mrs. Lane had read *Three Lives* and thought very highly of it and . . . he had the greatest confidence in her judgment," suggesting that Lane has not read Stein's books himself (A, 789–90).

⁸³ Chun, 37.

⁸⁴ Chun, 79. Chun is describing Vannevar Bush's Memex.

⁸⁵ This model depends, of course, on the possibility of disentangling embodiment and cognition, which is far from established—rather the reverse, in fact.

⁸⁶ "Palilalia and Gertrude Stein," 1711.

⁸⁷ Stafford, 134.

⁸⁸ Bridgman, 135.

⁸⁹ On "difficulty," Leonard Diepeveen's *The Difficulties of Modernism* (New York: Routledge, 2003) is invaluable, and addresses the moral panic around literary difficulty.

⁹⁰ Gertrude Stein, "To Ellery Sedgwick," February 1934?, YCAL MSS 77, Box 15, Folder 245, Beinecke Library.

⁹¹ Helga Lénárt-Cheng, "Autobiography as Advertisement: Why Do Gertrude Stein's Sentences Get Under Our Skin?," *New Literary History* 34.1 (2003): 128.

⁹² Lénárt-Cheng, 129.

⁹³ Sara Blair, "Home Truths: Gertrude Stein, 27 Rue De Fleurus, and the Place of the Avant-Garde," *American Literary History* 12.3 (2000): 417.

⁹⁴ For the record, I would consider *The World Is Round* more difficult reading than *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*.

⁹⁵ James Mellow, *Charmed Circle: Gertrude Stein & Company* (New York: Praeger, 1974), 404.

⁹⁶ Sianne Ngai suggests that the minor aesthetic category of “cuteness,” which she applies to Stein’s famously domestic *Tender Buttons* (1914) in particular, offers a crucial connection between modernism and mass production because the cute object is “the most reified or ‘thinglike’ of things” (Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2012], 93).

⁹⁷ Will Fisher, “Queer Money,” *ELH* 66 (1999): 15.

⁹⁸ Goble, *Beautiful Circuits: Modernism and the Mediated Life* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2010), 128.

⁹⁹ Clement has written remarkably about the role of gender in the emerging subdiscipline of digital humanities, of which distant reading is typically understood to be a part. Clement explains that the performance of public research that the subdiscipline often requires (in blogging and social media) is at odds with socialization as a woman, and also constitutes a second shift incompatible with one’s “job” as a mother. Clement affirms domestic labor as work, work that takes precedence over the subfield’s cultivation of an online *oikos*. See Tanya Clement, “I Am a Woman and I Am a Mother and I Do DH,” Tanyaclement.org, 27 March, 2012, <http://tanyaclement.org/2012/03/27/i-am-a-woman-and-i-am-a-mother-and-i-do-dh/>.

¹⁰⁰ Katie Trumpener, “Critical Response I. Paratext and Genre System: A Response to Franco Moretti,” *Critical Inquiry* 36.1 (2009): 164.

¹⁰¹ Moretti, “Critical Response II. ‘Relatively Blunt,’” *Critical Inquiry* 36.1 (2009): 173.

¹⁰² While the *Autobiography*’s authorship is revealed on the last page, Stein’s name does not appear on the cover or dust jacket of either the Harcourt or Bodley Head first editions.

¹⁰³ Deborah M. Mix, “Gertrude Stein’s Currency,” in *Modernist Star Maps: Celebrity, Modernity, Culture*, ed. Aaron Jaffe and Jonathan Goldman (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010): 96.