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Solveig Daugaard, *Collaborating with Gertrude Stein: Media Ecologies, Reception, Poetics*. Institutionen för kultur och kommunikation, Linköpings universitet. Linköping 2018.

Late in her career, in 1937, Gertrude Stein said, “I am always wanting to collaborate” (18). With *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933), which offered stories of her life told through her partner’s perspective, she had become a celebrity and felt a new pressure to perform. Perhaps she wanted collaborators so that she could share the pressure with other well-known writers. Curiously, the invitation to collaborate went virtually unheeded. She wanted Thornton Wilder, for instance, to collaborate with her on a novel about a woman whom everybody seems to know, but he backed out. Besides Virgil Thomson, who composed music for her librettos and adapted them for the stage, who else was there?

Reinterpreting Stein’s “wanting to collaborate” is just one of many interventions offered by Solveig Daugaard in her dissertation, *Collaborating with Gertrude Stein: Media Ecologies, Reception, Poetics*. Instead of seeing Stein’s interest in collaborating as something new, an effect of fame, or something that failed, Daugaard argues that Stein’s collaborative impulse existed throughout her career and was essential to her poetics. With that understanding as a foundation, her dissertation then examines the many collaborators that Stein has had posthumously: the “diverse poetic, visual and performative recycling of Stein’s work as it has taken shape in a North American context from the end of Stein’s life [1946] and up until the present day constitutes my primary research material” (23).

Chapters one through five offer a practically boundless narrative of collaborative possibilities. It begins with John Cage and then, whatever the medium—music, poetry, theatre, dance, pop art or film—catalogues a wide range of responses to Stein’s work. The second chapter observes the mutually beneficial relationship between the Language poets and Stein, her book *Tender Buttons* (1914) in particular. As the poetry and prose of the Language poets (in the 1970s and 1980s) was taken up by the academy, Stein’s work was offered a canonized status. Chapter three focuses on the African American poet Harryette Mullen. After the Language poets and Mullen, chapters four and five return to the eclectic mode of the first chapter, including analyses of the “Rose is a rose is a rose is

rose” motif’s afterlife, the Stein and Alice Toklas couple as featured in theatre and politics, and a wandering exhibit that restages the Stein salon with its paintings and hipster aura.

The dissertation builds on the history of academic studies that open with Stein and track her influence on later writers. This rich history begins with Marjorie Perloff’s *The Poetics of Indeterminacy* (1981), and then includes Peter Quartermain’s *Disjunctive Poetics* (1992), Juliana Spahr’s *Everybody’s Autonomy* (2001), Elisabeth Frost’s *The Feminist Avant-Garde in American Poetry* (2003), Deborah M. Mix’s *A Vocabulary of Thinking* (2007), Amy Moorman Robbins’s *American Hybrid Poetics* (2014), and Astrid Lorange’s *How Reading Is Written* (2014). Each book identifies a component part of the Steinian poetics—whether the keyword is indeterminacy, disjunctive, connective, feminist, or hybridity—at play in the writing of mid-to-late-twentieth-century and contemporary American writers. Many of these studies represent Stein as a foreparent, and in remembering the title of her libretto *The Mother Of Us All* (1946), about Susan B. Anthony, we can say that Stein has been a mother figure to avant-garde writers and artists. Her posthumous vitality speaks to something remarkably fecund in her writing and life story. As Lorange asserts, “Stein’s work is enduringly relevant. The questions she asks, the challenges she sets, and the concepts she develops continue to mobilize conversations around poetry, representation, and experience. Her work is endlessly generative” (102).

While Daugaard’s dissertation likewise regards Stein’s work as “endlessly generative” and extends the insights of Stein critics such as Lorange and Perloff, its catalogue of collaborations is far more inclusive and comprehensive than what has come before. And around her readings of Stein’s texts, critics and collaborators, Daugaard constructs a media-theory framework. (One precedent for this framework is in the collection of essays edited by Sarah Posman and Laura Luise Schulz, *Gertrude Stein in Europe: Reconfigurations across Media, Disciplines and Traditions* [2015].) Wanting to understand Stein’s robust popularity in the twenty-first century, she argues that a “striking quality” of the reception of Stein is “its transmedia character” (85) and she looks at “correlations between the quickly transforming media situation [that Stein] was working in” and our own today (49). So whereas earlier studies named Stein’s poetics as disjunctive or hybrid, Daugaard’s uses collaborative, affective

and ambient. Other keywords include interface, infrastructure and ecology. And when using a media-ecology approach, Stein is less a mother figure and more a presence and interlocutor. Daugaard's dissertation resists the lineage model of scholarship for one that sees Stein as a medial figure, a shifting node in a network.

Technology in our century means that the text-and-author relation is often "sticky," another keyword for Daugaard that comes, for her, primarily from the philosopher Sara Ahmed. When I read a book and follow its author on social media, my attractions—to page and persona—will feel sticky; I cannot separate them or read one without the other. Daugaard's chapter on the Language poets is a major rereading of their argument that Stein's importance is fundamentally textual, in the words and the creative principles driving them, not in her person. While the Language poets may have been ideal readers for Stein, their formalist approach left "the sticky effects of Stein's persona" unacknowledged (223). As Daugaard points out, when Stein has needed defending they do so "with the vigor of loyal friends, and at times seem unaware of their own emotional investments in this job" (236). The text is always a *Stein* text. Concomitant with this rereading is Daugaard's emphasis on Stein's own practice of adhesiveness, which included her salon and her correspondence (with its unique "Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose" letterhead, a line originally in a literary text), as well "her occasional poetry and portrait writing" (362). All of these stuck the page to the persona in ways that anticipate the typical text-and-author relation today.

In digital space a text can be easily shared, broken apart, and cited. Posting something online sets it loose, so the original context may be lost on new readers. There was a similar multi-media quality to Stein's own platform. What was on the page was only a part of her artistic practice—her name was on the book and extended far beyond it. For one thing, "many early readers first approached *Tender Buttons* via other interfaces than the codex" (252). Newspaper writers in the 1910s became collaborators when they not only quoted Stein's notorious prose poem but also imitated its Cubist style. Readers knew "Stein" not just for her books but as a brand, a reference point in a newspaper or even advertisement—her name standing for nonsense or guru-wisdom or abstract art. "Isolating the text [in a book] is a gesture that makes [even] less sense" in our time, when "we encounter literature or the

art of writing on so many other platforms than the well-known book interface" (39).

Like an appropriation artist, then, Daugaard and a media-ecology approach challenge "the concept of originality, the figure of the sovereign artist, and the segregation of art and popular culture" (258). The ecology concept expands the idea of an artwork to include not just the artist and the material object, but everything that made and continues to makes its presence possible, including collaborations. A collaboration in this sense can unsettle the stability of the "original." For example, after Filip Noterdaeme uses *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* as a template for *The Autobiography of Daniel J. Isen-gart* (2013), Stein's work, the idea of it, now includes Noterdaeme's, which indirectly unpacks some of Stein's untold stories about her queer life with Toklas. We can say that Stein did not so much produce texts as interfaces, which are "part device and part user" (252), things not just to read but to write with; and as we write with them, our texts manifest particularly Steinian elements or qualities. "It is exactly in terms of its delayed and deferred dissemination through artistic collaborations [...] that Stein's work establishes its unique status" (75). In the conclusion to her dissertation, Daugaard returns to John Cage and discusses his *4'33"* (1952): when the musician sits at the piano but does not play its keys, the audience can hear itself; indeed, there is no piece without an audience. Cage's piece is Steinian, Daugaard says, and like Noterdaeme's collaboration, reveals an essentially social quality in Stein's work that has perhaps been understated or not always understood.

This notion of the text as interface echoes an axiom of Jerome McGann's, that the "meaning" of a text is in its "use" (248). And it finds common cause with Timothy Morton, for whom "contact becomes content" (58)—that is, the "meaning" of Stein is in the relationships her texts refer to and, simultaneously or later, build. Or "[f]ollowing John Durham Peters," says Daugaard, "I understand infrastructuralism as a transposition of the interest from the art object itself to the infrastructures it is embedded in" (144). And she borrows Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's idea of "art as producing physical presence" (25) as she tracks "the sticky effects of Stein's persona" (223). What is new in this dissertation is partly a result of how widely-read Daugaard is, not just on the topic of Stein and her influence, but in media theory and philosophy. This approach transforms the one-way nature of influence into the back-and-forth of collaboration.

The genius of Stein's work is that it talks and listens at the same time (20). One of Stein's plays is titled *Listen to Me* (1936). But when we say that Stein, through her writing and her persona, invites the reader to respond, we also mean that she is listening. In her introduction, Dugaard uses Bernard Heidsieck's sound piece "Gertrude Stein" (1989) as a touchstone collaboration to represent the body of collaborative material she assembles. In this virtual conversation, Heidsieck talks to "Gertrude" while interpolating the sounds of Stein breathing, as recorded in the 1930s. In the sound of Stein breathing she is listening, and there is "mutual recognition" (63). "Heidsieck is calling our attention to the affective connection towards the author, a connection that in his piece exists independently of this author's words" (33). The implication here is that while it may seem that Stein's ego demanded fame, if she went after fame it was to have readers, people listening and talking (back) to her. In that way, the "text" never quite stays on the page or stays the same.

Dugaard addresses materials that move from "portraying or paying tribute, to quotation, appropriating, mocking, remediating, sampling and re-writing or restaging" (23). She is not primarily interested in people who write *like* Stein. Other studies address Stein's influence on, say, among her contemporaries, Sherwood Anderson, Ernest Hemingway, Edith Sitwell, or Laura Riding. This is not studying influence or tribute or even collaboration in the typical or literal sense, but "the affective connection towards the author" (33). While Thomson composed music to accompany Stein's words—collaboration in the typical sense—Cage composed words as music, as if Stein were a musician. Dugaard's interest is in the Cage-style transformations. This is about various people reimagining Stein, not writing like her but as her—which expands our sense of who "she" is. This argument builds, after Cage, toward the acts of Stein impersonation by Charles Bernstein (see the section "Collaboration by impersonation" on 202–207) and in Noterdaeme's *The Autobiography of Daniel J. Isengart*. For Stein and her collaborators, argues Dugaard, this is about "install[ing] the social into the heart of the autonomous artwork" (224).

As happens in an "affective connection" between people, there is tension. Dugaard uses the word "collaboration" instead of "dialogue" because whereas dialogue suggests "a power-free and frictionless exchange between equal parties" (45), col-

laboration can include "irritation, envy, and disappointment" (46). She chooses the word "collaboration" because she—like Perloff or Ulla Dydo before her—wants to avoid a naïve sense of play or equal exchange: "collaborations without active structures of power and dominance are non-existent, and to naïvely idealize the thought of collaboration as free from power/dominance would be a mistake" (59). And central to a collaborative poetics is what Dugaard calls disidentification, a term she adapts from José Esteban Muñoz, who says: "Disidentification is [a] mode of dealing with dominant ideology, one that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather, disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology" (72). In short, Stein is so generative in part because we have mixed feelings ("irritation, envy") about her and her work. Stein "respects very few taboos" (277) and says things—whether in style or sense—that demand a response. It is neither possible nor desirable to be neutral about Stein, and to collaborate is to (dis)identify with her.

The chapter on Harryette Mullen offers the most tangible articulation of what it means to disidentify with Stein. Dugaard asserts: "Where Stein's language has instances that directly negate the possibility of a black reader, Mullen's talks back to this language, not by 'sanitizing' it, but as Muñoz has it, by working 'on and against' it" (73). Mullen's race-conscious readings of *Tender Buttons* produced two books of poems, *Trimmings* (1991) and *S*PeRM**K*T* (1992), and then in 1999 Mullen wrote an essay on her mixed feelings about Stein. I suspect that this passage in Mullen's essay was vitally important to Dugaard's thinking: "*Tender Buttons* remains an extraordinary source of creative energy for my poetry and me. [...] I feel free to claim Gertrude as a literary foreparent, even though I am not so sure she would want to claim me as an heir. And although I claim her as an ancestor, I cannot say that I am a devout ancestor worshipper" (283). Like "Stein's own public identity performance as a female, queer version of the autonomous male genius" (72)—Stein disidentified with the traditional figure of the genius—Mullen's books politicize the words-as-objects aesthetic of the Modernists and Language poets. Stein and Mullen both inhabited a space that had been off-limits. Meaning may depend on how a word is used in a text, but words still carry particular racial and gendered connotations that do not necessarily dis-

appear in the (traditionally white) ludic mode.

Daugaard quotes and is inspired by Juliana Spahr's contention that "[o]ne aspect of the many possible pleasures that might arise from reading Stein is reading how others read her" (201). The variety of ways of reading Stein says something about Stein and about why we value her. While *Collaborating with Gertrude Stein* shows us how Cage or Mullen or Noterdaeme reads Stein, this dissertation is also Daugaard's act of reading. I have called it a catalogue, but it never merely lists. The remarkable critical intelligence we follow here has searched, sifted and organized a narrative that goes far in explaining why Gertrude Stein has been so generative and controversial. As Daugaard notes, in "Stein's case, it apparently remains difficult to lead a nuanced discussion that includes all parts of her complex media ecology, and thus takes into account written works, cultural persona and the political implications and contexts actualized by both" (237). There have been decades of enthusiasm and backlash. There have been collaborators and those who bemoan the alarming popularity of the loud American with a monstrous ego. Playing the medial critic, Daugaard addresses the divisiveness while also opening a middle ground, apart from those who disagree with each other but never not implicated; she too is a collaborator, reading with and against. She takes a non-binary approach and shows us the blind spots and contradictions in the reception of Stein. It is "difficult to lead a nuanced discussion" (237) but she does it.

Daugaard's dissertation not only draws a circle around divided readers; it does so with the two modes of appreciating Stein as well. These two modes can be described by pointing to her best-known books: *Tender Buttons* and *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. Readers often favor one or the other. Andy Warhol made his choice apparent with *The Autobiography of Alice B. Shoe* (1955) and works that appropriated photos of Stein. On the other hand, Lyn Hejinian was more inspired by the formal stylistics of *Tender Buttons*. But as Daugaard points out, just as important to Hejinian was the letter that her father received from Toklas in 1934, an object that suggested the power of a woman writer—an encouraging legacy for the poet born in 1941, a woman growing up in conservative mid-century America. Accordingly, we should see no essential division between the Warhol mode and the Hejinian.

Or let's return to the Stein's Saturday evening

salons, which displayed not only a modernist art collection but the artists themselves, and to the more than 130 verbal portraits that Stein produced, which, Daugaard says, "work like a type of occasional poetry in establishing relations and making social bonds" (45). Hosting a salon or writing portraits can be seen as simply the self-promotion of someone whose work won't, as the saying goes, "stand on its own." Stein's detractors like to claim that we would not read Stein if her outsized personality had not gotten our attention. As Daugaard observes, because detractors have so often used the persona (or person) to undermine the work's value, adherents have tended to ignore the social Stein in focusing on what they see as her real achievement, the plenitude of textual possibility in her writing. Here, in Daugaard's reading of Stein, which combines formalist and media-ecology approaches, the persona includes its collaborators and has the plenitude of the text.

As much as *Collaborating with Gertrude Stein* aims to document the range of responses, and is therefore about the collaborators first, not Stein—the implication being that her posthumous popularity says more about us than her—it is also always about Stein. Because it focuses throughout on how people have read (and written with and against) Stein, and the question of how to read Stein is an essential one, *Collaborating with Gertrude Stein* is one of the very best introductions to this radical Modernist. While it does not address the full range of Stein's own texts, or consider them at length, it nevertheless ambitiously offers an overview of her career as it was and continues to be, in the hands of others. Rather than an argument for how to read a particular Stein text, it more usefully teaches us that "contact becomes content": the meaning of the text is in how we approach it, and this keeps changing. This is about the next word, not the last one.

Logan Esdale