

Inventing Modernism: Place and Sensibility
Troy David Ouellette, Research Paper
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The Text Outside, Outside the Text
Imagining the Parisian Street in The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas

*“Everybody knows if you are too careful you are so occupied in being careful that you are sure to stumble over something.” Gertrude Stein, *Everybody's Autobiography*, 1937*

It is an interesting choice of words being “occupied” rather than preoccupied, the former being more inclusive, suggesting that one might come across something previously unnoticed. The language of the street surfaces in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* in various ways through: looking, remembering, stumbling, walking, climbing and dodging. I too hope to stumble over something in Stein’s text with the realization that each new text on the early twentieth century Parisian experience adds to its invention. Stein’s remark about Oakland California, “there is no there there,”¹ may also be seen to apply to the historic city of Paris, in the sense that the past is removed from the present. It no longer exists as a place circumscribed by the text. It is a reimagining at best.

Stein does something clever when she describes the Modernist experience through the eyes of Alice Babette Toklas. She initially offers Toklas as the narrator to more fully convince the reader that the work is written from her point of view, but with every turn of the page comes an invitation to survey another world from the harmonious voice of Toklas *and* Stein.

Although the novel departs from Stein’s earlier experimental style, her emphasis on the present and the subversion of literary, linguistic and cultural conventions is bristling with the richness of rivalries, characterizations, antidotes and documents. At worst the work becomes self-aggrandizement. Stein is promoting herself and others through the confluence of energetic and wilful characters; but how could the history of Modernist interactions be played out through any other form? This is Paris seen from the view of an American expatriate fascinated by its cultural *mélange*. When Toklas first moves to Paris she does not stay with Stein but rather in a hotel on the boulevard Saint-Michel, then in an apartment in the rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs. Revealed in the text is the

¹ Gertrude Stein’s full remark about Oakland California reads “The trouble with Oakland is that when you get there, there isn’t any there there.” The quotation referred to personal loss. Gone were the orange groves of her youth—her familial home destroyed and replaced by modern development.

tenuous and unsure footing of someone unfamiliar with their surroundings.

The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas is peppered with allusions to the streets of Paris. In Walter Benjamin's The Arcades Project he notes that the history of naming Paris streets begins with honouring saints and martyrs but after the revolution Paris was transformed into a "map of the world" through the commemoration of France's military conflicts. He continues, "For what do we know of streetcorners, curbstones, the architecture of the pavement—we who have never felt heat, filth, and the edges of the stones beneath our naked soles, and have never scrutinized the uneven placement of the paving stones with an eye toward bedding down on them."² In other words, planners are not the people who use these streets everyday. And the street names are usually contrary to the places they are imposed upon. Stein's address, 27 rue de Fleurus, was so named for a Napoleonic victory in Belgium. Yet, it also seems a fitting locale for Paris' blooming bohemian culture as its name stems from its entomological root for "flower".

In Stein's novel the street becomes a world of the ambitransitive verb: shopping, walking, driving in and around landmarks, traffic and crowded neighbourhoods. The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas is replete with references to the street that are both direct and indirect. This is a text that goes beyond any one reading of the social dynamic of early Parisian Modernism in the bohemian rich left and right bank. 27 rue de Fleurus becomes synonymous with Stein's salon. This location functioned for social gathering and artistic camaraderie. There was a kaleidoscope of early Modernists, with all of the trappings of the politics of friendship. Here, the characters of the novel were transformed by crossing the threshold of the salon. Passing from the bustle of the street to a space of interior contemplation, where one was exposed to a world of visual delights inspired by her art collection.

² Walter Benjamin. The Arcades Project. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, trans., (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1999), p.517

Toklas describes the procedure for introductions to Stein's salon thusly, She usually opened the door to the knock and the usual formula was, *de la part de qui venez-vous*, who is your introducer? The idea was that anybody could come but for form's sake and in Paris you have to have a formula, everybody was supposed to be able to mention the name of somebody who had told them about it. It was a mere form, really everybody could come in... Miss Stein once in opening the door said as she usually did by whose invitation do you come and we heard an aggrieved voice reply, but by yours, madame....³

Although open to all, visitors to Stein's salon were usually preceded by an "introducer". Toklas remarks that H. P. Roche was such a person. "He knew everybody, he really knew them and he could introduce anybody to anybody." This reads as if the general introducer were a profession within intellectual circles—certainly this mirrors Stein's own magnetic personality and influence as an "introducer". This charismatic individual is a personality more important to Modernist circles than the over-theorized dandy, *flâneur* or *flâneuse*.

The novel doesn't provide a colourful description of the right bank neighbourhood of Montmartre until chapter three when we are offered a glimpse the important picture dealer Ambroise Vollard, who is an "introducer" in his own right. We can tell this from all of the important people who knew him.

His shop was on the rue Laffitte not far from the boulevard. Further along this short street was Durand-Ruel and still further on almost at the church of the Martyrs was Sagot the ex-clown. Higher up in Montmartre on the rue Victor-Masse was Mademoiselle Weill who sold a mixture of pictures, books and bric-a-brac and in entirely another part of Paris on the rue Faubourg-Saint-Honore was the ex-café keeper and photographer Druet. Also on the rue Laffitte was the confectioner Fouquet where one could console oneself with delicious honey cakes and nut candies and once in a while instead of a picture buy oneself strawberry jam in a glass bowl...⁴

The character Vollard becomes a go-between for artists and collectors, writers and playwrights, musicians and street performers anyone who is anybody in Modernist circles knew of him.

³ Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten, eds., *Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1990). p.12. We can see in this text that to gain entrance you either had a referral (the password was the acquaintance), used a witticism or relied on Stein's own memory of having once met and invited you, although if she forgot some, they nonetheless still gained entrance to the salon.

⁴ Ibid, p.27

Rue Ravignan becomes another important location in the novel because of its association with artist studios, Picasso's in particular. When Stein goes there to pose, Toklas describes Picasso's "little fox terrier...that had something a matter with it." She goes on to express the importance of the veterinary clinic. "No frenchman or frenchwoman [sic] is so poor or so careless or so avaricious but that they can and do constantly take their pet to the vet."⁵ The groomed pedigree pet is also an example of excess and rising social status among the Parisian middle class, one that is echoed earlier in Georges Seurat's *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*⁶, or by the *flâneur* perusing the streets of Paris with his pet turtle. In this sense the pet becomes a surrogate "introducer", inviting remarks and conversation from like-minded strangers.



(fig. 1) *Life Magazine*, October 2, 1944, Alice B. Toklas and Gertrude Stein with "Basket 2" at Bilignin, Ain
Photo: Carl Mydans. Sep 01, 1944. Web. www.life.com/image/53370065. Dec. 30, 2009.

The importance of pets to Stein and Toklas is reinforced by the innumerable photographs of the two going for walks with their pets. The practice of dog walking draws attention to the connection between one's home and the street, a bridge between interior and exterior spaces. The stops and starts of the journey are

⁵ Ibid, p.43

⁶ Painter Georges Seurat, was the founder of the nineteenth-century French school of Neo-Impressionism whose technique for portraying the play of light using tiny brushstrokes of contrasting colours became known as Pointillism. Using this technique, he created huge compositions with tiny, detached strokes of pure colour too small to be distinguished when looking at the entire work but making his paintings shimmer with brilliance. Works in this style include *Une Baignade, Asnières* (1883–84) and *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* (1884–86). (Source: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/536352/Georges-Seurat#ref=ref235856>. Date accessed, Dec. 27, 2009.)

punctuated by the distractions of the pet and by the conversations henceforth. The leash and the dog therefore can be seen to be a tether between the private and the public, the domesticated and the undomesticated, the tamed and the untamed. Stein personifies her dogs by naming them both “Basket.” The name is known intimately to Stein and Toklas but becomes something a stranger may come to know and identify. It is a marker of familiarity.

Down the street from Stein and Toklas lived philosopher Raymond Duncan, the brother of the dancer Isadora Duncan. The text describes Raymond and Stein’s brother Leo going to the registrar’s office to record the name of Raymond and his partner Penelope’s new baby. The child is “against his will” called Menalkas, but is legally registered as Raymond Junior. There is in this act of naming an intimate gesture. Raymond Senior so admired Greek culture that he staged social gatherings in which guests wore togas and discussed Greek philosophy. And so the child’s nickname conveys the values of his parents, but is juxtaposed with the public act of naming. Raymond Junior is both more socially acceptable and establishes the child’s lineage. While the registration allows for the rights of citizenship and provides a public record of his birth, (as does the account in the text), it also provides for him a legal name that does not socially disadvantage or stigmatize him.⁷

Overlapping Grids

There are parallels to the gridiron street plans of ancient Greece, also common among the new cities of Stein’s America, and the salon style hangings that adorned her parlour walls. The pictures were arranged and rearranged, as a seating plan, as if one were undertaking a secret code of juxtaposition, a formula for ordering space according to anticipated company. Author Gabrielle Dean remarks in *Grid Games: Gertrude Stein’s Diagrams and Detectives* that:

The parlor is the privileged place in the grid where public and private surfaces correlate. Stein’s own famous “parlor” at 27 rue de Fleurus, where her salons took place, vividly illustrates how the textuality of the public

⁷ Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten, eds., *Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein*, p. 41

world was mapped on to this space in the interior of the home. Photographs of the room reveal that those walls were covered by the square shapes of many frames—the Stein art collection, materializing as an uneven geometric 329 gridwork. Stein’s archived papers even include a drawn plan of the placement of her paintings, a picture of the picture grid.⁸

There seems to be more to this though. Stein was showing off her collection, ushering people into the parlour to provoke their senses by presenting them with new ways of seeing. The pictures served as windows onto the lives of others. The experience of viewing was about Stein living with all of these things, all at once, and to imagine them over time in relation to one another. This is not unlike looking at a Cubist work or reading Tender Buttons in which one is presented with fragments of image or text that are at once independent and interrelated. Their meaning revealed over time.

The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas merges the map of experience with experiments in style while chronicling events through reflection and recollection. In one of the passages Toklas says of Tender Buttons,

Of these three manuscripts two had been written during our first trip into Spain and Food, Rooms etcetera, immediately on our return. They were the beginning, as Gertrude Stein would say, of mixing the outside with the inside. Hitherto she had been concerned with seriousness and the inside of things, in these studies she began to describe the inside as seen from the outside.⁹

The mixture of the inside and outside is a large part of the Modernist project. Picasso, for example, was one who brought print-media headlines from the outside world into the studio to use in his collage and paintings and then back again in the public presentation of his work. This is in stark contrast to the Impressionists who situated themselves in the landscape to catch the fleeting light and changes in colour of atmospheric effect. Conversely the analytic Cubist fragments of Picasso, Braque and others, were about arresting movement and the changes in time and space. The images, an assemblage of different viewpoints, are presented to the viewer simultaneously.

⁸ Gabrielle Dean. "Grid Games: Gertrude Stein's Diagrams and Detectives." *Modernism/modernity*, 15.2 (2008), p.328

⁹ Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten, eds., Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein, p.147

Paris Ever Changing

Paris itself at this time was in transition, as expressed by Toklas in the novel:

We went to the building just put up for this salon. In France they always put things up just for the day or for a few days and then take them down again. Gertrude Stein's elder brother [Leo] always says that the secret of the chronic employment or lack of unemployment in France is due to the number of men actively engaged in putting up and taking down temporary buildings.¹⁰

In this sense the intimate space of the salon is brought outdoors. There is no doubt that Parisian society was engaging in experiments involving temporary outdoor architecture as early as the *Paris Exposition Universelle* in 1855. Designers, artisans, architects and engineers used their understanding of materials, coupled with the new processes of the Industrial Revolution, to produce both temporary and permanent attractions, changing the streetscape dramatically in just a few days. This is further evidenced by the moving walkways that debuted at the *Paris Exposition Universelle* in 1900. The city's notion of itself as a modern city set it apart from other European cities that lacked such "progressive" attitudes.

Both Montmartre of the right bank and Montparnasse of the left bank were vibrant artist districts in Paris. The novel takes us on a brief tour by having the characters reference Mademoiselle Bellevallée's "little street" and then somewhat later, in *My Arrival In Paris*, explores the Montmartre district when Toklas and Fernande, (Picasso's former lover) imagine walking, shopping and visiting a tea house. The account of their sensorial discussion of "fur", "perfume" and "dogs"¹¹ echoes Stein's literary use of "objects", "food" and "rooms" in Tender Buttons.

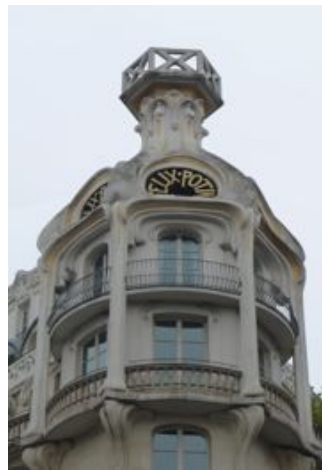
Part of the ontology of the street is the extemporaneous nature of interaction. Unforeseen events become pivotal to the story through chance meeting, for example when Fernande encounters Picasso and wants to acquire the comic supplements he has under his arm. Fernande recounts this story to Stein who is astutely aware of the rivalry between the two after they part. This drama only unfolds because of their chance meeting. The Parisian street offers no opportunity to prepare, rather theirs is an unscripted engagement like the Italian

¹⁰ Ibid, p.15

¹¹ Ibid, pp. 22, 25

street singers who, upon hearing the celebrations, arrival unannounced at Rousseau's banquet.¹²

The novel projects a sense of place through the descriptions of the short distances between ateliers and studios, commercial galleries, salons, hotels and restaurants. For example Toklas describes a restaurant and grocery store in order to convey a sense of the social activities of artists in the Montmartre district. She recounts that Fernande has purchased "made to order" meals from the grocery chain Félix Potin. The stores in this chain were known, in part, because of their unique architectural façade, perhaps an early example of architectural branding. Paul Auscher, who designed several buildings for the Potin chain and Hector Guimard, who designed the Paris metro entrances, both designers of the Art Nouveau movement, provided early examples of this new style that was to change the face of Parisian streets. This architectural vernacular also served as a visual cue so people, familiar and unfamiliar with the city, could easily orient themselves.¹³ When Toklas came to Paris, she would have experienced the Art Nouveau movement in contrast to the Neo Classical and Gothic styles and the more predominant city plan of Haussmann's Paris.



(fig. 2) The turret over the old Félix Potin shop on rue de Rennes, Paris.
Web. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:FelixPotinRennes.JPG>. Dec. 30, 2009

¹² Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten, eds., Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein. (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), p.100

¹³ The Félix Potin network experienced remarkable success during the late Second Empire and early Third Republic. In 1864 he expanded the Villette factory and opened a boutique on the Boulevard Malesherbes. In 1870 he started a home-delivery service. The business continued to grow after its founder's death, with a second factory in 1880 and a second large shop on Rue de Rennes in 1904. Félix Potin factories employed 1,800 workers in 1906, growing to 8,000 by 1927. By 1923, the Félix Potin name counted 70 branches, 10 factories, 5 wine stores and 650 horses.
(source http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/F%C3%A9lix_Potin, accessed Dec. 29, 2009).

Dressing for the Outdoors

Toklas makes mention of Stein's outerwear as "a brown corduroy suit, jacket and skirt, a small straw cap, always crocheted for by [sic] a woman in Fiesole, sandals and she often carried a cane."¹⁴ The cane is an interesting accoutrement as it provides stability to the walker, as well as defense, on those steep Parisian boulevards. Author Shari Benstock argues that Stein uses costume as metaphor when she "shed the tight-waisted dresses of her Radcliffe and Johns Hopkins years and adopted looser clothing—Greek sandals, heavy woolen stockings, and large overcoats. This apparel allowed her the freedom to walk, an activity that took up as much as six hours of her day in Paris, and with few changes over the years this attire served her to the end of her life."¹⁵ Further into the reading, Benstock suggests the notion of cross-dressing to assert female power in a world of male power structures—but Stein must have found herself in a city with few reprisals from people on the street. Although her choice in clothing would become more common after Coco Chanel's new designs came to signify the working woman after World War Two and thus cross-dressing would come to lose some of its subversive power. One gets the impression that, to Stein, it was about genius in the work and not genius in the dress.

The experience of the outside is often mediated by one's outerwear. Toklas hints of this, in chapter two, when she and Fernande go for a walk and speak of hats.

This first day we talked hats. She [Fernande] liked hats, she had the true french [sic] feeling about a hat, if a hat did not provoke some witticism from a man on the street the hat was not a success. Later on once in Montmartre she and I were walking together. She had on a large yellow hat and I had on a much smaller blue one. As we were walking along a workman stopped and called out, there go the sun and the moon shining together. "Ah," said Fernande to me with a radiant smile, "you see our hats are a success."¹⁶

Outerwear was as much about being noticed on the street as it was about class, cultural difference, shelter from the elements or signifying an occasion. To the

¹⁴ Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten, eds., *Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein*, p. 109

¹⁵ Shari Benstock. *Women of the Left Bank: Paris, 1900-1940*. 1st ed. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986. p. 177

¹⁶ Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten, eds., *Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein*, p. 14

workman it becomes an invitation for flirtation. To Fernande and Toklas the hat is also a sign of modern female identity and independence. The hat is put into the service of preserving the shape of one's hair or concealing what is underneath. Madame Matisse for instance "...had an abundance of dark hair. Gertrude Stein always liked the way she pinned her hat to her head and Matisse once made a drawing of his wife making this characteristic gesture and gave it to Miss Stein."¹⁷ If we are to believe Toklas, Stein's miniature biography in chapter four, has a description of shopping in 1874, when her mother and brother, Leo "...bought everything that pleased their fancy, seal skin coats and caps and muffs for the whole family from the mother to the small sister Gertrude Stein, gloves dozens of gloves, wonderful hats, riding costumes, and finally ending up with a microscope and a whole set of the famous French [sic] history of zoology. Then they sailed for America."¹⁸ The passage reads as nostalgic longing, reinforcing Stein's own yearning for a place of visceral sensation.

Towards the end of the text, the character of the servant is offered for consideration. The servant or nanny would usually be sent out to do most of the shopping at a bazaar. The word bazaar has Islamic roots meaning the place of prices. In Paris this would have been an open-air street separate from the *archade*, which was something different, from an earlier period with a glass roof and iron girders that spanned the two sides of the street. These may have been the places Stein visited in her early childhood years.

Having recently returned from London, just before the Great War, Toklas and Stein reminisce about the street of this earlier time, "You can see the streets because there is nobody on them, it is just like my [Stein's] memory of Paris when I was three years old. The pavements smell like they used (horses had come back into use), the smell of French [sic] streets and French [sic] public gardens that I remember so well."¹⁹ These are not just any streets to Stein these are French streets that have returned to what they were through the eyes of a child and before

¹⁷ Ibid, p.33

¹⁸ Ibid, p.68

¹⁹ Ibid

the advent of the crowds and enormous flows of traffic.²⁰ There is no political position taken on the war in the novel, merely a simple description of the street through the absence of pedestrians as if it were small town America. By the time of the Great War the coat and warm outerwear take on particular significance for the displaced populations that journeyed through the countryside or by those in the urban centres who had lost the ability to heat their homes. This theme also arises in the text when Stein confronts a policeman on the street about coal shortages.²¹

Transportation Systems

Streets are often said to be the bones of a city. They have a physiology. As is the case with many Roman influenced cities in Europe, they have a system that allows for the circulation of traffic around a central hub. This is something modern transportation routes take advantage of, as did the Paris Métropolitan. At the same time the Métro provided new ways to get around the city and was an example of the implementation of Haussmann's social agenda. This urban redevelopment was part of his civilizing mission, geometric aesthetic and the beautification of the central core however, the settling of the industrial working class districts to the periphery happened as a result.²²

By the time of the Paris Exposition, in 1900, the horse drawn omnibus was in direct competition with the Métro. The omnibus was an important feature of the Parisian Street at the end of the eighteenth century. Literally meaning “everyone's bus” Toklas describes:

We went to the Odeon and there got into an omnibus, that is we mounted on top of an omnibus, the nice old horse-pulled omnibuses that went pretty quickly and steadily across Paris and up the hill to the place Blanche. There we got out and climbed a steep street lined with shops with things to eat, the rue Lepic, and then turning we went around a corner and climbed even more steeply in fact almost straight up and came to the rue Ravignan, now place Emile-Goudeau but otherwise unchanged, with its steps leading up to the little flat square with its few but tender little trees, a man carpentering in the corner of it, the last time I was there not very long ago

²⁰ It is interesting that Stein chooses to capitalize America through the novel but fails to do so with the word “french” in all its permutations—is this Toklas editing the text and/or Stein dictating?

²¹ Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten, eds., *Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein*, p.162

²² See Peter S. Soppelsa's *The Fragility of Modernity: Infrastructure and Everyday Life in Paris, 1870-1914*. (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan, 2009), p.83

there was still a man carpentering in a corner of it, and a little café just before you went up the steps where they all used to eat, it is still there, and to the left the low wooden building of studios that is still there.²³

The omnibus would officially cease to exist in 1913 but until then there was a hazardous mix of transportation systems, when horses were pressed into military service.²⁴



(fig. 3) Postcard "Paris, Le Théâtre de l'Odéon" Publisher: Aqua-Foto, L. V. & Cie. Type: Divided Back Size: Classic Web. www.andreas-praefcke.de/carthalia/france/f_paris_odeon.htm. Dec. 30, 2009

The first allusion to the street and driving, given in The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas, occurs when Toklas writes, “These were the days before automobiles and nobody worried about accidents.”²⁵ This one sentence, circa 1907, expresses a world without automobiles and where the streets facilitated gatherings, street vendors and market places, in an age preceding the noise, traffic and pollution created by the combustion engine. This was only one year prior to Ford’s introduction of the Model T from the assembly line in America. It was not until Toklas and Stein returned to Paris from America in June 1916 that they acquired a Ford Model T as described in the novel, “with the help of connections

²³ Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten, eds., Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein, p. 20

²⁴ The number of horses with the BEF in France rose from 25,000 to over 475,000 by the autumn of 1918. On all fronts and theatres a staggering 1 million plus horses and mules were listed in service with British and Commonwealth forces by the close of war. (source <http://www.firstworldwar.com/features/forgottenarmy.htm>. Accessed Dec. 30, 2009). There are estimates that eight million horses died on all sides during the First World War.

²⁵ Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten, eds., Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein, p.11

in the United States; Gertrude learned to drive it with the help of her friend William Edwards Cook.”²⁶ With the advent of the automobile came the uniformity of movement. As long as one could press down on a gas pedal, steer and squeeze a clutch, one could go as fast and as far as anyone else. Toklas was the one who wanted to purchase the car and navigate as long as Stein would drive it. This described as owing to Stein’s robust nature in using the clutch and working the crank start. When married to the map, street signs become historical markers indicating the most efficient route for getting from one place to another. It is an indexical sign.

There are particular questions that should be raised in Stein’s writings. Why, for instance, does she not talk about the Paris underground rail system—one of the most sophisticated in Europe during the *Belle Époque*? Paris was only one of four cities on the continent to have an underground electric rail system.²⁷ There is no evidence in the novel that Stein ever used the Paris Métro. This seems unusual when one considers that Gertrude’s father, Daniel Stein, was a railway executive, whose prudent investments in streetcar lines and real estate had made the family wealthy.²⁸ Gertrude’s fortunes came, at least in part, from the public transportation industry. Answers may lie with the fact that many of Stein’s acquaintances lived within walking distance and with the Métro’s early safety concerns, although over time, with Hausmanization, the smaller nooks and crannies where thieves could lurk was driven underground.²⁹

²⁶ Ibid, p.159

²⁷ Norma Evenson, *Paris: A Century of Change, 1878-1978*, (New Haven, Conn: Yale University, 1978), p.208

²⁸ James R. Mellow, *Charmed Circle: Gertrude Stein and Company*, (New York: Praeger, 1974), p.22

²⁹ “Tours were partly designed to reassure the bourgeoisie that there were no sinister forces, of the sort that Hugo had described in *Les Misérables*, lurking underground.” See David Harvey, *Paris, Capital of Modernity*, (New York: Routledge, 2003), p.245



(fig. 4) Paris Métro Under Construction 1902-1910. The tracks were dug at street level in the open air and covered over later. Web. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Paris_Metro_construction_03300288-3.jpg. Dec 30, 2009

The streetcar, Métro and rail in Paris dramatically contributed to urban sprawl as more and more neighbourhoods were moved to the periphery, encouraging traffic at particular times of the day. The commute eroded the more commercial aspects of the public sphere within the street by competing for time and space. Street markets and attractions became less frequent as roads and boulevards yielded to the automobile. Eventually the Métro determined where much of the urban activity and commerce would take place, with events being held at its numerous subway stops. The cordial exchanges, in many of Paris's public places, parks and other locales of leisure are virtually silenced in Stein's text. This may suggest that these new transportation systems altered the way people related to one another.

The urban social process of gathering in plazas to discuss politics or daily events in shopping districts, in the arcades, casinos and theatres was now shaped by the flow of motorized traffic through the streetscape. These new modes of transportation also introduced new dangers in for pedestrians. Although, before and after the armistice was signed, the streets of Paris were unsafe due to the desperation and hunger of its population. There are some examples in the text regarding Paris as being "scareful" and Stein being comforted by the Policeman

who takes care of them in the streets during the Zeppelin attacks when all the lights were out.³⁰

There is much evidence to suggest that self defense initiatives and public/private partnerships to keep the streets safe were in the works even as early as 1890. There are also suggestions that, by publicizing street violence and keeping it in the public consciousness, women were deprived of full participation in the working social sphere,³¹ by limiting the times of day when a woman felt secure being alone on the street. This is certainly part of a larger geocritical approach that problematizes female literary spaces. Indeed we see very few examples of Toklas or Stein going out alone in the novel (let alone at night)—although there is an instance where Stein is mentioned to have posed for Picasso, “She had come to like posing, the long still hours followed by a long dark walk intensified the concentration with which she was creating her sentences.”³² There is no doubt that Stein was a “night owl” as she would often wait until the late hours, after everyone had left 27 Rue de Fleurus, before setting down to diagram sentences, (a kind of linguistic cartography), or write in quiet meditation.

Although crime was a problem in Paris the novel offers no descriptions of its occurrence. Even the passage describing Alice’s missing purse, is in the end returned by a stranger that replaces everything and refuses a reward. Yet there is much evidence in the novel regarding the erosion of civic infrastructure and the dilapidated state of its architecture, which may have introduced opportunities for crime. This is further emphasized by the presence of gas lighting at 27 rue de Fleures despite the fact that electric lighting had been around since the early 1890’s. Unlike electric lighting, which could be switched on simultaneously, individual gas fixtures were more difficult to maintain and created fire hazards.

The difficulties accessing the various floors in many of the studios visited, in particular the studio of Matisse on the left bank, were due to the unkempt state of urban dwellings. There were also problems with telephone communications

³⁰ Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten, eds., *Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein*, pp. 166,162

³¹ Aaron Freundschuh, “New Sport’ in the Street: Self-Defence, Security and Space in Belle Epoque Paris,” *French History: Spaces and Places*, 20(4), 424, 2006. Retrieved December 18, 2009, from Research Library. (Document ID: 1171125391).

³² Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten, eds., *Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein*, p.47

when Fernande and Toklas attempt to order the *riz à la Valenciennes* to feed everyone at Rousseau's banquet in a small café at the foot of *rue Ravignan*. These examples suggest the tremendous growing pains Paris experienced throughout the period. Paris was and still is the most densely populated major municipality in the world even though its total population peaked in 1921.

The Rueful Street and The War Years

Following the French Revolution, from 1789 to 1799, successive city plans to widening the streets were initiated, under Haussmannization, in an attempt to thwart future efforts to construct barricades, allow for the survey boulevards and, if necessary, deploy troops. The ancillary effect of Haussmannization created the cultural district of Montmartre due to the granting of large swaths of land near the centre of the city to his financial supporters. This drove the less fortunate central populations to Montmartre in order to escape taxation and higher rents, but also enabled a large cultural district to flourish. Movement through the city was certainly improved but by World War Two the changes had also made it possible for Hitler's mobilized army to move with ease through the urban centre. Ironically the chaos of invasion was the antithesis of Haussmann's order.

The militarization of the street is recounted in Toklas' description of the Great War:

It was the principle of the camouflage of the guns and the ships in the war. The first year of the war, Picasso and Eve, with whom he was living then, Gertrude Stein and myself, were walking down the boulevard Raspail on a cold winter evening. There is nothing in the world colder than the Raspail on a cold winter evening, we used to call it the retreat from Moscow. All of a sudden down the street came some big cannon, the first any of us had seen painted, that is camouflaged. Pablo stopped, he was spell-bound. "*C'est nous qui avons fait ça,*" he said, "it is we that have created that," he said. And he was right, he had. From Cézanne through him they had come to that. His foresight was justified.³³

This seems particularly close to the anecdote of Picasso's comment to a German officer when harassed by the Gestapo in Nazi-occupied Paris. An inquisitive

³³ Ibid, p. 84-85

officer, coming into his apartment, noticed a photograph of Guernica lying on a table. “Did you do that?” he asked. “No, you did,” said Picasso.

There has been a good deal of scholarship relating the relationship of aerial photography and military mapping to the advent of Cubism. The landscape when viewed from above appears fractured—streets become abstract lines and parks, buildings and neighbourhoods become shapes.³⁴ The use of Zeppelins during the Great War is recounted in the novel, along with street blackouts, alarms and the ensuing terror.³⁵ Zeppelin crews performed the dual function of dropping bombs and providing aerial reconnaissance.³⁶ The flights allowed for the mapping of urban and rural areas, the determination of war strategies and troop movements. The map of the French Republic on the other hand was used

...to unite as well as to support. Maps during the Third Republic validated the new regime. Completed projects, schools, stable neighborhoods, multiple *Paris Expositions Universelle*, and other tourist destinations commonly appeared in maps sanctioned by the government as well as in those produced by the private sector.³⁷

Steins own interest in maps and roads would become married with her medical training when she drove for the American Fund for French Wounded during the First World War and street signs would take on new significance for her. The communities they served within Paris and in the smaller towns asked if the AFFW would also carry small sellable items. Ford trucks would be loaded with towels, shoes, stockings and sundries to administer along with the donated food and medical supplies. The trucks were a small mobile stores as well as a means to organize relief efforts.

By volunteering Stein and Toklas had broken through some of the barriers levied against women who were not allowed to participate in combat. “Gertrude and Alice...volunteered to drive supplies to French hospitals, in the Ford they named *Auntie*, after Gertrude’s aunt Pauline, ‘who always behaved admirably in

³⁴ Paul K. Saint-Amour, "Modernist Reconnaissance." *Modernism/modernity* 10 (2003): 349-80

³⁵ Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten, eds., *Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein*, p. 148

³⁶ *Ibid*, pp.147, 148

³⁷ Kory Earnest Olson, *Mapping Modernity: Representations of Paris in the Early Third Republic 1870-1900*, (Pittsburgh, PA: Pennsylvania State University, 2006), p.6

emergencies and behaved fairly well most times if she was flattered.”³⁸



(fig. 5) Toklas and Stein with their Ford Model T “Alice” as volunteers for the AFFW, 1916
Web. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gertrude_Stein#Auntie. Dec 30, 2009

Stein casts Toklas’ voice when they run out of gas on their way to the AFFW headquarters. The scene unfolds like a comedy sketch.

We went outside of Paris to get it [the car] when it was ready and Gertrude Stein drove it in. Of course the first thing she did was to stop dead on the track between two street cars. Everybody got out and pushed us off the track. The next day when we started off to see what would happen we managed to get as far as the Champs Elysées and once more stopped dead. A crowd shoved us to the side walk and then tried to find out what was the matter. Gertrude Stein cranked, the whole crowd cranked, nothing happened. Finally an old chauffeur said, no gasoline. We said proudly, oh yes at least a gallon, but he insisted on looking and of course there was none. Then the crowd stopped a whole procession of military trucks that were going up the Champs Elysées. They all stopped and a couple of them brought over an immense tank of gasoline and tried to pour it into the little ford. Naturally the process was not successful. Finally getting into a taxi I went to a store in our quarter where they sold brooms and gasoline and where they knew me and I came back with a tin of gasoline and we finally arrived at the Alcazar d’Eté, the then headquarters of the American Fund for French Wounded.³⁹

³⁸ Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten, eds., *Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein*, pp.84-85

³⁹ *Ibid*, p.163



(fig. 6) A sidewalk café in Paris in 1917, in which a mix of various nationalities can be seen.
Web. http://www.greatwardifferent.com/Great_War/Paris_at_War/Paris_at_War_01.htm. Dec. 30, 2009.

The Alcazar d'Été was originally a *café chantant*. An outdoor café, inspired by the Turkish coffee house, where small groups of performers would play popular music for the public during the *Belle Époque*. The fact that the incident unfolds with everyone pitching in is an interesting way of framing the scene, because one imagines a crowded busy street with traffic noise and the urgency that accompanies modern life.

The cranking of the car in the novel evoked the hardships that often accompanied ownership. Stein eventually had to retire “Auntie”, because it no longer qualified as a post war civilian vehicle. The importance of vehicles to Stein cannot be underestimated. An extension of her concern for the liminal space between the inside and outside, the car represents a kind of outwear, a private cocoon within public space. Metaphorically the automobile may also be seen as a vehicle for Stein’s writing as well, providing her with an impromptu space to pen curbside poems while waiting for Alice to run errands on foot.

As author James Mellow notes, “The sight of Gertrude Stein, perched high atop the driver’s seat of her Ford runabout, gripping the steering wheel, peering intently ahead and proceeding down Parisian streets, like some comically large goddess of the machine, was a vision many expatriates of the twenties recalled.”⁴⁰ But the bulk of the text regarding her automobiles in the novel dwells on the

⁴⁰ James R. Mellow, *Charmed Circle: Gertrude Stein & Company*. (New York: Praeger, 1974), p.241

movement and sound of the streets. “She also liked to set a sentence for herself as a sort of tuning fork and metronome and then write to that time and tune.

Mildred’s Thoughts, published in The American Caravan, was one of these experiments she thought most successful.”⁴¹ Indeed Alice calls both pictures and automobiles Stein’s “distractions” only later adding “dogs” to the list.⁴²

Landmark Omissions

Métro stations, like several other landmarks, that represent Paris in the popular consciousness of the time are conspicuously absent in the text. The Eiffel Tower, Machinery Hall and the Catacombs are all interesting omissions, but Stein’s concerns remain at street level. It could have been that some of these places were tourist traps. Stein does not seem to be interested in the tourist even though she herself was an American expatriate.

Paris was filled with memorials, statues, obelisks, cenotaphs, tombs, shrines and commemorations. Apart from Guillaume Apollinaire most Modernists tended to ignore such things. Perhaps it was after Apollinaire’s death that Stein needed to move on. The last two pages of the chapter entitled *The War* end with triumph in the streets under the *Arc de Triomphe* a sign of nationalism, which received significant attention in the text. French, Spanish, American, Russian, Hungarian and English people, among others, united to celebrate the end to the war.

The members of the American Fund for French Wounded were to have seats on the benches that were put up the length of the *Champs Elysées* but quite rightly the people of Paris objected as these seats would make it impossible for them to see the parade and so Clemenceau promptly had them taken down. Luckily for us Jessie Whitehead's room in her hotel looked right over the *Arc de Triomphe* and she asked us to come to it to see the parade. We accepted gladly. It was a wonderful day.⁴³

Life in post war France nonetheless remained difficult, as refugees from the war-ravaged countryside began to return to Paris, choking train stations and making it impossible to drive from one part of the city to another. Many of the

⁴¹ Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten, eds., Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein, p.194

⁴² *Ibid*, p.198

⁴³ *Ibid*, pp.180, 181

ambulance drivers stayed on to help refugees resettle under the newly created American Committee for Devastated France (ACDF). Buses in the city were crowded, roads were in poor condition and train stations were cluttered with belongings virtually impossible to retrieve.⁴⁴ The growing pains continued as tensions would inevitably arise between new arrivals, particularly during the city's population spike of the 1920s, providing a new stage for Stein and the writers of the "lost generation".

A predominant theme in the novel dwells on changing nature of the public space and it was the citizens of Paris who held the reigns of public policy. In the everyday of Paris, change often occurred as the result of apparently insignificant moments. On one occasion when Ernest Hemingway visited Stein, the pair took a walk to discuss Hemingway's vocation and uncertain future. He reaffirmed his commitment to be a writer, rather than a journalist, in the streets of Paris, and the walk set the course for his future.⁴⁵

The End of the Line

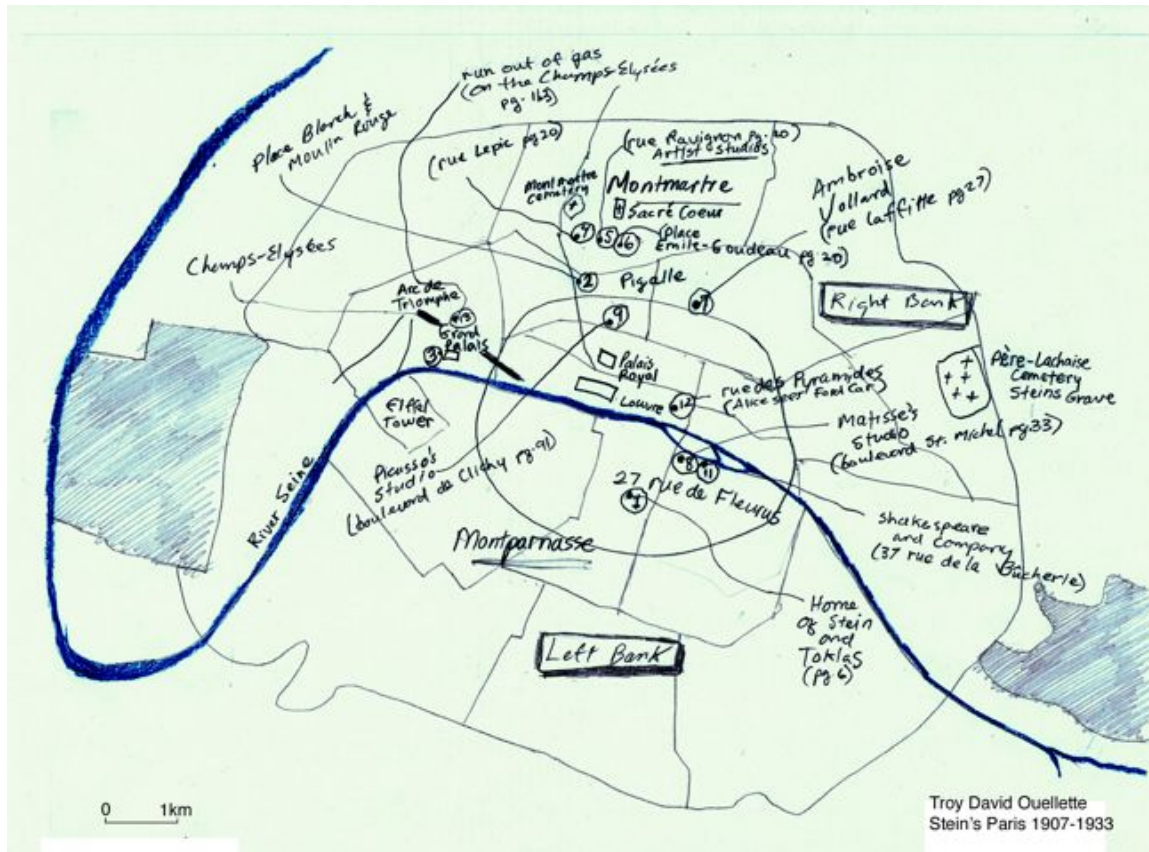
In relatively short span of twenty years, Paris had overcome the terror its streets had known through eighty years of revolution, urban revolt and rapid expansion. The modernization of the city, changes in urban planning, new modes of transportation and widespread mechanization irrevocably altered the experience of the street. Boulevards, which once hosted commercial markets and public events gave way to taxi cabs and automobiles. The sounds, smells and sights too were forever changed. The clatter of horse hooves, the odor of manure and the bustle of pedestrian traffic were replaced by the roar of engines, pollution and the speed of commuter traffic. It was a time of reinvention. A reinvention of public space as well a reinvention of the Republic itself.

Stein and Toklas invent for themselves a community of operative agents for social and artistic transformation by way of introduction. Their lived experience becomes mythic by way of association with the creative synergy of Modern Paris. As an outsider (an intellectual, an expatriate American, an

⁴⁴ Kimberly Chuppa-Cornell, *The U.S. Women's Motor Corps In France, 1914-1921*, *Historian*, 56:3. 1994, Spring, p.473

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p.201

independent, lesbian woman), Stein was uniquely positioned to act as “our” “introducer” to the changing nature of Modern Paris, providing a road map for understanding complex urban problems, that help us to navigate our own tumultuous times.



(fig. 7) Map of Stein's Paris 1907-1933, Troy David Ouellette, 2009