

Three Compositions on Philosophy and Literature:

A reading of Gertrude Stein's *The Making of Americans* through Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*.

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Preface

What means to be asserted in what follows is that we together speak a common language and that it is through this language that each of us affirms our individual identities. If I have combatted any view, then it is the tendency to isolate the analysis of knowledge, and especially our knowledge of other minds, from our shared form of life, from the contexts in which they have natural coherence: from history. I mean primarily to acknowledge that we live in time; that our past shapes our present; that in our family living we learn the ideologies or myths or paradigms or world-views through which we see the world.

I have tried to reflect these issues formally in the composition of this thesis. If, as a result, I emphasize practice over theory, it is no doubt because of a conviction that theory can be found only in practice. I have made the main text, my three compositions, completely internal and self-referential: descriptions whose explanations are self-contained. No special knowledge (not of philosophy or literature) is required in order to understand what has been written; the compositions are written in ordinary, non-technical, language and are available to anyone who will take the time. I have felt primarily responsible to the uninitiated reader, one who is a stranger to the writing of Gertrude Stein and Ludwig Wittgenstein. I certainly hope that I have been able to provide a context that makes Stein's puzzling novel, *The Making of Americans*, more available.

At the same time, these factors may detract from the thesis' value as a working piece of philosophical analysis; for I have sometimes chosen to ignore some of the language of current philosophical discourse. My concern, however, has been to make Stein's prose more public and in so doing to locate some of the sources of philosophical problems. What I have done is to investigate what certain philosophical problems (other minds, meaning and reference, personal identity, private language, mind-body dualism) *refer to*, from where and in what form these problems arise in everyday experience. This concern has its most explicit manifestation in the tension between the three compositions and the lengthy notes that follow each of them. These notes, referred to in the main text, should not be considered of secondary importance, for some of the most substantive philosophical and aesthetic issues are given fullest explication therein. It

may seem that I casually neglect the most pressing issues — even denying prevalent interpretations by offhand juxtapositions. It may also be felt that I sometimes use Wittgenstein's language in an unexplicated and even exceptional way. But I trust that it will be acknowledged that what I quote or paraphrase or refer to from Wittgenstein is intelligible solely on account of its context within the internal argument of this paper. If only in practice, I do give a reading of Wittgenstein's later philosophy.

Formally, what follows may be seen as a reading of *The Making of Americans* in conjunction with *Philosophical Investigations*. There are by now several valuable books written about Stein, but none, I think, have adequately explored her singular importance as an originator, with such as Joyce, Proust and Woolf, of modernist composition. (The best writing on Stein is her own lectures and introductions of her friends — Wilder, Faÿ, and Anderson.) And though Stein is occasionally said to be of importance to twentieth century philosophy, there has been little before that has seriously tried to bring out what the connections are.

I acknowledge that this thesis is not easily placed in any genre of philosophical writing. If it is difficult to categorize, and so deal with, I hope that at least this will be recognized as a *philosophical* problem. I do not mean to deny the philosophical way of coming to knowledge, nor to claim that all ways of coming to knowledge are the same. If it is thought that mine is not the philosophical way, then I would reply that it can provide the datum for that way — datum on the ontology of philosophical problems.

I have tried to remember Austin's motto for a sober philosophy: "neither a be-all nor an end-all be". I have been content to be myself, accepting the limitations of vision that are thus set down. Nor have I ended anything, but have only spoken some preliminary words. My errors are yet to occur to me, but that will come with time.

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ONE:

GERTRUDE STEIN, ANOTHER MIND

Gertrude Stein had no desire to make her writing easy to read. It is always difficult to understand another mind in the fullness of its own particular being, in the fullness of its faithfulness to its own particular form of being. Often she despaired of having any readers, often she despaired that anyone could understand what she had written in the way she had written it. Mostly she was convinced that any stranger could understand what she wrote in the way she wrote it, if he would give of his time, mostly she recognized that her writing was open for knowing. This is then the story of one such knowing, this is then the story of one such loving, this is then the story of one such stranger reading and knowing and loving what she had written in the way she has written it.

Early on, in *The Making of Americans*, Gertrude Stein says that she writes for herself and strangers. “This is the only way that I can do it. Everybody is a real one to me, everybody is like some one else too to me” (MA, p. 211).¹ Over and over, she brings forward the understanding that every one (every person) is a different one, separate from each other one. As she was a separate one from every other one, her writing must also be separate, it must also be another one. The primary experience in reading *The Making of Americans* is of the particularity and aloneness contained in its words. Reading newspapers and magazines, lectures, novels, one is constantly confronted by a barrage of easily understandable sentences that can be readily assimilated. The form is standardized — punctuation, agreement, style, and tense are consistent and follow explicatable rules. The language of this material might be called public and it was such seemingly public language that Gertrude Stein did not write. Her audience was never a public one (which is not to say that her writing wasn’t available to each one separately) — her writing was written alone and written to be received alone. And so reading *The Making of Americans* one is bound to feel that one is reading a stranger and one never forgets that while reading it. And this can be explained by describing her language as seeming to be a private one.² Now, the problem arises, and Gertrude Stein always kept this problem in mind, how can private one be understood by another one. That is, if each one is a stranger to every other one how can anyone get to know any other one? It is this question, a problem of other minds, that makes Stein of interest to ones interested in philosophy. Stein is always describing how this thing of being understood by another one is always happening. Stein never gives her explanations in the form of answers (not acknowledging that there is a question), nor does she explain except by description of this thing happening repeatedly, and by describing her investigations into this thing. She wrote in

Descriptions of Literature that “a book naturally explains what has been the result of investigation”. And she wrote in *An Elucidation*, “If in the beginning you mention explaining, could he be angry could he really be angry that you had not explained it to him.”

So let us now investigate what it could mean to write for oneself and strangers, and what it would mean to write a private language in a public universe. Surely there is no intention to be misunderstood, though there is the acknowledgement that this undoubtedly happens.

There is something very Biblical about Stein’s style.³ In *The Making of Americans* she describes the different kinds of men and women who make up America at the time she is writing. Stein often said that a writer naturally reflects the time in which she is living. And this is what she has done in *The Making of Americans*. She describes every kind of men and women, and what makes them that particular kind: the sound that each one makes, the insistence that each one has. Each one living in his and her own time, making their own time, living in time and living time.

Stein, living and writing in her own time, describes the time in which she is living and all the kinds of people living in the time in which she is living and the history of all the kinds of people living in the time in which she living. She describes her own time without explaining why it is or how it is. She describes what makes each one a different one (what makes her a different one) — the different rhythm and time of each human being. She describes each one understanding and misunderstanding each other one. She does not explain why or how we understand one another, she describes, she is always describing, what happens — people talking to other people, living together in families, growing up together with common histories. “After all description is explanation.”⁴ She is always describing what is happening in the way that it happens. Living in her own time, she describes the time in which she is living and in so doing describes the time of all the other people living in her time.⁵ She is another one, most certainly another one, and all the time we are understanding her.

The Making of Americans is an exploration of the natural history of Americans. By tracing the history of the day to day living of the Hersland and Dehning families and the many people who form a part of their living, Stein describes the kind of men and women who make up American living and the way in which American living is lived. The book is composed of descriptions of different people and the different groups they form, the different ways of being and seeing and talking they have. From one family to the next one hears and experiences the

different words that each family uses in accordance with the way they are living and the different histories (the different visions) that each has.

It would never come to him to think of a new world. He never wanted to lose anything he ever had around him. He did not want to go to a new world. He would go, — yes to be sure it would be nice there, only it was very nice here and here he was important in religion, — and he liked his village and his shop and everything he had known all his life there, and the house they had had ever since he had married his good Martha and settled himself to be comfortable together with her, — and now they had their children. Yes, alright, perhaps, maybe she was right, there was no reason, the neighbors had all gotten so rich going to America, there was no reason they shouldn't go and get rich there, alright he would go if his Martha talked about it so much to him, alright, his Martha could fix it anyway she liked it, yes it would be nice to have all of them get rich there. He would go, yes to be sure it would be nice there, but it was very nice here and he had his religion, and he liked his village and his shop and everything he had known all his life here, and the house they had always lived in since he had married his good Martha, and they had settled to be so comfortable there and to stay there, and now they had all those good children. But yes, alright, perhaps, maybe she was right, there was no reason ... (MA, pp. 41-42)

Stein here uses the words of Mr. Hersland's "daily living", invokes Mr. Hersland's everyday way of seeing. She invokes this and lets us share in his living by describing the way in which that one individual family, that one man, actually sees going to the new world, how he uses the words, what it means to him in his daily life. She does not list the factors that led European peasants to emigrate to the New World. She does not tell us (define) what the New World was. Rather, she describes Mr. Hersland's daily talking and daily seeing of this thing, always from within the context of his everyday family life. Stein never leaves this level in *The Making of Americans*, she does not narrate the story of the Hersland family (there is no plot here). She is always letting us see her characters through their own eyes, she is always describing them in their own terms, from their point of view. She leaves the words — the concept — 'new world' in their own place in Mr. Hersland's language, just where he uses them and means them.

She neither explains nor deduces anything: putting everything before leaving everything in its place (cf. PI, §126).⁶ — Mr. Hersland's world is left as he sees it.

The Making of Americans does not have the form of a vast sociological or historical overview or narrative scheme. Stein's method (and this whole book, like *Philosophical Investigations*, is an insistence and repetition of a method) is to describe the actual and particular way that Americans go about living and talking, i.e. the way in which a word — ‘new world’, ‘religion’, ‘washing’ — is actually used “in the language game which is its original home” (PI, §116).

There were many families of, for them [the Herslands], poor queer people living near them and each one of the families of them had in them their own way of living, their own way of going on existing, of having uncertain feelings in them, or earning their daily living. (MA, p. 88)

Gertrude Stein describes the forms of life that the people share. The washing that they do

...Washing is very common, almost every one does some washing, with some it is only for cleansing, with some it is a refreshing, with some a ceremonial thing that makes them important to every one who knows them ... (MA, p. 87)

The religion that they have in them —

...Eating and sleeping are not like loving and breathing. Washing is not like eating and sleeping. Believing is like breathing and loving. Religion can be believing, it can be like breathing, it can be like loving, it can be like eating or sleeping, it can be like washing. It can be something to fill up a place when some one has lost out of them a piece that was natural for them to have in them ... (MA, p. 88)

She describes the things we do that make up our daily living, not by just naming them but by describing the use each one plays in our everyday living, the particular context that they each exist in, as part of the being of each one, as part of the history of each family, always as a part of everyday daily living. (“What we do is to bring words back ...” [PI, §16].) What she does is to bring our lives back to their everyday context, and our actions back to being a part of our daily living.

There is constant beginning over throughout *The Making of Americans*. Stein never counts on what was told earlier to justify what is presently being written. Each paragraph begins just where it ends — it doesn't *get* anywhere, prove anything — but leaves everything just as it is. Reading a paragraph one is continually reminded of the way we (Americans) do things. The reference for understanding Stein is not in looking back to earlier parts of her book but by recalling how it is that you actually experience or do what she is writing about. Explanations begin and end in the description of particular experiences of daily living. The starting point in constantly beginning again — what has to be accepted — is the form of the world as seen by us (*lebensformen*). (Cf. PI, p. 226.) Here there is always insisting that we see our lives on their most daily level. Reading *The Making of Americans* one wonders at the depth of every small act, every gesture and word we use, in our everyday daily living. Surely there are few writers in this century who can bring forward in us the absolute wonder at our daily lives (and where the meaning in them is to be found) as Gertrude Stein does when she describes washing. Except if we think of Wittgenstein describing calculating (PI, §234), or knowing or interpreting.

Stein saw *The Making of Americans* as “a description of learning to listen to all the repeating that every one always is making of the whole of them” (MA, p. 219). Everybody is always repeating things — a person shaves in the same way every morning, says hello to the cat with the same particular kind of smile, hands his ticket to the bus driver with the same gesture, eats an apple pie in his own way, repeats the same characteristic phrases and intonations over and again. We express a certain kind of joy with a particular expression of our face and repeat this expression often so that those who know us recognize it and understand it. There are many different ways of expressing joy — “there are many different kinds of men and women”. Each one repeats her and his joy in a particular fashion, just as each one “always (is) repeating the whole of their being, the whole nature in them” (MA, p. 213). It is the repetition that is always coming out of a person that lets us say something “sounds like her”.⁷ It is a person's repeating that enables us to recognize him as that one, that reminds us of him. — That makes a particular person come to mind when you hear one of the things they repeatedly say in a different context (i.e. from another person):

Each one has it to say of each one he is like such a one I see it in him, every one has it to say of each one she is like some one else I can tell by remembering. (MA, p. 223)

Sometimes the repeating in people is annoying — as when an adolescent becomes angered at the repetitious repetition of his father (as the Hersland children were often annoyed at the habits of their father). Sometimes the repeating in people is puzzling, as when one hears strange turns of phrase by a foreign speaker, or when one encounters a strange prose style as in *The Making of Americans*

Very often such repetition is a reassuring and warming thing:

This is a joy to any one loving repeating when in any one repeating steadily tells over and over again the history of the complete being in them. This is a solid happy satisfaction to any one who has it in them to love repeating and completed understanding.” (MA, p. 214)

The joy and reassurance in repeating is like the feeling of hearing a piece of music that is a total expression of something to us (perhaps the sea, a bitter mood, cool) over and over — of coming to know every note and sound of it and liking more and more to hear it repeated because we feel closer and closer to it, know it better and better. The joy in repeating comes when we hear the familiar voice of a friend breaking into her characteristic hello: think of the warm and secure and close feeling there is knowing the particular sound of someone else’s voice, the look of their eyes. Mostly one has this feeling in a loving relationship such a reassuring feeling in repeating is always a loving feeling. Mostly such a feeling is found between lovers. Sometimes one finds oneself loving the repeating in everything one is able to hear repeating. So,

There is then always repeating in all living. There is then in each one always their whole being, the [bottom] nature in them. Much loving repeating has to be in a being so that one can listen to all the repeating in every one. Almost every one loves all the repeating in some one. This is now a description of loving repeating, all repeating, in every one. (MA, p. 215)

Sometimes the repeating in people is puzzling, one is unable to hear their “bottom nature” coming out in their repeating. Considering the popular charge that Stein’s “repetitious” writing was itself quite “puzzling”, it is significant that Stein does not give very much explicit attention to the question of repetition that seems puzzling. She maintains that at some time every person is understandable to another one and devotes herself to describing such coming to complete understanding of another one:

There is a certain feeling one has in one when some one is not a whole one to one even though one seems to know all the nature of that one. Such a one then is very puzzling and when sometime such a one is a whole one to one all the repeating coming out of them has meaning as part of a whole one. When some one is not a clear one to one, repeating coming out of them has not this clear relation. Then such a one is puzzling until they come to be a whole one. Then repeating coming out of them has clear meaning. (MA, p. 219)

This describes, for instance, the experience of hearing atonal music for the first time — the feeling of being unable to “get it” for a while even though one is well acquainted with music. In such a case one feels it is a question of the person or work being unfamiliar, that after a while one will come to an understanding of the repeating, that eventually the other one will become a “whole one” to you. And this is really a very common experience — another one first seeming strange and puzzling and then eventually coming to be very familiar and completely understandable. Indeed, this is a description of the experience of reading Stein’s prose.

The Hersland children found much of their father’s repeating to be annoying, affected, even mechanical. He seemed, to them, unreachable behind all his mannerisms. Every one has peculiarities of pronunciation (“often”), repetitions of particular phrases (“very tasty”), peculiar ways of saying hello (“helloses”) or waving goodbye, and sometimes to another all these repeated gestures and ways of performing conventions seem affected, grotesque and lifeless — false selves hiding the person’s bottom being from view. Here one feels another’s repeating to be just trappings, behavior, criteria: that although someone is exhibiting pain-behavior one can’t get through (can’t feel) his pain. But when we learn to hear another’s repeating we are able to see his or her whole nature coming out in what at first seemed mechanical mannerisms. Loving repeating is learning to see the whole of another coming out in their mannerisms — being able to know another’s pain through his pain-behavior of groaning and wincing. We know other people (their bottom being, their inner lives) through these “outer” manifestations (outward criteria) the particular way of furrowing the eyebrows in disgust or snapping fingers in impatience, each one’s own way of performing customs (each of which had conventional — “outer” — criteria). — We learn of other’s inner lives by hearing their outer repeating. This is not to say, however, that we know the other just by identifying his mannerisms, the mechanisms that are the criteria for a particular mannerism: it is necessary to feel the individual insistence coming out through

these mechanisms, embodied in them. As Wittgenstein has it, “An ‘inner process’ stands in need of outward criteria” (PI, §580).⁸ One learns to know another person, to love her and feel her bottom being “fill up all inside” one, by realizing that all her nature is coming out in her everyday, customary repeating, in every meeting of convention, in the particular insistence with which each one follows every rule. — What cannot be done is to split the criteria from what they are an expression of. Stein never for a moment countenances such dualism. She is always reminding us that we are always knowing, loving, caring, hearing, responding, and living.

And yet, still, at times, in other contexts, one never stops being puzzled by the repeating of another person, one never hears the bottom nature coming out of him, one never feels him as a whole one. Such a person might seem an enigma, in that one feels out of tune with him — we are unable to find ourselves in him (cf. PI, p. 223). In some cases we can explain this by saying that he comes from another place, that although we cannot understand him, another people surely can. In other cases still the puzzling is more troubling. Here we feel that the person’s repeating does not express the being in them, that their repeating is a kind of faking and pretending. Imagine, for instance, a situation in which someone is always trying to sell you some thing and though you have heard her talking and repeating many times you never feel her as another person talking to you — a “whole one” — you never come to a complete understanding of the bottom being in her. In such a situation one finds another puzzling, even dishonest or faking. But, insists Stein, one can find another context, say the way of loving this saleswoman has — “which makes a whole one of such a one long enough to hear the whole repeating in such a one as a complete one by some one” (MA, p. 220). That is, though we always see this person in a context in which she does not seem a whole one, it is possible that in a different context (with a change of aspect) we can come to a complete understanding of her as a whole one.

As far as the puzzling repeating Stein herself does, perhaps it can best be said that —

Some are puzzling a long time, almost every one is puzzling, more or less puzzling to everyone, mostly everyone is puzzling to me, sometimes mostly everyone is puzzling to me, sometime mostly every one comes to be a whole one to me. (MA, p. 229)

Stein insists that we do not need to remain in skeptical puzzlement over whether we can know another person (another mind), even while admitting that sometimes other people are puzzling.

(Even that everyone is sometimes puzzling.) She insists that we can come to a complete understanding of other ones, that we can come to know them. (Making *The Making of Americans* an epistemological investigation describing the meaning of ‘knowing’, i.e., “I know them [kinds of men and woman] so well inside me, repeating in them has so much meaning to knowing” MA, p. 217.) She asserts that we can have a complete and sure knowledge of another person by describing how it is that this happens, how human beings do know other human beings, by describing the human conditions for knowledge. And this is how *The Making of Americans* is a manual of instruction to lead us from philosophical puzzlement — “a description of learning to listen to all the repeating that everyone is always making”.

One is at first puzzled by Stein’s prose. Reading it one encounters continual repetition of the same kinds of phrases. One comes to understand the writing not be an exposition or clarification of what these phrases mean but by their (the phrase) repeated repetition, by their use in different contexts, by becoming more and more familiar with the sound and shape of them. One learns to understand Stein’s prose more and more deeply in just the way Martha Hersland learns to understand the life around her more and more — by listening to the repeating that is all around her, by repeating it for herself, by getting more and more in the form of life that she is continually a part of.

Stein, then, is initiating us into a process of knowing; or rather reminding us of how we do know. She does this through the form of her prose by having the reader come to know her characters by learning to hear their repetition, by becoming familiar with the way they have of speaking, the way they have of “repeating the whole of them, the bottom nature of their being.” One is able to understand these characters and they each other and each of us Stein because there is (“bottom being is”) a shared and “natural way of winning, loving, fighting, working, thinking, writing” in each one and in every one. (Indeed here are all the complexities of related things Wittgenstein calls a “form of life”.) “This is then a universal grouping, always everywhere with every education there are the same kinds of them” (MA, p. 228).

One is able to understand the repeating in others because one learns together with them what it is to call and what it is to be afraid, or hurt, or knowing, because one shares with them common routes of understanding, of language (*lebensform*). The description of coming to a complete understanding of another person is that —

...each one is sometime a whole one to me, is a whole one inside me, each one then sometimes gives to me a sense of being filled up inside me with that one, then a whole one inside me.” (MA, p. 221)

The condition set here for knowledge of another person is that I must be able to integrate him or her into my own way of understanding (my own time) (“inside me”) and this necessitates that in our bottom being we share natural ways of loving, thinking, fighting, smiling “everything then we do in living...eating, pleasing, smoking, scolding, drinking, dancing, ... working, walking, talking, laughing, sleeping, suffering, joking — ” (MA, p. 222) everything that we say we do. And this also entails that not everything counts as a natural way of loving or smiling.

Each person does their repeating in a particular way — each has a certain smile, a slightly different method of paying for the bus, a particular way of singing or prose writing. But, again, this is not to say that *anything* counts for smiling or prose writing. Gestures that do not count for smiling (say, moving your lips from side to side) make for “puzzling” repeating of the kind that seems enigmatic. But a person might move his lips in such a way as to imitate the mechanisms of smiling and we still would not ordinarily call it smiling — feeling it was only the trappings of a smile. For what counts as smiling is not simply that one has copied how other people smile (as if one were copying a strange gesture of another tribe). To learn to smile is to be able to smile for oneself — to have the smile “inside” oneself.

Similarly, to recognize a smile requires that one has smiled oneself and that one has a sense of what pretending to smile is like.⁹ — That one is able to understand it “inside” oneself. The obscurity of this last phrase will perhaps be lessened on considering the example of a smile that strikes us as the outer trappings of a smile — a false or faked smile. This judgment could not come from memorizing an explicit external rule as to what a smile looks like. There could be no manual from which someone could learn the context of a fake smile so as to recognize this aspect of a physical gesture. And yet we are all sure and agree that such and such an administration is always putting on a fake smile. Someone who knew only the facial mechanisms of a smile — a very foreign anthropologist who had read about it in a handbook — would, unlike us, be unable to make this judgment.

So, again, one is at first puzzled by Stein’s prose, eventually one learns to love her repeating in it, and then even to repeat her repeating. Loving her repeating is the reader’s experience while he is learning what it means to love repeating. Often, one is tempted (and

succumbs) to repeating her repeating, but in so doing one ceases to repeat for oneself, to be expressing one's own particular nature in one's own voice. It is a hard thing not to speak in another's voice, one so often feels drowned in the repeating of others since all our words are learned listening to the repeating of others. One speaks with a language that is given, that is held in common, and that makes it seem very hard to speak for oneself and to know what to say for oneself. — Though Gertrude Stein always is repeating her prose, her prose can never be repeated.

Notes

1. Gertrude Stein, *The Making of Americans* (New York: Something Else Press, 1966). All references preceded by “MA” are from *The Making of Americans*, abridged version (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1934 & 1962).
2. Wittgenstein uses the expression “private language” to mean one which cannot be understood by anyone else. Here I say “seeming to be ...”: stay to see the deception.
3. Like *The Making of Americans*, the Bible is a generational chronicle that by its form sets down the ways of life — the manners, morals, beliefs, conventions, agreements (the form of life) — of the people from which it comes. One might say the Bible described the shared time of those then living.
4. Stein, “The Gradual Making of *The Making of Americans*” in Patricia Meyerowitz, ed., *Writings and Lectures 1911-1945*, p. 88.
5. For Stein, time is what individuates each person from each other (each is living in his “own time”), but time is simultaneously shared. We all take our own time, so to say, but at the same time we live in the same times. (Compare with the discussion, in the last section, of Stein’s “‘grammatical’ exploration of the limits of meaning” and “the particular grammar of each one”.)

6. All references preceded by “PI” are from *Philosophical Investigations*, tr. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1958). Sections from Part 1 are indicated by a “§” before the section number; references to part 2 are given by page numbers.

7. It is by a person’s repeating that we recognize him or her. Compare Austin’s account in “Other Minds”: Recognizing “consists in seeing, or otherwise sensing, a feature or features that we are sure are similar to something noted (and usually named) before, on some earlier occasion in our experience. ... When I say I can tell the bird ‘from its red head’, or that I know a friend ‘by his nose’, I imply that there is something peculiar about the red head or the nose, something peculiar to goldfinches or to him, by which you can (always) tell them or him.” — J. L. Austin
Philosophical Papers (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1961), pp. 52-53.

It might, of course, be claimed that it is just the repeating that someone does that is hiding him; that it is exactly so repetitious as to seem contrived, or robot-like; that far from revealing it is blocking; that it is just this invariant quality that would make a person seem unhuman or mechanical or concealing. One might then claim that it is variation that reveals: the fact that people do not just repeat themselves but do different kinds of things, smile in different ways, are indeterminably moody, prone to erratic behavior; that there are no fixed boundaries that make a person what he is, that his behavior is unchartable; that it is just this variation that makes each one “a real one”. But, in Stein’s idiom, “Each one is of a kind of men and women.” Within the variety of a person’s behavior there are continuities that can be discerned, significant patterns that can be recognized, that make each one the *kind* of one that he or she is. That is, one recognizes (comes to know) someone by the *particular* variety of his repeating, by hearing all the varying in his repeating and the repeating in his varying.

It is not just random variety that could make someone knowable, recognizable as that one. Rather, it is variety within a particular locus of significance, especially one which has a discernible continuity that gives it a continuous identity through variations and change. Thus, given a set of finite elements that appear in varying conjunctions in a series, one might determine a significant pattern of reoccurrence that allowed one to identify the series as one continuous (though open ended) function. Even though the elements varied in each instance of the series, one would be able to recognize a particular repeating pattern that related all the instances. One might say it is the *kind* of variety that is repeated.

(The example of modernist art in the last twenty years is a striking one. I am thinking of the use of series to establish automatisms within which only slight variations [often of a single element] are used to differentiate one instance of the series from another. What is remarkable is that these artists are able to create whole different worlds by minimal variation of a finitely small number of elements, because of the establishment of an underlying “repeating” for the series as a whole. And it is this underlying repeating that establishes the identity of the artist in all the different works. — I am especially thinking of Ad Reinhardt and Barrett Newman. See Stanley Cavell’s *The World Viewed* [New York: The Viking Press, 1971], particularly chapter 14, “Automatisms”.)

It is not that people do just the *same* things in the *same* way, but that everything someone does is characteristic of that one, can remind us of him. In Wittgenstein’s phrase, there are “family resemblances” in all his repeating. (See PI, §66-§68.) Repeating does not entail that it be “everywhere circumscribed” by boundaries. Recognizing the continuity is finding something similar about the given instances of a series. (Cf., PI, §72.) But the similarity in no way excludes variety; it is not, for instance, describable by a definition or derivable from a rule. We relate one instance of the series to another by finding it characteristic of that person, by recognizing the family resemblance. And this does not entail that there is something in *common* about the instances (the repeating, the behavior), but rather that there is a “complicated network of similarity, overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarity, sometimes similarity of details.” One might say, the essence of the series (or the personality) does not lie *behind* its instances (behavior, gestures) but is coincident with them. (See note five to Composition Three, below.) There is, then, no manual or rule book that can teach one to recognize the relationship of the instances. Seeing the continuity unfolding in the series “require a new decision at every stage” (PI, §186). Indeed, there is nothing to necessitate, logically or otherwise, that a pattern will be discerned: the series may strike as completely random variety. Stein’s claim is that she can find a family resemblance in all the behavior of a given person, that she can make his repeating significant, that all of him is coming out in his “outer repeating”. No doubt it is an act of faith.

Stein’s vision is of repeating. Her claim is that recognizing the continuity in a person’s behavior (gestures, actions, speech) is knowing that person. Surely this is not meant to exclude the unchartable, undefinable variety of a person’s character or behavior (the variety in his

repeating and the repeating in his variation). Rather it is meant to assert that significance can be found in this variation; that by recognizing someone as that one we come to know him.

8. There is much current philosophical debate on what Wittgenstein means by “criteria”. I agree most fully with Stanley Cavell’s account in *The Claim to Rationality* (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard, 1962) and Albritton’s description of Wittgenstein’s usage in “On Wittgenstein’s Use of the Term ‘Criterion’” in *Wittgenstein: The Philosophical Investigations*, edited by George Pitcher. See also W. Gregory Lycan’s “Noninductive Evidence: Recent Work on Wittgenstein’s ‘Criterion’” (*American Philosophical Quarterly*, April 1971) for an encyclopaedic account of current opinion on the question.

I use “criteria” to mean those things (gestures, behavior, indications, manifestations) by which we recognize or identify something as that thing. Thus, screaming, howling and crying are criteria of pain; and the farthest distance thrown is the criterion for winning a javelin contest. More precisely, closely paraphrasing Albritton:

1. Criteria explain how I know. The criterion of x is what is called x.
2. To be a criterion of x is just to be (what is called) x (in certain circumstances).
3. A criterion for a given thing being so is something that can show by its presence that it is so and by its absence that it cannot be so.
4. The criteria entail that anyone who is aware that the man is behaving in this manner (howling, etc.), under particular circumstances, is justified in saying that he is in pain.

The philosophical question about criteria involves determining what is the (logical) relation between pain-behavior (the criteria) and the pain itself — the public “repeating” and the private, inner “bottom being”. I mean to reject the three following accounts of criteria, though of course a major effort of this paper is to explore the ontological status of the claims. It should first be noted that a common feature of these accounts is contending with a picture of criteria as, somehow, “outer signs” that stand for (mean, refer to, represent) “inner processes”.

(1) Some Wittgensteinians claim that the outer criteria, when “satisfied”, indicate the presence of the inner process (i.e. the existence of the pain). In other words, they hold that it is a “necessary truth that mental state M accompanies M-behavior,...in the typical case” (Lycan, p. 113). A major difficulty with this view is thinking the pain-behavior *accompanies* the pain. Wittgenstein explicitly rejects this picture by insisting that one is seen via the other. And, indeed,

this is the picture I am rejecting when I discuss “seeing as” and “interpretation” in the next section. Following Cavell’s account, I would emphasize that criteria do not indicate the *existence* of anything. They are what we “go on”, our grounds. They don’t *refer* to anything outside themselves. They are not signs that indicate the presence of some inner sensation or feeling or experience; they do not point us to anywhere else. — No doubt such a view allows for “exotic reversals” such that what once counted as criteria for, say, a toothache might, in some future time, no longer count. But this does not prevent knowledge; it is part of the description of the human conditions for knowledge.

(2) Behaviorists, often claiming to follow Wittgenstein’s text, claim that criteria are operational definitions by which we determine (or agree) to say certain behavior indicates pain. “Inner process” is rejected as a mirage, while behavior is asserted to be all that is knowable. Criteria of pain allow us to claim knowledge of the other’s pain because such is the rule of language; consideration of the personal experience of pain drops out of consideration as irrelevant. Wittgenstein maintains that our mental vocabulary does not refer to inner acts and states. It is not so much that he denies the existence of private experience as that he denies that they could serve as criteria for the employment of mental words. ... To say someone is in a given mental state is to say ... that he is doing or disposed to do any of a large collection of publicly observable things. [A mental word is not] the name of any kind of private thing.” (A. M. Quint in the Pitcher anthology, pp. 17-18.) — But what Wittgenstein is rejecting is rather the false picture of “outer” and “inner” that is at the root of saying outer criteria *refer to* inner sensations, that one is somehow surrogate for the other. His view does not entail that everything but observed behavior (outer manifestations) is a fiction; one might just as well say that everything but the inner experience is a fiction. Behaviorism goes wrong because it essentially accepts the “inner/outer” picture and merely rejects the “inner”, leaving an empty shell of behavior isolated criteria that are no more than trappings. “If I speak of a fiction,” Wittgenstein writes, “then it is of a *grammatical* fiction.” (PI, §307) “Inner” and “outer” are directions of relativity, much in the same way “above” and “below” are. (Cf. PI, §351.) I feel my pain from the inside out; you see it from the outside in. “And is the pain itself outside or inside?” The problem is in the question. The best picture of a man in pain is his groaning and wincing: “The human body is the best picture of the human soul.” (PI, p. 178.)

(3) The private language argument is the flip side of the coin from behaviorism. Here, the inner state is given the epistemological ascendancy over the behavior. I can only know my own pain. The criteria of pain do not necessarily refer to the same sensation in different people. Thus, to recognize (or identify) by criteria cannot give us knowledge of the other's pain; it can only tell us about his behavior. As a result, criteria and behavior are seen as essentially different from the sensation itself (i.e., the inner process or inner feeling). "The result is the idea that anyone who says anything about his sensation is saying something he alone can understand" (John Cook in "Wittgenstein on Privacy" in the Pitcher anthology). In the behaviorist view, all that can be known — all there is to be known — is the pain-behavior. But here it is asserted that knowing the criteria (the pain-behavior) is not enough to give us knowledge of the pain.

These three arguments are the main interlocutors of my text; I do not restate my critique here. — Let me just add: to *recognize* by criteria that another is in pain is sufficient to *know* she is in pain. It is, no doubt, a matter of convention and judgment, but this does not exclude knowledge and certainty. Neither does knowledge logically preclude doubt: what I know now I may doubt tomorrow. Criteria will sometimes seem inadequate for knowledge; but there is nothing to be done about this — it is not, for instance a problem of the analysis of knowledge. For when we do know it is only *through* these same criteria. Wittgenstein does not deny skepticism by securing knowledge with a logical certainty; rather he puts skepticism in its place by describing the conditions in which we say and mean we know.

9. I take this to have a similar sense to Austin's view that to know another person is angry requires "experience...of the emotion or feeling concerned. ... In order to know what you are feeling, I must apparently be able to imagine (guess, understand, appreciate) what you're feeling. It seems that more is demanded than that I shall have learned to discriminate displays of anger in others; *I must also have been angry myself*" (italics added). — Austin, *Philosophical Papers*, p. 72.

10. This is certainly not to say that a smile is the expression of something inner, namely joy, and that one knows another's joy by inferring that when she smiles it is analogous to when you smile. The Argument from Analogy is empty because it irresponsibly generalized from the one case of one's own joy. (Cf. PI, §293.) One learns from and with others to express certain feelings in

certain situations by smiling, to call this expression a smile, to say of another that she looks joyful. Neither the smile or the joy is something “inner” or “outer”.

“But you will surely admit that there is a difference between a smile accompanied by joy and smile without any joy.” — Admit it? What greater difference could there be? ... What we deny is that the picture of the inner process gives us the correct use of the word joy. (Paraphrased from PI, §304-§305.)

According to Wittgenstein, recognizing a genuine instance of a smile, as opposed to a pretend smile, requires that one “gets a nose for it”. This is just the kind of case that cannot be ostensively taught and that relies on sensing the context. For smiling and being joyful are part of our shared way of life and have as little sense to oneself (as private sensations and experiences) as they do as isolated instances of behavior (behaviorism). To know another’s smile is to speak his language, to be a part of his world.

— “How do words *refer* to sensations? ... How is the connexion between the name and the thing named set up? This question is the same as: how does a human being learn the names of sensation? — the word ‘pain’ for example. Here is one possibility: words are connected with the primitive, the natural, expressions of the sensation and used in their place. A child has hurt himself and he cries; and then adults talk to him and teach him explanations and, later, sentences. They teach the child new pain-behavior...The verbal expression of pain replaces crying and does not describe it” (PI, §244). Wittgenstein is here combatting the view that criteria are only definitions we impose on a situation — a picture that comes from thinking of the formal criteria we explicate for the winning of a javelin throwing contest or travelling fellowship. For Wittgenstein, criteria are to be found in the situation, are part of our way of seeing (interpreting) what something is. For since language is “agreement in judgment” (§242), valuation is not metaphysically different from “objective” identification, not something that occurs after, or outside, such identification. Criteria are identifications, but not *mere* namings.

TWO:**WITTGENSTEIN AND GERTRUDE STEIN**

I dunno he was just very strange, he wanted, he talked with me very clearly and insisting — like intensely looking right at me and at great length but smiling about the simplest commonplace subjects but we both knew we meant everything else that we said — you know life — actually it was about the tunnels, the Stockton Street tunnel and the one they just built on Broadway, that's the one we talked of the most, but as we talked this great electrical current of real understanding passed between us and I could feel the other levels the infinite number of them of every intonation in his speech and mine and the world of meaning in every *word* — I'd never realized before how much is *happening* all the time, and people *know* it — in their eyes they show it, they *refuse* to show it by any other — I stayed a very long time.”

— Jack Kerouac, *The Subterraneans*

It is not hard to imagine that the description of knowing another mind that I have attributed to Stein might, at times, seem inadequate. Stein's account seems to count not only on my being able

to identify the gestures of another (the criteria that ostensibly make up his repeating) but also on my being able to feel the whole of the other one coming out in these gestures.

— How do I know someone else likes me?¹ Given, that he did all the right things to acknowledge he liked me — he smiled, looked right at me, even said as much. But how do I know, how can I be certain? Can't I be wrong? Do I ever really know another likes me, I can never feel his liking? I can't help thinking that I could be misunderstanding all these gestures, that maybe I'm being put on, that all his reassuring is just faking repeating. I identify all the criteria for reassuring repeating but find myself unable to go from this reassuring behavior to feeling reassured. I think that I do not know what he is feeling, whether he is liking me or disliking me. I am not knowing whether he is understanding what I am saying to him, hearing all the repeating coming out of me, or whether he is puzzled by my repeating, even thinks it faking or mechanical. All the appropriate expressions of reassurance have been given, but I keep thinking he really doesn't like me. Always I am remembering times when this problem did not come up, when it didn't even occur to me that another shouldn't like me. And so I want to find a method that will let me know for sure whether he likes me, that will bring me back to knowing the other person. I want a way of knowing whether his reassuring is real or faking repeating. There must be a method of understanding that won't be open to my misinterpretation — there must be a more complete analysis of knowing that will not give out.

Even more disturbing is the doubt this casts on my ability to know the other at any time. If there can be a doubt, even when I do not doubt I think that I am prohibited from ever saying I know. For all I can really be certain of are the gestures of reassurance but these signs alone seem dead — they do not produce the other's feeling. “The gesture — we should like to say — *tries* to portray, but cannot do it” (PI, §434). What seems intolerable is that an analysis of knowledge should leave such an ambiguity. If I know then it should be certain that I can't be wrong, certain that I won't misinterpret being put on for reassurance and liking. I must be able to refine the other's repeating to one clear and distinct aspect.

We want that there can't be any vagueness. ... The idea absorbs us that the ideal ‘must’ be found in reality. Meanwhile we do not yet see *how* it occurs there, nor do we understand the nature of this must. We think it must be in reality for we think we already see it there.” (PI, §101)

We feel there ‘must’ be a way because we think we need one. We want a procedure to get us all the way to the other’s feeling (or pain, or joy) for we feel there must be something we can do, some rule we can follow, when all the repeating around us seems distant and hollow, when the gestures of reassurance come off as empty (or the fellow howling in pain doesn’t seem to present to us). We want to be able to say, “this fellow shook my hand warmly, smiled at me, said he’d like to see me again, so therefore I know he likes me … even if I can’t get it up in myself to feel his reassurances and respond to them.” (Or: “He’s howling, his eyes are growing wild, his body is trembling, so therefore I know he’s in pain even if he seems an automaton, even if I can’t respond to his pain in any way.”) And herein lies “the hardness of the logical must” (PI, §137). We feel there must be a rule we can fall back upon so that we can possess the knowledge when all the criteria for the knowledge are present. As if knowledge of another’s liking (or pain) could be possessed like a hamburger. We suppose the grammar of knowing someone likes you (or, in the other case of knowing someone is in pain) is based on the model ‘object and designation’. (Cf., PI, §293.) That is, we confuse the language-game of identifying gestures (which we might play while doing theater improvisations: “he’s doing a smile”, “now a wince”, “now a scowl”) with knowing whether someone likes you. But these are different language games: it will not do to confuse them.

It is like the relation: physical object-sense-impressions. Here we have two different language games and a complicated relation between them. — If you try to reduce these relations to a *simple* formula you go wrong. (PI, p.180)

We want to know if he likes us or if he doesn’t and as a result we think the answer is a fact, a piece of information, that we can have on command.

One is inclined to say: “Either it is raining, or it isn’t — how I know, how the information has reached me is another matter.” But then let us put the question like this: What do I call “information that it is raining”? (Or have I only information of this information too?) And what gives this ‘information’ the character of information about something? Doesn’t the form of our expression mislead us here? For isn’t it a misleading metaphor to say: “My eyes give me the information that there is a chair over there”? (PI, §356)

Wittgenstein is insisting that we cannot isolate the knowledge from the *way* in which we know, the word *know*’s use in a particular context: that knowing if another likes or understands you is

not a process in which something registers in your brain (“a mental activity”) but a continuously present relationship.

“But when I imagine something, something surely happens!” ... We are so much accustomed to communication through language, in conversation, that it looks to us as if the whole point of communication lay in this: someone else grasps the sense of my words — which is something mental: he as it were takes it into his own mind. If he does something further with it as well, that is no part of the immediate purpose of language.

(PI, §363)

But knowing involves responding. To know I am liked by someone is inseparable from feeling comfortable with that person, for carrying on the current conversation, from taking reassurance from whatever he says. — Just as to know someone is in pain entails being upset or shocked or doing first-aid or feeling indifferent or something. The knowing cannot be reduced to just mental activity so that we “feel by means of it we had caught reality in our net” (PI, §428). All that we have “caught” is the name of the gestures, the behavior, the criteria. But we feel reassuring repeating and we are always being reassured by it — not by the words or gestures *alone* but by the meaning that is always coming out of them.²

Perhaps this will be brought out better if a particular context is given. Flo and Ru are talking late at night:

Flo: Ru

Ru: Yes

Flo: If I ask you something will you promise to tell the truth?

Ru: What?

Flo: Well I wanted to know if you really liked me.

Ru: No, actually I’m only interested in learning what you know about Wittgenstein.

Flo: Come on, Ru, tell me.

Ru: And I’m beginning to think you don’t know very much about Wittgenstein anyways.

Flo: Look, I’m serious, it won’t hurt you to tell me.

Ru: I told you — I really don’t think you’re very nice — frankly, I think you’re too...

Flo: I’m not kidding...

Ru: — dull, you don't have any sense of irony.

Flo: But I'm worried.

Ru: You know what?

Flo: No.

Ru: You're too stupid for me.³

Ru's words alone are ambiguous — they can be taken ironically as reassurance or "literally" as rejection, or perhaps seem obscure. So we see the meaning "now as one thing, now as another. — So we interpret it, and *see* it as we *interpret* it" (PI, p. 193). If Flo analyzes the *evidence* the next morning in order to be certain about what was meant she will find that by themselves the words can tell her nothing — or may even mislead her. "Every sign *alone* seems dead...." (PI, §432.) Here we see what Wittgenstein refers to as a seeming "gulf" between the words and our understanding of them. And so it looks as if what Ru really meant to say remained unexpressed, "as if the ultimate thing sought had to remain unexpressed, as there is always a gulf between an order and its execution." (PI, §433.) For even if Ru had answered directly, "Oh ya, sure I like you", Flo might be even more tempted to take this "flippant" answer as rejection — and so the gulf would remain. Of course what Flo wants is for Ru to give a completely unambiguous answer, already interpreted and narrowed down to a single aspect. Perhaps out of insecurity, Flo is making demands of knowing that cannot be met: she is trying to force the language to give her a certainty not part of the particular language-game of liking.

I can be as certain of someone else's sensations [feelings] as of any fact. But this does not make the proposition "He is much depressed," "25 X 25 = 625" and "I am sixty years old" into similar instruments. The explanation suggests itself that certainty is of a different *kind*. — This seems to point to a psychological difference. But the difference is logical...Am I less certain that this man is in pain than that twice two is four? — Does this show the former to be a mathematical certainty? — Mathematical certainty is not a psychological concept. The kind of certainty is the kind of language-game. (PI, p.224.).

And so it turns out that the gulf arises because Flo is putting language between the words and her understanding. She feels she doesn't know her way about, that she can't trust her own sense of what was said (her interpretation) and so she looks to a different language-game to give her assurance. But in looking at just the words and their definitions, to evidence, she is trying to

reduce understanding to a mechanism that does not count on her relation to the situation, her realization of the use of the words in context.

... How does it come about that this arrow — — — — -> *points*? Doesn't it seem to carry in it something beside itself? — "No, not the dead line on paper, only the psychical thing, the meaning, can do that." — That is both true and false. The arrow points only in the application that living being makes of it. (PI, §454)

The final responsibility for understanding what Ru has said rests on Flo, and nothing *ensures* that she will understand. She may refuse to put her feelings and instincts on the line, refuse to listen to what was meant and hear only what was said: and no matter how hard Ru tries it may be to no avail. And, of course, Flo may simply determine, perhaps unavoidably, that Ru was unintelligible to her. But again, this scene might end with Flo breaking into a smile and Ru kissing her, both going to sleep reassured and certain.

Nothing ensures that the repeating of another will "fill up inside me", that I will be able to hear all of her being coming out in her repeating. Wittgenstein's insistence falls on the realization that in attempts to secure ourselves against our feelings of uncertainty and isolation we use 'knowing' in such a way that it catches nothing at all (or only gestures and trappings). So that we miss the experience of liking or understanding or feeling or knowing another. We are bewitched by language into thinking we can separate the criteria of reassurance from the reassuring, the words from their use and meaning in a particular context. Stein is always describing how we are always knowing & liking & understanding other ones. Both of them are always reminding us that knowing another always involves listening to what they are saying, feeling their repeating, responding to what they are meaning. Stein's insistence is that we can always come to know another person and his repeating: "This is now a description of learning to listen to all of the repeating every one always is making of the whole of them" (MA, p. 219).

Remember the salesgirl all of whose repeating seemed faking. We could not make sense of the wholeness of what she was saying, we could not hear all of her being coming out in her repeating. But Stein insisted that she could make *everyone* else intelligible, that she could come to know every kind of men and women. What was required in order to make a whole one of the saleswoman was a change of aspect.⁴ We saw that the faking saleswoman was at the same time a loving person to someone. At the "dawning of this aspect" our picture of the woman changed — she looked different to us, literally different. We saw her in a new light. "So we interpret ... and

see ... as we interpret" (PI, p. 193). At first we felt separated from the other (found her repeating puzzling, did not know her): we were fixated on one of her aspects — her selling ("aspect blindness"). But then we switched aspects and the barrier that seemed to isolate us from the other disappeared. And all this took place within *our* seeing: *we* are always finally responsible for failing to make sense (know, hear) the other, — everyone can be a whole one to us.

Always one knows by knowing. Knowing is like caring, one cares only when caring. One proceeds only by proceeding. I know I am understood by knowing that I am being understood, by understanding, by continuing my conversation. How do I know someone likes me? — I just do, I hear liking repeating coming out of him, I feel his bottom being in what he is saying.

How do you know anything, well you know anything as complete knowledge as having it completely in you at the actual moment you have it. ... Knowledge then is what you know at the time at any time that you really know anything. (Narration, p. 20.)⁵

Knowing is like loving, I know by knowing just as I love by loving. I know another is in pain by knowing it. It happens. Stein is always describing this thing of knowing another person as it is always happening. Always we are knowing what Stein is saying. "I have said and anybody might say that knowledge is what you know and there is nothing more difficult to say than that knowledge is what you know." (Narration, p.16.)

Can one learn this knowledge? Yes; some can. Not however, by taking a course in it, but through 'experience'. — Can someone else be a man's teacher in this? Certainly. From time to time he gives him the right *tip*. — This is what 'learning' and 'teaching' are like here. — What one acquires here is not a technique; one learns correct judgements. There are also rules, but they do not form a system, and only experiences people can apply them right. Unlike calculating rules. (PI, p. 227.)

The *Philosophical Investigations*, like *The Making of Americans*, reminds us of how we know. No new information, no novel methods are provided. Always in reading these books we are remembering the rules we are always following. We do not have these rules stored away, or repeatable like formulas on demand. In use they come to life, all in the particular application of the rule to the particular context.

How do we know what Stein, or Wittgenstein, is saying? We can readily imagine someone who knew the definitions of all the words in a paragraph but still could not get it. And it

would be no help to him to learn additional grammatical rules. It would not, for instance, be possible for him to figure out what is meant by analyzing the sentences for syntax and structure. His problem, as Wittgenstein might put it, is that he hasn't yet got a nose for it. And there is no simple solution for giving someone a nose for something. Even after one does get the hang of what they are writing there is still no explicable rule that connects the sense of one paragraph to the next. The reader of these prose must always be making sense of what is being said (and why it is being said) for himself and herself.

“What you are saying, then, comes to this: a new insight — intuition — is needed at every step ...” It would almost be more correct to say, not that an intuition was needed at every stage, but that a new decision was needed at every stage. (PI, §186)

Knowing is always in the process of happening. That I know now doesn't mean I will continue to know. I am always renewing my knowing.

If pushed about my grounds for saying I know another likes me, I will give various descriptions: he told me, he smiled at me, wanted to see me again.... But after a while I won't be able to explain why I take these to count. When I am in a doubting mood, cold and critical the next day, these signs perhaps won't convince me. — But most times I don't doubt, I accept that I am liked and then I don't need any further reasons. For this is what I accept as a matter of course (and convention) in a particular case. “ — Well, how do I know? — If that means ‘Have I reasons?’ the answer is: my reasons will give out. And then I will act (go on), without reasons.” (PI, §482)

We have a picture of what it is like for two people to be in love. They go everywhere together, like being with each other, when they quarrel they always make up and kiss, they make love, they smile at each other, aren't self-conscious when the other is around, don't feel lonely, can really talk to each other, are happy⁶. Pick your fantasy. Then we think if we can only do all those things we'll be in love. We think that the picture is what love is, that that's what it means to be in love. Yet the picture shows only the manifestations of the love. Two people agree to get married and have children: that is the conventional expression of love. And so I think that if I get married and have kids then I will be in love. But the picture expresses gestures and customs that *by themselves* are only trappings, criteria.

A picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably. (PI, §115)

The picture describes the gestures and customs through which love comes out. But the customs by themselves are empty and take on life only when a human being uses them. This does not mean that love is an inner feeling which defies conventional expression — that is still another picture that drives one to imagine that two people in love would never marry and are always anguished and tortured by each other. Indeed, the picture of being in love that we have is compelling because people do express their loving through these conventions. (Indeed, *The Making of Americans* is all about people expressing the whole of themselves through all the middle class conventions.)

— I have a picture of being cool, so I put on sunglasses, say man a lot, get a sports car and think “so this is what being cool is.” And, of course, the picture of being liked misled me into doubting the other’s liking because I similarly realized the picture wasn’t enough. — It is as if you identified being a good man as having good politics, being kind and understanding in personal relationships, always acting thoughtfully and on good principles, etc. For isn’t this the way we do it, generally speaking?

What goes wrong is that I become bewitched by the picture into thinking it tells me all there is to know about something. I had a picture of what is looked like to be liked but the picture could not teach me the “hang of it” in a particular case. My problem arose because I had “lost my way about”. And now the picture of another’s liking (the smiling and reassuring gestures) no longer helped to find my way again but fixated my attention to one aspect: the *picture* seemed satisfied and still I did not feel liked. I imagined that the answer was hidden in the picture and so kept bringing my attention back to it, as if what it is to feel liked would reveal itself on closer inspection. (Cf. PI, §297.) But no one picture can work in all cases for all people. For the picture cannot teach me how to apply the rules for myself in a particular context.

How do I know I’m really in love or being cool (or that someone else likes me, or is in pain)? — I just do, and at other times I don’t. In every instance I have a different way of knowing. There can’t be any generalized description (any set of explicit rules) that can work for everyone all the time: no theorems or laws. (Cf., PI, §109.) The descriptions offered are meant to remind us of how we get back to knowing when we find ourselves in a particular confusion (say, being bewitched by a picture of being cool) — and any description can only apply to the

particular circumstance. (Cf., PI, §127.) Philosophy, it is said, cannot speak once for all. “There is not *a* philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, like different therapies” (PI, §133).

But to say that a generalized description of being cool (shades, “man”, sportscar) does not determine how to be cool in a particular situation does not deny that one of the ways one learns to be cool is by noting these features and imitating them. But imitating the gestures is not enough to make us cool — because if I’m really cool I’ll find new ways of expressing it. What we learn from the (paradigm) picture (the way in which we follow the rule) is by getting the hang of being cool. Once we do get the hang we don’t need to copy the exact gestures and features of the picture.

Always in following rules we are relying on the way we take them to apply, to mean something, in a particular context: we interpret what they mean for ourselves and have only our sense of the situation to go on. It is not enough just to mimic every last details of the picture, to follow a rule as though we were doing a calculating problem: each of us expresses the convention as she or he understands it. — This is *not* to say we do not express ourselves (or follow rules) conventionally but to describe what conventional expression is.

The conventions don’t *tell me* what to do, they don’t convey information to me like an order to be executed. My way of understanding the conventional expression of another’s liking is not something that accompanies the gestures, as it were “side-by-side” with them.⁷ The conventions are nothing except insofar as I take them to have meaning and give them meaning in use. When I am reassuring someone that I like him I do not consult a picture (a rule book) and mimic the gestures it, as it were, prescribes for me. *That* would not be very reassuring. No, I have my own way to reassure someone and it depends on the person and the situation. Sometimes I may violate the conventional picture, say by kidding him; usually, I will transform it so that I can make it work for me. And this is the conventional way to follow a rule (a description of the language-game as it is played).

What reasons have I to believe that my sense of the situation is enough to make myself knowing? — Well, it happens, I don’t doubt, that’s the way I do it ... My chain of reasons will some come to an end. Others may refuse to understand, refuse to accept my reassurances for the “very simple reason...that they do not have to accept it for any reason” (“Composition as Explanation”).⁸

All the conventions and rules are in us, are learned by us, and we are always expressing them. Each one has a different way of understanding each rule and meeting each convention. We are always making public conventions come to life by expressing what each of us separately means through them. I follow a rule by following it in my own way. I try to express what I experience alone, interpret for myself, through a language that is held in common.

No one is ahead of his time, it is only that the particular variety of creating his time is the one that his contemporaries who are also creating their own time refuse to accept. And they refuse to accept it for a very simple reason and that is that they do not have to accept it for any reason. (“Composition as Explanation”)

— Anything different at first seems strange. But if we give of our time we may find that through the strangeness we can hear each one fulfilling the same conventions and following the same rules as we are.

Every instance of knowing or liking or being cool or prose writing or loving or saying hello is particular and different. These are all conventional things to do but I must get the hang of them for myself, have my own way of understanding and expressing these conventions. There is something we all do called prose writing, but I have my own way of prose writing. I do not say that I know only from my own case how to write prose — or how to love or like or know. For these are public conventions of the language and form of life through which I see the world (that make up my world). They have no meaning, so to say, just to me. I learned how to write, the rules and conventions for prose writing, from other people — I have learned to identify certain things as sentences and paragraphs and essays. But my way of expressing myself in writing may not have exactly the same manifestations (feature structure) as those whom I learned writing from. I learned to write by getting the hang of writing; what I understand as prose writing (what I take as and interpret to be good writing) and how I write may not conform exactly to the conventional (paradigm) picture.⁹

Now the few who make writing as it is made and it is to be remarked that the most decided of them are those that are prepared by preparing, are prepared just as the world around them is prepared and is preparing to do it in this way and so if you do not mind I will again tell you how it happens. Naturally one does not know how it happened until it is well over beginning happening. (“Composition as Explanation”, p. 24.)

The whole world is in us and is always coming out from us, in everything we say and all that we do. Everything we know we know for ourselves in our own way. Knowing in our own way, interpreting what is meant, is not something that goes on “side-by-side” with what is publicly or officially known: outside the way we know there are no facts. Facts are things we know each in our own way. The way I know what I know is not separable from what I know.

It would have made as little sense for me to say “Now I am seeing it as...” as to say at the sight of a knife and fork “Now I am seeing this as a knife and fork.” This expression would not be understood — Any more than: “Now it’s a fork” or “It can be a fork too”. One doesn’t ‘*take*’ what one knows as cutlery at a meal *for* cutlery any more than one ordinarily tries to move one’s mouth as one eats or aims at moving it. (PI, p. 195)

To come to know something is to come to know it inside oneself, to know it for oneself. For any one, a thing is what it has come to be in one.

In writing philosophy or music or prose one is not simply reporting facts that have been gathered or determined and are not ready to be written. That would be similar to what a newspaperman does in reporting. What needs to be said in writing is the particular way of knowing or liking some particular thing (say the way I have of liking Stein).

Anybody can be interested in the story of a crime because no matter how often witnesses tell the same story the insistence is different. That is what makes life that the insistence is different, no matter how often you tell the same story if there is anything alive in the telling the emphasis is different. It has to be, anybody can know that. (“Portraits and Repetition”, p. 100)¹⁰

And so in writing we are interested in the particular insistence of another’s knowing, or caring, or laughing, or paying for the bus, or writing. The particular way they have of repeating.

Wittgenstein describes the particular way he knows, sees, interprets, calculates ... He never responds to us, he always describes how he sees something in the way he sees it. This is why his writing is so often confusing in the way a newspaper article isn’t. We find ourselves unable to get the hang of what he is saying. And still we know that he is doing everything possible to make himself understood, for nothing is hidden.¹¹ Sometimes he doesn’t. People misunderstand. Sometimes nothing can be done about that.

The “danger lies in making fine distinctions” (PI, p. 200), in attempting to sort out all possible interpretations and prune the writing down to a single aspect. This *attempt* might be seen as one of trying to avoid misinterpretation. (Nothing ventured, nothing lost.)

I am writing for myself and strangers. Each one is a real one to me. Each one is another one too to me. ... I do this for my own sake and for the sake of those who know I know it that they look like other ones, that they are separate and yet always repeated. (MA, p. 211)

I am responsible to others for being intelligible and listening to what they say. I am responsible to myself for saying what I mean to say in the way I mean to say it. — I am always knowing others.

Notes

1. I might ask instead, “How do I know another is in pain?” so as to make the investigation that follows conform more closely with the current philosophical discussion. I have not because I wish to conform to an even deeper necessity in writing philosophy (one that is always present in the *Investigations*), namely that all the questions asked come from one’s own temptations. It is too easy to tell what other people are doing wrong. — As if by treating your own problems you are not speaking as directly as you can to others. The question I ask here, “How do I know another likes me?” is meant to serve as a means for investigating my knowledge of other minds. It may be argued that one can never *know* another’s liking since it seems to involve a kind of prediction not called for, say, in knowing another’s pain. But ordinarily we do ask how we know to mean “how can I tell?” or “how can I be sure?” And if someone denies this knowledge we might well say, “But you *do* know I like you.” And often we really would.

The temptations described here will, no doubt, strike some as somewhat paranoid — unfounded fears that ordinary people do not have. This is natural since they are, necessarily, descriptions of my own ways of being estranged and out of it, — and another’s alienation often feels less imminent than one’s own. But we all feel like strangers, from time to time, unable to find our way over paths we have walked all our lives. And finding our way again is often not so easy, though we are managing to do it all the time.

2. The meaning is not something that accompanies the gestures, as it were “side by side” with them. The relation is rather one via the other, each inseparable from the other. Indeed, the problem arises because we talk as if we could separate them. (See note five for references.)
3. Stein’s first novel, *QED* (later published as *Things As They Are*) centers around a young woman’s failure to understand and respond to her first lover. Adelle finds that her “thinking” gets in the way of her knowing if she really cares for Helen and if Helen cares for her. “I hope some day to find a morality that can stand up to the wear and tear of real desire to take the place of the nice one I have lost.” Stein’s concern is with the possibilities of relationship. Here, she describes the two women fixated by each other’s separateness. They refuse to yield to each other and are unable to reach out to each other. “‘Won’t you ever learn that it is the facts that tell.’ Adelle laughed ruefully. ‘But you forget,’ she said, ‘that there are many facts and it isn’t easy to know just what they tell’” (p. 86, *Things As They Are* [Pawlet, Vermont: The Banyan Press, 1950], written in 1903).
4. I am relying in this paragraph on Wittgenstein’s language in Part Two, section xi. (PI, pp. 193-229.)
5. *Narration* by Gertrude Stein (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969).
“(A whole cloud of philosophy condensed into a drop of grammar.)” (PI, p. 222)
6. I am thinking here of that vision of love made a common fantasy for one generation by the AM hits in the fifties and brought to a head with the early Beatles. Here, the picture was literally pounded in; we let these sounds dictate our love and tell us when love was real. And when one’s private isolation superseded the reassurance of such public fantasies, this traditional picture so thoroughly shattered as to thereafter seem patently ludicrous, even repelling. Remarkably, the Beatles, who if nothing else continually and miraculously revealed the current fantasies of their audience, recorded the transformation of the traditional picture, most strikingly in *Rubber Soul*. “The bird has flown” is the subtitle of “Norwegian Wood”: it registers the failure of the old fantasy as does “I’m looking through you” (“I thought I knew you, what did I know? / You don’t look different, but you have changed. / I’m looking through you, you’re not the same.”) These

songs are followed by George Harrison's "Think for Yourself". But help is given, in the fantasy of the transcendence of the schlock love into a universal and spiritual mission meaning nothing less than salvation: "Say the word and you'll be free ... Have you heard the word is love." And yet throughout this album the Beatles simultaneously held fast to the traditional picture of love and subsequently even wrote a quintessential expression of it — "Here, There and Everywhere". — An overall development that, in retrospect, left John Lennon howling "the dream is over" and "give me some truth". There is no end to pictures.

The picture is not the thing (loving) but its name or label. "As I said a noun is a name of a thing, and therefore slowly if you feel what is inside that thing you do not call it by the name by which it is known. Everybody knows that by the way they do when they are in love and a writer should always have that intensity of emotion about whatever is the object about which he writes. And therefore I say it again more and more one does not use nouns." — Stein in "Poetry and Grammar" included in *Writings and Lectures*, edited by Patricia Meyerowitz (New York: Penguin Books, 1967.), p. 126.

7. Interpreting and expressing what a rule means for myself, my own particular way of seeing, is not separable from seeing (Cf., p. 183), not an accompaniment or a consciously chosen interpretation (Cf., p. 200, paragraph 5). In this paragraph and the preceding one I draw from the citations noted above, from PI, as well as p. 179, p. 193, p.212 (paragraphs 4 and 5), p. 217

(paragraph 2), p. 218 (paragraph 3), and §329.

8. "Composition as Explanation" by Stein in Meyerowitz, p. 22.

9. The most whole-hearted way to follow a convention may, at times, involve changing some of its major features. Civil disobedience can sometimes be the fullest way of acting for law.

More generally, I take such changes as a description of aesthetic and historical change. Those who knew the conventions of the novel best and cared most about making them work often radically refashioned them. And yet, just the people who seemed to defy the conventions, traditions and rules turn out to be most fully in harmony with them, while the others who imitated every last detail of the old picture seem dead. Radically new forms do not emerge out of

the blue but are rooted within, are radical criticisms of, past conventions and forms. They transform the old conventions in order to express the present vision.

A writer's own way of writing is not something personal that other people can have no relation to. What is personal is his or her understanding of the common roots, the common form of life. One might say, her and his revelation of the form of life.

10. "Portraits and Repetition" by Stein in Meyerowitz.

11. "Philosophy simply puts everything before us and neither explains nor deduces anything. — Since everything lies open to view there is nothing to explain. For what is hidden, for example, is of no interest to us." (PI, §126)

THREE:
HISTORY, WRITING, AND DISILLUSIONMENT

A sentence says you know what I mean. Dear do I well I
guess I do.

What is a sentence. A sentence is not a fair. A fair is
followed by partake. This does not make a sentence.

Grammar little by little is not a thing. Which may gain. ...
The meaning of that does not interest me. It is a
complexion that interests.

Grammar does not mean that they are to limit themselves as
if they were to be welcomed with it. Grammar does not
make me hesitate about prepositions. I am a grammarian I
do not hesitate but I rearrange prepositions.

Anybody can see nearly what I mean.

— Gertrude Stein, from *How to Write*

There is then knowing. There is also being certain. There is also disillusionment. Being certain
does not prevent disillusionment. Knowing does not prevent disillusionment.

There is then disillusionment. There is always the fear for Stein that all she has written will not be understood or accepted, that she will find herself alone and isolated. “This is then complete disillusionment in living, the complete realization that no one can believe as you do about anything” (MA, p. 281). — Everybody has been misunderstood sometime. Everyone has thought they had something down right only to have it rejected by another as false. Everyone has at least once tried to do something of the most perfect goodness and in turn received a spanking. This is then the disillusionment of feeling that “nobody agrees with you” that can make us doubt, or feel apart from, all the world because of a single rebuke. “The amount they agree is important to you until the amount they do not agree with you is completely realized by you. Then you say you will write for yourself and strangers, you will be for yourself and strangers and this then makes an old man or an old woman of you” (MA, p. 282.) Such a feeling might make one think that he or she was hidden from others, that his or her inner life was private or veiled. Such a one might say that Stein was writing a private language.

Disillusionment, then, is a sense of separation: a felt gap between what I do and its consequences, my words and their meaning — an order and its execution. Disillusionment is a kind of radical skepticism — a disjunction between my mind and the world. It marks the failure of any sense of communality or sharedness or viable tradition. It means that everyone, at such times, “is a queer one to me”¹.

This is then what everyone always has been meaning by living bringing disillusion. This is the real thing of disillusion that no one, not any one really is believing, seeing, understanding, thinking anything as you are thinking, believing, seeing, understanding such a thing (MA, *ibid*).

It is a sense dramatized in much nineteenth century fiction and philosophy. If Dostoevsky saw it as nihilism (a radical skepticism in which one severs oneself from the world and hence God) it was to insist that we had to accept our nihilism, understand its roots in ourselves, before we could pass *through* it. Nietzsche continually heaped abuse on those who would deny or try to go around it by pious acceptance of the conventional creed. — Western philosophy is said to begin in wonder; it is often a wonder preceded by disillusion.

In the middle of the seventeenth century, Jean-Jacques Rousseau decried the split he saw between personal virtue and public approval. Society, the public, had taught us to speak an “affected language” and tempted us to give up sincerity and authenticity for appearance and good

manners (changing morals into manners.) “One no longer asks if a man is upright, but rather is he talented....Rewards are showered on the witty, and virtue is left without honor.”²

Rousseau was perhaps registering the fact that men and women no longer accepted a single mythology, a common vision or paradigm, through which to see the world. Or, at least, they no longer knew where to look for such a mythology — as the Jewish Kabbalists looked to the Torah as the complete word of God, the absolute form of the world; as Christians might once have looked to Christianity. Rousseau was early in recognizing that we share no common text, or view of the world, that governs our communality or intelligibility or virtue. That we share no way of governing ourselves that we can together give consent to. That we are continually confusing sinners for saints and geniuses for idiots. — And yet still we are compelled, or compel ourselves, to confess our state and describe our aloneness — having faith that here we will find the way back to our connection, intelligibility, and certainty: back to our natural forms of life.

Blake saw that the public symbols and doctrines of Christian cohesiveness had lost touch with individual experience and practice — that they had become a hierarchical system of public belief to be learned by rote: trappings that spoke of suffering and sin and pride as different categories to be preached in churches. But, Blake insisted, the logos of Christianity was in “every cry of every man” — in the individual meeting (union, encounter, relationship) of one mind (soul, person) with another: in one man’s love of another in the particular context in which this occurs.

For Mercy has a human heart,
Pity a human face,
And Love, the human form divine,
And Peace, the human dress.

— ”The Divine Image”

But the Organized Church had publicized (and so transformed) human tears and love into an abstract concept: Christian symbols had become dead signs because people did not see the world *through* them but explained the world *by* them. The symbols had, in effect, become exclusively public (on the surface, vestigial) and thereby denied the private. And so the task of the Christian, in Blake’s view, was the reformation of Christianity by restoring its vision to a human form and

content, flowing out of each person's experience of another: Christ was the bridge that offered salvation from our felt isolation from one another, our inability to know another's mind. Christianity flowed from our experience of separateness ("the mind-forg'd manacles"), not from our cupidity for life everlasting. Blake, like Luther before him and Kierkegaard after him, insisted that a recognition of Christianity meant a realization of the emptiness of its public practice.

Dostoevsky's Prince Myshkin does not deny the manners of the Russian society he enters; he never learns them. *The Idiot* can be seen as the dramatization of the private (here innocent) man in the public world. But for one knowledgeable member of that society, Nastasya Filippovna, Myshkin seems the "first human being" she has met. Dostoevsky's "perfect man" is ignorant of society's conventions. The great dialectic of the novel centers on whether Myshkin is a saintly genius or an epileptic idiot. (Perhaps Dostoevsky's way of finding an alternative to the *ubermensch*, here *before* good and evil.)

The Making of Americans fits well into a picture of the nineteenth century declaring, or dramatizing, the struggle between the public and the private. Indeed, *The Making of Americans* is very much a work of, or rooted in, the nineteenth century. Stein's overall plan for the novel was to follow a family's history through three generations. Starting with "the old ones coming to the new world", she ended with her own generation. In this way she hoped to explain how we (for her then the present generation) got to where we are — "the basis of the existence in each one". It was Stein's vision that each generation, living in its own time and making its own time, was different and that we could come to know ourselves by learning to hear the repeating of our history. She sub-titled her novel, "A History of a Family's Progress".

A recurring structure of nineteenth century writing was the use of the family as a microcosm for (i.e., to stand for, to mean) the state, church, and world. Thus the father would often carry the weight of (represent) earthly authority, law, official morality convention, God ...³ And often there would be a character who rebelled against (or felt out of connection with) these things by rebelling against (or withdrawing from) his family — the *ubermensch* or genius or idiot or outcast or possessed or homeless or holy man or woman. Leon Katz's studies of Stein's notebooks have revealed that Stein was explicitly concerned with problems of geniuses and saints (she liked to equate the terms) who were "unqualified and unlimited individualities, incapable of being known to others but capable of being self-known".⁴ David Hersland, the last

of the Hersland family talked about in *The Making of Americans*, was to come the closest to being such a “singular individual”. One whose main problem, Stein wrote in her notebook, was “to run himself by his mind”.

Naturally some knew David Hersland had a brother and a sister and a father and a mother. Naturally some were certain that he was in Hersland family living. He was like them, of course he was like them, why should he be unlike them when he had been living with them and had come out of them and had heard them and had seen them. ... And sometimes it was a pleasant thing to him to be connected with every other one by such a thing by doing things in a way he was noticing other ones had been doing. Sometimes it was a pleasant thing to him to know then that everything means something, that he was a part of every one who was a part of him and sometimes he had very much family feeling in him, very often he was naturally not having any family feeling. (MA, p. 377)

And so Stein moved into the twentieth century grounded in the nineteenth. The recurring motif of that century had been to represent (even allegorize) the family as setting limits that were acknowledged or transgressed; that is, to see family living as a microcosm of initiation into society.⁵ Stein’s genius was to be able to express this solely in terms of language, by her prose composition; for the David Hersland section is written in Stein’s emerging modernist style.

For all the talk so far about each one being a separate one, it remains to be registered that, for Stein, traditional prose and its established genres had lost the power to communicate this separateness. Indeed the very publicness and intelligibility of the established forms seemed to deny the overwhelming sense of privacy and distance from others. The nineteenth century had dramatized, and hence declared, the dialectic struggle between our inner lives and the external world. What is happening in the long “Beethovenian”⁶ paragraphs of *The Making of Americans* is the internalization of this dialectic into the prose composition itself.

[In] writing *The Making of Americans*, I was completely obsessed by the inner life of everything including generations of everybody’s living and I was writing prose, prose that had to do with the balancing the inner balancing of everything.⁷

Stein’s focus became the words themselves; her declaration is that of *wordness*. The writing has become so dense that the meaning is no longer to be found in what the words represent, or stand for, but in their texture: the repetition, juxtaposition and structure of phrases,

sentences, and paragraphs. One might say the words refer only to themselves, that there is no disjunction between what the prose refers to and the prose itself.

In *The Making of Americans*, the dialectic becomes an investigation (a struggle with) the limits of language. “To imagine a language,” Wittgenstein writes, “is to imagine a form of life,” (PI, §19.) The structure of language reveals the physiognomy, or over all topology through which we see the world. To speak a common language is to “agree in judgments”. (Cf., PI, §241, §242.) We are limited *to* language: for language provides the bounds of our intelligibility — of what can be meant. We see everything *through* our language: “The limits of my language are the limits of my world.”⁸ As a result, the internalization of the dialectic into the medium of prose itself makes language function as family (and society) had in the nineteenth century dramatization. This is carried to its most radical end in Stein’s later writing, particularly *Tender Buttons* and *How to Write* where Stein composes a “grammatical” exploration of the limits of meaning — of sense and nonsense.

There is a temptation, I think, to confuse this style (the assertion of wordness) with private language. Schopenhauer has written that “Style is the physiognomy of the mind and a safer index to character than face.”⁹ Stein, in the language of *How to Write*, would perhaps call this the different grammar of each personality with the implicit recognition that though grammar is what individuates one person from another, it is also that which is *shared*.

Each one, then, has a different grammar, just as every good writer has a different style. The effort in much of Stein’s early writing was to describe the particular grammar of each person; that is, to do portraits. The attempt of the portraits was to show each one as he or she is without telling stories. Each person living in his or her own time, sounds different: has a different way of seeing quite apart from what is said. (“Essence is expressed by grammar. Grammar tells us what kind of an object a thing is.” PI, §371, §372.) By listening to the different way in which each one says things we can “know what they are”, know the different worlds in which they live. Stein, then, is trying to describe what makes up a human personality (an individual consciousness or soul or form, a particular “repeating”). Her insight is that such individuating grammar is the most public and knowable because it fully discloses the person in the context in which she or he is living.

Still, one might feel that peculiar grammar was, if not private, at least cryptic. And indeed interpreters of Stein have claimed this. Allegra Stewart sees Stein’s descriptions of objects in

Tender Buttons as a kind of code and proceeds to decipher them as if they were symbolic or occult or semiotic *signs*.¹⁰ It is as if the words *stand for* something else — are the embodiment of something which really exists on another level. Thus, the words are seen as outer trappings (signs) that refer to and are separate from the real “inner” meaning. It is just this disjunction of outer and inner (similar to the disjunction between pain and pain-behavior) that I mean to refute by saying that the words “refer” only to *themselves* and that the meaning is internal to the prose. For if the unsayable “inner” meaning is being *translated* into the “outer” language it would be as if we already had a language full-blown prior to learning the one we speak: as if we had a form of life before we could speak and so were translating our pre-existing concepts into the public language.¹¹ That would perhaps be an explanation of a real private language, but it could not account for the fact that learning language is learning those concepts — that the limits of our language are the limits of our world. There is no escape into a prior and hence private language, a world *outside* language. Everything we know we know *through* our shared language, our way of life is formed by it: but we must learn it and speak it for ourselves.

The grammar that individuates is shared. The private dissolves into the public. In *The Making of Americans* Stein wrote, “I write for myself and strangers.” She later abandoned this formulation but was discontent with the idea that one is audience to oneself. In *Four in America* she wrote, “I am not I when I see.” (Stein acknowledges Flaubert’s influence.) The “I” drops out and writing becomes totally public in its intimate privacy.

Here it can be seen that solipsism, when its implications are followed out strictly, coincides with pure realism. The self [*das Ich*] of solipsism shrinks to a point without extension, and there remains the reality coordinated with it.¹²

— All of my “inner” feeling is coming out in my “outer” repeating: everyone can be a whole one to me.

The words of *Tender Buttons*, like those of *The Making of Americans*, are not outer signs representing an inner world. *Tender Buttons* is not a cryptic code to be deciphered by the industrious scholars or devoted disciples. — Though discipleship may be necessary in order to understand this work; for there is nothing to necessitate that one will understand this work; for there is nothing to necessitate that one will understand any work of art — or any other person. “Not *how* the world is, but *that* it is, is the Mystical.”¹³ One must always interpret for oneself. Discipleship, if one calls it that, is a condition for all understanding, and all knowledge. Prose

like Stein's will yield only as much as we are willing to give to it. We come to know what she is saying only when we undertake the task of understanding as if trying to make sense of ourselves.

Near the end of *The Making of Americans*, after the portrait of David Hersland and how he came to be “a dead one”, Stein invokes the ontology of being-in-the-world, of “one being living”.

Any one can come to be a dead one. Any one can come to be such a one. Any one can come to be almost an old one if they have not come to be a dead one. Any one is such a one. ... Any one is one being living, some are knowing all of this thing, some are not knowing all of this thing. Some are almost old ones, some are old ones. Some are ones coming to be old ones. (MA, p. 397)

Stein reminds us of the “very general facts of nature” that Wittgenstein says need mentioning in order to explain the significance of concept (PI, p. 230). She reminds us that we know we are “ones being living”, that we can be certain that “being living is existing, that there is being existing, that there is existing being living” (MA, p. 385). She insists that each one has their own way of connecting what he says and means and thinks (MA, p. 364). She reminds us that people live in families, and grow old, “and come to be dead ones”.

To know one's being-in-the-world is to come to self-knowledge. It has been said that both Stein and Wittgenstein investigate the natural history of human beings. One might say that they were doing a kind of anthropology,¹⁴ attempting to map out the topology¹⁵ (physiognamy, overall structure) of the human life of which they are a part. Stein is always describing people as being part of — not isolated from — everyday conventional life:

I have it, this interest in ordinary middle class existence, in simple firm ordinary middle class traditions, in sordid material unaspiring visions, in a repeating, common, decent enough kind of living, with no fine kind of fancy ways inside us, no excitement to surprise us, no new ways of being bad or good to win us. (MA, pp.37-38.)

Always everybody is repeating and we learn to understand them. We learn together with other people and could have happen to any of us “what could happen to any of them in their living, in their schooling, in their playing, in their quarreling, in their liking, in their disliking, in their being interesting one to the other of them” (MA, p. 242). We see the Herslands in these pages becoming a part of the family living that surrounds them.

— The best picture of a private language is our own very public one.

Gertrude Stein said that the contemporary writer could not be appreciated until she was dead, her form having become classic. And now Stein is dead and her form is being made classical. And though her writing still seems difficult it also seems classic. And so theses can be written about her. This is certainly one of them.

NOTES

1. *The Making of Americans*, complete version (New York: Something Else Press, 1966), p. 482-483.
2. *Discourse on the Science and Arts* by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau subsequently investigated problems of convention, agreement and consent in his *Social Contract*. He wrote in *Emile*: “The public institute does not and cannot exist, for there is neither country nor patriot. The very words should be struck out of our language” (book one).
3. The examples are numerous and range from *The Brothers Karamazov* to *Pride and Prejudice*. Other particularly interesting ones include Balzac’s family chronicles, Shelley’s *The Cenci*, *Fathers and Sons*, *Wuthering Heights*, and Hawthorne’s “Wakefield”.
4. *The First Making of The Making of Americans* by Leon Katz (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1963), p. 281. Katz, in this quote, is using the language of Lionel Weininger, author of the rabidly sexist philosophical tract, *Sex and Character*. According to Katz, Stein read Weininger’s book and was very interested in his “non-coordinate” characterology. A remarkable quote from that book comes out of Weininger’s quest for the “single and simple existence” in a man. Weininger writes that a man’s “character...is not something seated *behind* the thoughts and feelings in the individual, but something revealing itself in every thought and feeling.” His aim for his new psychology was to do “away with the study of sensations”. [Wittgenstein and Stein shared an interest in Weininger.]

5. The vision that the family sets the boundaries in which we live our lives received its best twentieth century interpretation from Freud. It also serves as the thesis of most of R. D. Laing's books, particularly *Sanity, Madness, and the Family* and *The Politics of the Family*. A tempting, but perhaps overdeterministic, way of stating this thesis is: The limits imposed by my family are the limits of my world.

6. Gertrude Stein discusses the development of her writing most explicitly in a tremendously revealing interview conducted by William Sutton for Robert Haas in 1946. This interview has been published for the first time in the collection "What Are Masterpieces" (New York: Pitman, 1970). She says that she got from Cezanne "the idea that in composition one thing was as important as another thing. ... After all to me one human being is as important as another human being and you might say that the landscape has the same values, a blade of grass has the same value as a tree." She says that she "threw away" punctuation and increased the length of her paragraphs "in an effort to get this evenness" of valuation. Writing *The Making of Americans*, she says, "I felt that I had lost contact with the words in building up these Beethovenian passages. ... You had to recognize words had lost their value in the nineteenth century particularly toward the end, they had lost much of their variety and I felt I could not go on, that I had to capture the value of the individual word, find out what it meant and act within it."

7. "Poetry in Grammar" in Meyerowitz, pp. 140-141.

8. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* by Wittgenstein, 5.6.

9. *The Art of Literature* by Arthur Schopenhauer (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), p. 11. Schopenhauer goes on to remark: "Further, the language in which a man writes is the physiognamy of the nation to which he belongs." I trust the parallel is clear to the picture of language I present in the preceding paragraph.

10. *Gertrude Stein and the Present* by Allegra Stewart (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967.) Stewart calls *Tender Buttons* a "mandala".

11. I am here paraphrasing Wittgenstein's criticism of Augustine's picture of language in §32. Augustine describes the child learning as if he already had a language, already a form of life. The root of the idea of a private language is in thinking we already had our conceptions of sensations, feelings, and the like, full-blown before or outside, language; and that learning language is learning the proper labels and names and rules that correspond (refer to) these: "I trained my mouth to form these *signs*" (PI, §1, emphasis added).

It is possible to see this problem in terms of W. V. Quine's analysis in his essay "Ontological Relativity" (1969). One might then say that Stewart is reinterpreting the universe of *Tender Buttons* into the universe of another theory (or coordinate system). The question of reference ("for the background language") would then lead to a regress (the reference of the reference of the reference...), stoppable by the theory of ontological relativity. "When we are given a position and velocity relative to a given coordinate system, we can always ask in turn about the placing of origin and orientation of axes of that system of coordinates; and there is no end to the succession of further coordinate systems that could be adduced in answering the successive questions thus generated. ... The answer, of course, is the relational doctrine of space; there is no absolute position of velocity; there are just relations of coordinate systems to one another, and ultimately of things to one another" (pp. 49-50). Thus though *Tender Buttons* cannot be "fully (re)interpreted" (p.51), it can nonetheless meaningfully undergo such a transformation.

— But it is just my point that such a reinterpretation would not only lose the meaning but *deny* it. For this prose is an assertion of its own inconvertibility: it has no reference (or, more formally, refers only to itself); it has no background to recede into. This modernist composition asserts total internality, total insideness, and in so doing asserts a concreteness that is not relative to any other universe: it is tempting to say that it is itself the very "objects" that the relativist theory denies (p.50). (This move is evidently not the one that was worrying Quine. See p. 62 and the top of p. 64 where he implies that ontology is "emphatically meaningless" for such cases as these.)

Strange as it may sound, such an "object" is made possible by the fact that it does not name anything; as Stein herself says, "one does not use nouns." One might say, following Quine's advice that is "makes no sense to say what the objects of a theory are", (p. 50) that modernist composition's "objectness" consists of the assertion of its medium, or universe, or particular coordinate system. Its meaning, so to say, is its particularity: that it is just this

“coordinate system” and not any other. This is why I say it exists only in relation to itself (“internality”): its particularity is coincident with its universe.

I trust that the parallel to the “singular individual” / *übermensch* genius is clear. It should also be remembered that Stein’s portraits (of people and objects) are descriptions of how each one (entity, individual, person) differs from each other one: what makes each one each one. Just as shared grammar individuates, so predicates particularize. This is to say, in this writing the predicate becomes inseparable from the subject. Leon Katz (in *Three Americans in Paris*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1970) puts it this way: “As (Stein) saw it, Cezanne was treating composition itself as the essential aspect of reality — as the ‘entity’ ” (p. 52). (“Entity” is Stein’s own expression.)

Quine’s ontological relativity, and his thesis that “it makes no sense to say what the objects of a theory are”, are aimed at alleviating the problem of inscrutable reference — that people could conceivably call complementary colors (or upside down and right side up) by the same name. (Thus registering the same sense that I have been calling “disillusionment”.) Stein’s solution of this problem is found in her creation of a prose composition that acknowledges (by asserting) this inscrutability of reference. Let me try to bring this out by an example. John is the name of a person; the word refers to him. A referential distinction can be made between the external or outer “name” and the “inner” person who is being named. What Stein has done is to collapse this distinction by eliminating the referent, making the “naming” the only level — the assertion of wordness means a completely self-referential internalization: the inner is totally coincident with the outer. (It can also be seen vice-versa: the outer dissolving into the inner.) This has the effect of neutralizing (by radically asserting) the problem of confronted of “inscrutable reference” (disillusionment). For here one is confronted with *objectness*; it only remains for us to come to know it. The most completely private and self-contained (self-referential) thing turns out to be the most completely public and completely knowable.

— A moral is forthcoming: If Stein’s “outer” words are referring to (are reinterpretations of) an inner feeling (meaning, process) what is to prevent that inner feeling from being a reinterpretation of a still more “inner” feeling, and so on into a regress. It should not surprise us that it is the private language argument that is the really unintelligible thing. We are left with Quine’s alternative of ontological relativity, or construing the case such that ontological relativity

does not apply (the “trivial case” when it is “emphatically meaningless”). When I say the words refer (name) only themselves I am opting for the latter.

In the language of the *Philosophical Investigations*, reinterpretations of art like *Tender Buttons* are a (unwarranted) switch of language-games. (See, above, part two: “we confuse the language-game”.) Wittgenstein deals with the question of regress in talking about justification and grounds (see above, part two: “If pushed about my grounds ...”.) He says that the “mistake is to look for an explanation where we ought to look at what happens as a ‘proto-phenomenon’. That is, where we ought to have said: ‘*This language-game is played.*’... The question is [one of] ... noting a language-game” (PI, §654, §655); see also ”What has to be accepted is our form of life” (PI, p. 226) and, above, part one: “the form of the world as seen by us.” (Quine says something like this when he speaks of “acquiescing to the mother tongue” [p. 49].)

12. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 5.64.

13. *Ibid.*, 6.44. “Don’t take it as a matter of course but as a remarkable fact” that we understand works of art and that they give us pleasure. “... Find it surprising as you do things that disturb you. Then the puzzling aspect of the latter will disappear by your accepting this fact as you do the other.” (PI, §524.)

14. It might be objected that Stein is not so much doing anthropology as providing datum *for* anthropology; but that would be to forget that for Stein’s datum, like description, is explanation. Wittgenstein describes initiation into a language (a form of like): one might say he is investigating the epistemology of initiation — or perhaps “the foundations of psychology”. (CF., PI, §590; p. 232.)

15. For a systemic exploration of the more explicitly mathematical ways of looking at language, signs, agreement, grammar, and “possible language”, see: *Convention: A Philosophical Study* by David Lewis (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968).

One of Wittgenstein’s best topological descriptions is PI, §18.

AFTERWORD

There is only one thing to say and infinitely repeat and say over and over again and repeat it and write it and speak it, and so it doesn't matter all so much, not all so much at all, what you say it about, whether you say it about Gertrude Stein or roast beefs of trees, you say what you can in what way you can, whatever you can. It can be seen as one's insistence, each one insisting with his own insistence, or not named at all. But we each get up every morning (though at different times in the morning) we each get up and go through the day, making whatever sense we can, making whatever love we can, making whatever impression we can, each of us everyday. And so it matters very much what you write about because that is the occasion, and it matters very much how you write about it because that is the composition.

All of me is coming out in all my repeating: my ungrammatical and even faking repeating just as much as in my solid traditional fine kind of writing. I am always being conventional.

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