

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

IF “[Gertrude] Stein’s agenda was subversive and political,” to quote Kenneth Goldsmith’s excellent afterword here, then how most effectively, at the university, to *teach* that agenda? The default university setting, of course, is the lecture. Students sit in rows, or, if lucky, in a circle, and in any case are induced to listen to an academic expert explaining: *These are the facts of Stein’s radicalism, etc.* Yes, our beloved student apprentices to modernism’s open-ended heretical qualities are generally being taught them by being *told* them—hardly at all itself heretical. Even so, all modern poetry has had this implied in the background: a conjecture that it’s always better to *do* poetry as itself a means of analyzing it than to analyze it.

So now what about learning spaces? Similarly: it’s better to be (and to learn) in a space “where poetry actually happens” (to quote Jerome Rothenberg) rather than a space where its occupants are aware that theirs is *not* the place where the art they study is being made—that such making is always already elsewhere. When alienation happens (in most classrooms, to say the least), a sense of one’s distance from art is established, and from then on art-making is always Other. This dislocation, I think, is partly the cause of the demoralization felt by students of the humanities. Goldsmith’s energized, elated students witness the reversal of this demoralization. Conventional denotative pedagogy (*teacher*

points to text and then to an object in the world, implying or saying outright: "This is what it means") is not up to the challenge of permitting the performance of the self-reflexivity that is a staple of the classroom of this course, with its constant "miracles playing fairly well," as we might call it using Stein's phrasing (from her famous verse portrait of Picasso).

So in modernism's materials must at least implicitly be a meta-pedagogy—a learner-centered learning that becomes a teaching. For this reason I want here to help celebrate Goldsmith's decision, in offering this year's two-semester seminar on writing about contemporary art, to return to modernism's radical origins (Dada), and, for the group's culminating project, to Gertrude Stein. "To say the students *got to know* Gertrude Stein's writing is an understatement," Goldsmith writes (my emphasis). "They got inside the text in a way that only rewriting and reauthoring can do." This special kind of "g[etting] to know" and "g[etting] inside" is, in short, the finest education. Learning is, at its best, a full and detailed experience of language. Every word choice—here, not only one's own but also the writer's!—must be pondered, defended, debated. Such pondering is never an isolated act; it must form the basis of collaborative co-creation, which, I think, can stand as an artwork in itself. The experimental year-long seminar produces, but also becomes, an art.

An experiment of this sort requires tolerance administratively and otherwise—technical support, scheduling magic, institutional partnerships, special funding, and leadership. The work you hold in your hands could not have been made without the guidance of Julia Bloch, Director of the Creative Writing Program, and Mingo Reynolds, Director of Admin-

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istration at the Center for Programs in Contemporary Writing. An ongoing partnership with the Modern division of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and especially with Matthew Affron, the Muriel and Philip Berman Curator of Modern Art at PMA, continues to be fundamental to the success of this project. Jane Treuhaft, as usual, designed the book and implemented the impossible idea of the students and their teacher in the most exacting way conceivable. Because of her, this volume is a special thing: utterly unique and yet also an almost exact replica. We are grateful to College of Arts & Sciences at the University of Pennsylvania, and the Dean of the College Paul Sniegowski, not merely for putting up with such trial-and-error pedagogy but for enthusiastically encouraging it. In the all the years this special seminar has been offered, generous and visionary support has come from the Cape Branch Foundation. The students and Goldsmith could not possibly have made this book without visionary leadership in and for the arts demonstrated by the trustees of Cape Branch, and in particular the leadership of Dirk Wittenborn, a true dear friend of this effort. Dirk believes firmly that learning must be challenging, unpredictable, whacky, unthwarted by mistakes, at least somewhat improvisational, and so overall a lot like art itself.

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