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The Motivation of the Sign

ROSALIND KRAUSS

Perhaps we should start at the center of the argument, with a reading of a papier collé by Picasso. This object, from the group dated late November–December 1912, comes from that phase of Picasso’s exploration in which the collage vocabulary has been reduced to a minimalist austerity. For in this run Picasso restricts his palette of pasted material almost exclusively to newsprint. Indeed, in the papier collé in question, Violin (fig. 1), two newsprint fragments, one of them bearing a dispatch from the Balkans datelined TCHATALDJA, are imported into the graphic atmosphere of charcoal and drawing paper as the sole elements added to its surface.

Or should this rather be described as one piece of newsprint? For what there is to be noticed about this material, first and foremost, is that it comprises two halves of a single planar segment, the jigsaw-like edges of each section of which announce the way they could be reconnected. And further, in their very condition of being, self-evidently, two pieces of a single puzzle, the two fragments signal something more: that their present placement within the field of the collage has resulted not simply from their having been scissored apart and transported to separate sites on the visual field, but rather that one of them has had to be flipped so that what it now shows as its front was originally its reverse. And this is to say that when these shards from the material world fluttered onto the aesthetic surface of the drawing they did so most conspicuously by declaring the reality of literally having a front and a back.

Now if the evocation of the backs of objects, the achingly beautiful turn of a nude or a bottle’s shoulder into the place where vision ends and touch begins, has been the glory of painting from the Renaissance onward, this very turning was what was squarely at issue in Cubism. For in its developing, Analytic years, the Cubism of Picasso and Braque pronounced the impenetrable frontality of the pictorial surface more obstinately and resolutely than had any style before it, so that the little areas of modeled form that heave into relief like so many swells on the surface of a

lake, hit the shoals of the picture support with a finality that could only dissipate their energies into a lateral spread, never implying a further plumbing of that support into a space behind. Modeling in this sense becomes the empty trappings of an illusionist system more and more divorced from the business of illusionism, a business we could describe as giving us access through the vehicle of sight to reality in all its carnal fullness—to its weight and density, to its richness and texture, to its heat and vaporousness, to the evanescence of its very perfume. By 1911 the asceticism of the intermittencies of Cubist light and shade had almost totally renounced the possibility that the two dimensions of the visual field could ever afford its viewer direct and unmediated access to that other world of tactile completeness, the world that bodies inhabit but vision only registers by means of so many flat and frontal pictures on the retinal plane of the eye.

Collage represents the point of no return within this process. With its evacuation from the pictorial field of wave upon wave of modeling, of the cacophony of slightly canted planes, collage completely ironed out the fabric of illusionism, rendering the object's existence within the visual field as inexorably flat as an insect crushed between two panes of glass. Nothing can be seen to turn within the vise of this frontal display: no rotation, no obliquity, no slide from luminous highlight into the cool of shadowed depths. In collage in general such frontality is secured by the way the paper elements glued to the surface of the sheet are literally foursquare upon that surface, an inevitable result of their actual flatness. But in the geometry of Picasso's very first series of papiers collés we can see how specifically this frontality is insisted upon, for there the violin's face is figured by a square of paper whose flat-footed parallelism with the surface it joins is underscored by the rigid geometries of its alignments with other paper rectangles in the field (see Daix 517–519; and Musical Score and Guitar, fig. 9).

Now the Violin from after December 3, 1912 is indeed one of these early works, though unlike the very first of them patches of modeling are readmitted to the space, albeit not enough to break the grip of the two-dimensionality established by the newspaper silhouette with the Tchatalda report. That silhouette which both locks the notched contour of the violin into the white of the paper abutting it and lines up its own rectilinear left edge with the vertical, charcoal slash that declares the right-hand side of the object, creates at one and the same time a powerful reading of the flatness of the object as material and of its foursquareness as shape. In its material condition—that is to say, newspaper—it produces the violin as an unbendingly opaque façade; and in its formal aspect—that is, one rectangular shape centered within the other oblong of the drawing sheet as a whole—it secures the instrument's frontality as a kind of visual absolute. For the very flatness which banishes all three-dimensionality from the field of the image declares the total presence of the two-dimensional shape to vision: held firmly parallel to the plane of the retina, the frontal shape is unassailable in its availability to the visual sense; it is nowhere dependent on the synthesis of the sense of vision with the sense of touch. If we can say that touch is literally absent to the field of vision, that it is what must be inferentially added to the pictorial image in order to produce the illusion of depth—and this is what perceptual psychology through the late nineteenth century was saying—then in the visual fields of these collages there is no absence, since no illusioned depth distracts us from the pure frontality of the visual screen.

No absence in the visual field. But the collages do indeed open another field in which absence is the essence of meaning. And that field has properly to be called proto-linguistic.

For the linguistic sign, absence is not what depletes and

saps the system of representation, but rather what makes it possible. Words operate in the absence of their referents; indeed they can be said to outrun the limits of those referents even when the referents themselves are present to the pronouncement of the word that names them. We can say the word depth pointing over the side of a boat into the sea, or indicating the darkness of a shade of blue, or calling attention to the tone of someone's voice, or remarking the profundity of an argument. In each case the meaning of the word is not limited to the positivity of the element to which we point. Depth takes its place in a system of oppositions in which it always operates against markers of shallowness, of lightness, of highness, of banality. Like any other word, depth is not the name of a property but the marker in a network of relationships, relationships which the structuralists term a "paradigm," relationships produced by language not as a set of names, but as a system. And it is this system that resonates behind the word as it is invoked in the total absence of anything to which it might, visually, refer.

Depth is indeed the absent element called into the field of experience, if not into the field of vision, by collage's increasing control of a kind of sign that moves very close to being linguistic. For if Cubism could not produce the illusion of depth as present, collage honored its absence through summoning it as a meaning—a signified—that would be inscribed on the pictorial surface. "Depth" would be written on this field the way EAT ME OR DRINK ME was written on the objects Alice stumbled onto in Wonderland. It would be the signified of a signifier that would not figure it forth like an image—or what the semiologist calls the iconic sign—but would produce it through an arbitrary set of marks—the kind of signifier which the semiologist terms a symbol. The earliest and most abiding form of this inscription is to be found in the f-holes of the collage's violin. These f-s, so blatantly disparate in size and thickness, are what Picasso creates as the suspended emblem of foreshortening, of a plane's turning away from full view into depth so that as it turns its two identical incisions grow steadily unequal within our field of vision. Lifted from the foreshortened surface of a depicted violin to remain, like the smile of the Cheshire cat, a detached and weightless phantom, these wildly mismatched f-s take their place on the insistently frontal plane of the collage's violin not to dispute that frontality in the field of vision but instead to inscribe it with the pronouncement of a depth nowhere to be seen. Become a symbol, they write of the instrument's body, of its turning in space, of its voluptuous fullness with the same loving irony as Jasper Johns—

stroking the words blue and yellow and red onto nearly monochromatic passages of paint—would write a half-century later of the color he dared not display. And this inscription of /depth/, once invented, joins Picasso's working vocabulary. Again and again he uses it for the same, evocative purpose (see Siphon, Glass, Newspaper, and Violin [fig. 3]; Bowl with Fruit, Violin, and Wineglass [p. 270]; and Daix 529, 573).

Now if one half of the newspaper element in Violin functions to create the intractable ground of flatness and frontality against which to inscribe the sign /depth/, the other half interlocks with it as back to front. And this, within the incredible economy of the work, serves several interrelated purposes. On the one hand we can see it heightening the poignancy of the way depth is absent in the collage, since it enacts, as an action now vanished, the very gesture which originally produced it as the reverse of its partner. On the other, we could say that in conjuring up a turning which is simply the flipping of a flat page from one frontal position to another, the gesture already heralds the reduced condition of a plenitude no deeper than a sheet of paper. Thus in being the reverse side of the element that locates the violin's front, the second element not only is literally the paper's back but establishes the notion of /back/ or /behind/ as something that must necessarily take place in the dismantled and splayed planarity of the collage surface. Yet this marker of the nether side of the
front plane of the violin galvanizes its very material surface into the marker of quite another sort of /behind/. For it is extremely clear that the same newsprint which underscores the opacity and physical resistance of the instrument’s body is manipulated in the guise of its twin to break up into the intermittency of a buzz of black lettering on white paper and thereby to mimic the draftsman’s various ways of creating the illusion of atmosphere and of light. We might think of the scumbled passages of Rembrandt, or the flecked highlights of Turner, or the stippled textures of Seurat; the artist’s conventions for evoking atmosphere and transparency are brought into play here, so that the shower of letters opens this flat collage plane to the inscription of /light/ as insistently as the f-holes wrote /depth/ across the surface of its brother. Moreover, the relation between these two elements, which couple in their physical gesture of interlocking, creates precisely that kind of paradigmatic pair I referred to before as a structural prerequisite for linguistic meaning. If Ferdinand de Saussure, the founder of structural linguistics, described meaning itself as “relative, oppositional, and negative,” he was insisting on this purely relational condition of signification, with coming to take on meaning only insofar as it is not \( \gamma \). The couple Picasso produces in these scraps of discarded newsprint perform just such a system—which in linguistic terms is described as diacritical as the one gets to speak of transparency in relation to the signified opacity of the other. This speech, this semiosis, marks the upper plane with the signed /light/, while the fs imprint the lower one with /depth/. But it must be stressed that both these surfaces are merely inscribed with these absent qualities, with a space and luminosity that has literally been banished from vision. And thus as the two actual planes of newsprint hold in a kind of vise-like grip the fitful stretches of drawing that occur on the page between them, they never once slacken in their control of the image’s presentation of frontality, in the face of which the velvety passages of charcoal drawing achieve a kind of poignant superfluousness.7

And just like the case of the f-hole sign for /depth/, this newsprint sign for /transparency/ and /light/ becomes a staple of Picasso’s collage vocabulary, appearing again and again in brilliant combinations and variations (see Glass and Bottle of Suze [P&B, p. 258]; Siphon, Glass, Newspaper, and Violin [fig. 5]; Bottle on a Table [P&B, p. 266]; Bowl with Fruit, Violin, and Wineglass [P&B, p. 270]; and Daix 548, 658).

Now if the analysis I have performed on this work seems convincing or compelling, if it seems to account, in a coherent, continuous reading, for most of the choices Picasso has made, the rest of what follows will be of some matter, for it will probably seem that a change as momentous as this one—a change not within the system of illusion from one type to another, but a conversion from one whole representational system, roughly called iconic, to another, roughly called symbolic—must be accounted for.

If on the other hand none of this seems to have described what is going on in Violin, or to have added up to any kind of explanatory system, then none of the rest of what will be argued here is going to mean very much, because the proofs available for what follows are, sad to say, rather thin. They take on density only in relationship to the demand one feels for this break to be explained.

The extremely small group of scholars who have, in print, called this break by the name it’s been given here is composed of Jean Laude, Pierre Dumfou, Françoise Will-Lavaillant, Pierre Daix, Yve-Alain Bois, and myself.8 Of these, Yve-Alain Bois has entered a suggestion for a possible cause for the switch-over in late 1912 that transmutes Picasso’s late Analytic but still iconic vocabulary into those procedures in collage that must be called linguistic. He has proposed that the intervention of African sculpture, in the form of the Grebo mask that served as the trigger for Picasso’s 1912–13 Guitar (fig. 4), was a kind of precipitating agent to reorganize how Picasso conceived of the visual sign—reshaping it not just as arbitrary or conventional but as fully diacritical.9

While I have no doubt about the role of the Guitar in the process of restructuring signaled by collage, and thus of the impetus from African sculpture (fig. 5), I think that the momentousness of this change cannot be explained as locally as that one encounter would suggest. Which is to say, it seems to me that something far more continuous and profound must have been at work in Picasso over a far longer period of time for such a change to be truly prepared for, or motivated. And in this I would further say that Braque is what scientists would call a control case. For, since collage heralds no such change for him, in that Braque’s use of collage elements never moves beyond the iconically structured sign toward the symbolic one (for example, fig. 6), whatever is there in Picasso’s earlier, Analytic work that might have motivated the change in question is probably what is missing from Braque’s.

I take it that Braque was a gentle and private person and thus that outbursts of anger were rare for him. His irate
response in 1935 to The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas, called "Testimony Against Gertrude Stein," seems, then, rather significant.10 Braque accuses her of getting various facts wrong—his example is that he never painted Marie Laurencin's portrait as she said he did—and of not understanding French very well, and his major polemic is that Stein's account mistakes the collective nature of his and Picasso's Cubism, which Braque calls their "search for the anonymous personality," turning it instead into gossip about a star—Picasso—and his followers. Gertrude Stein is, in fact, extremely demeaning of Braque, saying that the first manifestation of Picasso's Cubism anyone was able to see in the Salons was the one Braque painted for him and insisting that Cubism was Picasso's invention alone.11 Now had Stein not been more precise about what she thought Picasso invented, none of this could have much resonance. But she was precise. She said that Picasso invented Cubism in the Horta landscapes through the disjunction between the houses and their terrain.12 Later she made this more specific when she said that the landscape was curved and the houses cut across the curve; and she added that the struggle that began Cubism was "to express only
the really visible things.”

But she insisted on the famous sentences: “Once again Picasso in 1909 was in Spain and he brought back with him some landscapes which were, certainly were, the beginning of Cubism. These three landscapes were extraordinarily realistic and all the same the beginning of Cubism.”

Now no one really takes Gertrude Stein seriously in this claim that Cubism began at Horta. Practically everyone follows Kahnweiler when he says, “During the summer of 1909 at Horta the new language of form was augmented but left essentially unchanged.” And the widely held assumption is that the new language is that which was formed the preceding year, most precociously by Braque at L’Estaque. But if I wish to dissent from this assumption and take Gertrude Stein more or less at her word, it is because what happens in Picasso’s Horta landscapes does not follow Braque’s L’Estaque paintings but generates an experience that needs to be seen as essentially different.

If we agree with William Rubin that the organization of the L’Estaque landscapes entails readjusting the open expanse of spatial projection to a tighter concept of bas-relief, one “which moves downward and outward toward the spectator from a back plane that closes the space,” with the shallow, interlocking density of the relief maintained by a use of passage that allows “planes to spill or ‘bleed’ into adjacent ones,” we can agree that this same notion of relief is continued and intensified in the landscapes Braque made in the summer of 1909 at La Roche-Guyon. And what we can say further is that the spatial conception is based on the creation of an even density of tilted and eliding planes over the whole of that uprighted ground, a kind of constant pressure of relief that indeed seems to respond to the evenly disseminated color-stroke of certain late Cézannes.

But this organization could not be further from the case for Picasso in the summer of 1909. There, in the instance of the Houses on the Hill, Horta de Ebro (fig. 7), although there is something we could call a relief plane—in the sense of what can be pointed to in Braque— it does not coincide with the shape of the canvas field, but takes instead the configuration of a diamond, or lozenge form, coming to a point at the lower front edge of the painting. Many of the house forms in the landscape are clearly oriented toward this diamond, reinforcing their own sense of upended frontality by declaring their relation to it, and of course establishing the visibility of its lozenge shape by doing so. (The outward fan of the rooftop in the bottom center of the image thematizes, in a certain sense, the opening spread of the lower half of the diamond, the overall shape of which is made to read implicitly: [1] through the diagonal path at the lower left coupled with the treatment of the facade of the leftmost house—radically narrowing, as it does, from right to left; [2] through the silhouette of the landmass that slopes upward from the midpoint of the left side of the canvas to end in the house centered near the top edge of the frame; [3] through the downward cascade of roof lines that terminates in the horizontal which articulates the midpoint of the painting’s right edge; and [4] least explicitly from a geometrical point of view but most convulsively from that of a normative sense of perspective, the diagonal vector set up in the lower right by the right-hand eave of the near, central house.)

Now, if Picasso makes his relief plane from a lozenge rather than a rectangle, this, I would argue, is because a lozenge yields most readily to another set of geometries.
that can be mapped onto it. The diamond shape, with its axes drawn in—and within the shape’s implicit perimeters Picasso does indeed create a strong set of cross-axial vectors to indicate the internal geometry of the form—presents us with one of those visual puzzles with a long history in the game of spatial projection. It is a figure about which we can ask: Are we seeing a decorative object—four abutted triangular wedges—or are we looking at the four sloping sides of a pyramid? And if the latter, is this a concavity into which we stare, the receding walls of the spatial hollow that perspective diagrams; or is it a convexity, with the point of a solid projecting forward at us? Which is to say that Picasso’s “relief plane” has, in its very origami-like configuring, a trick up its sleeve in the form of a set of possible, interpenetrating but conflicting readings, being, so to speak, a plane with a collapsible back. And when that back collapses, as it so very dramatically does in the great chasm of voluptuous darkness that opens—full-blown in its modeling and without any possible passage-like elision between the walls that channel this abyss—the experience for the viewer is precisely one of being centered exactly over the pyramid, suspended above it and looking directly down into its tip—the only orientation with regard to this shape that could produce the ambiguous reading I spoke of. If Gertrude Stein said that the houses cut across the landscape here, refusing to fuse with it, might she not have been describing just this effect of radical disjunction that takes place between, on the one hand, the experience of shape—frontal, rising, parallel to picture and to plane of vision, the very stuff of what Leo Steinberg has (with a wink at James Joyce) called the diaphane—and, on the other, the experience of something that imperiously, vertiginously beckons, something that excavates deep into both painting and landscape ground. And if it is depth into which we look, suspended over the houses at Horta—as over the reservoir

(see Reservoir at Horta; P&B, p. 151)—and looking down, then that depth is connected to an angle of vision which is disjunct from the frontal rising field of the diaphane, the plane of vision. It is a depth which takes its cues from quite another zone of the sensorium, for it is a depth that occurs when the ground gives way below one’s feet, a depth that is a function of touch, of the carnal extension of one’s body.

This disjunction is, I would say, what Picasso took from Cézanne even more certainly than the lesson about the continuity of relief. For one of the anomalies registered again and again in Cézanne’s work is that as the perceptual array swivels out of the strictly vertical field of the diaphane—the plane of vision parallel to the painter’s upright regard—and, approaching the place where he stands, it slides away from the visual and into the ground that is beneath his very feet, the painter is then forced to drop his head and to look instead at the zone of his own body. The break thereby opened in his orientation to the array cannot but make the visual and the carnal disjunct within the unified system of the painting (see, for example, Still Life with Plaster Cupid; fig. 8). And it is this discontinuity between vision and touch that is there to be seen in Cézanne, a caesura which, I would argue, affected Picasso, as it never really entered the problematic of Braque.21

One of the earliest examples of Picasso’s working this disjunction, in all its absoluteness, into his art, and tracking it systematically, so to speak, is the elaboration in 1907 of what Kahnweiler would refer to as “thread-like lines” of direction, those parallel striations of color that are often identified as marking Picasso’s “African” style. In Picasso’s fascination with those marks, in his constant but varying recourse to them, we can see a comparison being made between the way parallel straight lines open onto two totally disjunct modalities of representation. In one, the system of Western illusionism, parallel hatching is the very mark of the oblique, of the swiveling of the plane from frontality into depth, and thus of the variation of shape in its changing relation to the angle of vision (fig. 9). In the second, parallel lines, etched permanently into their very ground, are a function of shape. The scarifications of the African body, they do not shift with the volume’s variable relation to light, but endure beyond all visual contingency. Oscillating back and forth in relation to the significance of these striations—the frontal and immutable versus the oblique and contingent—and often using the two possibilities within the same image, although always carefully separating them, Picasso seems to be playing with the way one and the same set of marks can open onto two separate
sensory tracks: one, a visual stratum, the other a tactile one; the first a registration of the frontality of the optical field, the diaphane, the second the descriptor of all those kinesthetic cues upon which the perception of depth depends (see figs. 10, 11). And in this oscillation what seems significant is this constant unraveling of what we can think of as the perceptual plenum, a disintegration of it into the unsynthesized possibility of two separate and separately marked sensory channels.

The idea of separate channels is something that is supported by late nineteenth-century associationist psychology in its insistence that the flat pictures formed on the surface of the retina are shapes indifferent to depth—like a trapezoid which can variously be read as a two-dimensional figure or as a square seen in perspective—to which remembered tactile cues must be coupled in order to aggregate the experience of a single perceptual whole. If Seurat welcomed such an idea, seeing in it the basis for conceptualizing a semi-autonomous realm of vision within the human sensorium—two flat fields, retina and picture, mirroring each other's structure—Picasso, I would argue, found such a notion extremely disturbing. For followed to its logical extreme, it seemed to be claiming that vision never has unmediated access to depth, that depth is something that in fact is never, directly, seen. And in this sense it brought Picasso to the very brink of an extreme skepticism about vision itself.

We can imagine a pencil held parallel to our plane of vision. What we see is a bar with a pointed end—a shape given to us as simple extension. If we turn the pencil ninety degrees, so that it is perpendicular to our visual plane, what we see is not the five or so inches that begins closer to our eyes at one end and terminates at the far end of the object; what we see is a point into which that distance has been compressed. The skeptical argument about...
depth reasons that vision registers extension only; that
depth, because it is not a shape spread laterally across our
visual field, is forever invisible. The mass of a given object,
according to this argument, may be accessible to touch,
but for a stationary viewer, it will forever remain the phan-
tom property of a consciousness that must reconstruct it
from intermediary sets of evidence. And thus without
those added sets of clues or associations there is no way to
distinguish—directly, from within the unmediated expe-
rience of vision—between the trapezoid and the square
displayed in space.22

I would contend that it is this sense of the indeterminacy
of the visual as such that accounts for the way the flattened,
amost floating shapes of the Houses on the Hill, Horta de
Ebro are set to rhyme with their diamond-shaped frame
on the one hand, and the way the exaggerated, sensuously
rendered experience of the free-fall into depth is ex-
pressed as discontinuous with this diaphanic impression
on the other. I would further contend that this sense of the
withdrawal of the tactile or carnal from the specifically
visual and frontal field was experienced by Picasso in the
succeeding years, but never, I would argue, by Braque.

If in Picasso’s Analytic Cubism the cues that signal the
two sensory strata—touch and sight—are kept rigorously
separate, such a separation is a function of the logic driv-
ing this production, a logic erected on the premise that
they are simply not transparent to one another. That such
is not the case for Braque accounts for those stylistic differ-
ences that so many scholars have noted, even in the period
when the work of the two is all but indistinguishable to the
uninitiated. Braque’s conception of structuring the picture
through the mechanism of transparent planes—his par-
ticular use of passage to create a system of overlap in
which vision and touch will be functions of the same
interlocking network—can be seen in the painting he
made of Sacré-Coeur in late 1909 (fig. 12), where the pic-
torial thinking creates in everything but its palette a pre-
cedent for Delaunay’s Windows. Picasso’s painting of the
same subject from the same place (fig. 13), even though
unfinished, makes clear how resistant he is to what would
later come to be called “simultanism.” For here we not
only look straight on at the diaphanic veil of shapes, but
are clearly going to be required to look downward also, to
experience the gulfs between the buildings, when, from
within another perceptual axis, the cityscape falls away
from beneath us. Further, it is Braque’s conception of the
possible transparency between vision and touch that de-
determines how, in 1911, he will handle the areas of stippling
that appear in both his and Picasso’s works from this time.

For Picasso—given the “logic” I’ve been describing—this
stippling must continue to function as a cue for touch; it
must in its close weave and density become an extension,
no matter how truncated and transformed, of modeling.
For in this way the meaning of its dislocation from the
planar profiles it abuts reads as an unmistakable evoca-
tion of touch wrenched apart from the planes whose obli-
quity it is “supposed” to define. But Braque’s drive for
transparency leads him to organize the analogous marks
far more flatly and decoratively. Indeed Braque’s transpar-
ency, which William Rubin believes Picasso to have been
imitating when in the summer of 1911 he painted an Accor-
dionist that would certainly win first prize in any Braque
look-alike contest (fig. 14), is greatly enhanced by the use
of stippling to create not patches of chiaroscuro in the
manner of Picasso but areas of a Seurat-like even fall of
light. It is not surprising that when Picasso writes to

canvas, 21⅛ × 16" (55 × 40.5 cm). Romilly 52. Musée d’Art
Moderne, Villeneuve-d’Ascq. Gift of Geneviève and Jean Masur. (Color
plate, P&B, p. 151)
Braque about the progress of this work, he refers to the stippling he will apply to it (“only at the end”) as a “Signac-style treatment.”

Now if it is true that Picasso did indeed develop a position about the relationship between the painter and the visual array that is shaped by the deep skepticism about vision I have been describing, it seems also the case that this sense of a withdrawal of touch from the field of the visual was experienced by Picasso as a passionate relation to loss. That the carnal objecthood of the model was withdrawing progressively and that its loss was felt not as a triumph but as a kind of poignant tragedy is registered in Picasso’s art of 1910 and 1911 by the way in which work clings to the human figure, and to not just any set of figures but those of his friends and lovers. One of the greatest monuments of this withdrawal is surely the portrait of Fanny Tellier (fig. 15). Conceived in relation to the extremely beautiful Corots that Picasso saw exhibited in the fall of 1909, his enthusiasm for which led him to the trade with Uhde (whereby the dealer’s portrait by Picasso was exchanged for a Corot lute player), the 1910 Fanny Tellier resonates with this sense of consternation at the thought that the extraordinary unity of the sensory plenum rendered with such directness and immediacy by Corot is no longer available to himself.24 If we look at the displacement of the representation of voluptuous, velvety substance from the nude’s breast—the very form that should normally carry it—to the empty space behind the figure, we are forced to compare a site of carnal pleasure now become merely a flattened, jagged shape hung away from the body and a patch of “empty” space now endowed with the qualities of delectability no longer imputed to the bodily form. And in the exquisite irony of that comparison we are led to experience something of the feelings that drove Picasso as he watched the outcome of his own visual convicions, as, that is, he watched depth and touch—that what we could call the carnal dimensions disappear, quite literally, from sight.25

I therefore think we have to read Picasso’s declaration, made to Kahnweiler in June of 1912, that his “great love” for Eva Gouel will be transcribed into his work in the form of something “I will write in my paintings,” as a statement that is extraordinarily charged.26 For it to have gotten to the point that the carnal dimension—depth—is so unavailable to one of the most accomplished figure painters of his age that he must render his passion for a woman by writing it on his pictures is certainly one of the great ironies in the history of illusionist painting.

But it is also one of the great watersheds.

In calling this essay “The Motivation of the Sign,” I have been crossing what may seem like semiological and psychological wires. For in semiological terms the linguistic sign—registered by words like JOLIE EVA OR MA JOLIE—is precisely unmotivated, unlike the iconic sign which, in the axis of its resemblance to its referent, is.27 And if by the summer of 1912 Picasso has come to the point where what he most wants to represent in his work is the very thing he has no means to depict directly, that is the point from which he embarks on writing such a thing on his canvases. It is the place of embarkation on a journey into the exploration and invention for his art of the unmotivated sign.

This matter of motivating the sign, raised by my title, does not, then, refer to the import of the semiological turn.
It is not a biographical or psychological motivation—the love for this or that woman, or indeed for women—nor is it really a formal one. Let us call it a phenomenological motivation, a desire to articulate the most inwardly felt experience and to be able to objectify it at the level of the sign.

On awakening I prepared to reply to Henri van Blarenberghe. But before doing it, I wanted to glance at Le Figaro, to proceed to this abominable and voluptuous act that is called reading the newspaper thanks to which all the unhappinesses and disasters of the universe during the last 24 hours, the battles that have cost the lives of 50,000 men, the crimes, the strikes, the bankruptcies, the fires, the poisonings, the suicides, the divorces, the painful residue of the emotions of the statesman and the actor, transmitted during our

The Motivation of the Sign

heralded by collage. Rather, it addresses the specific set of signifieds that Picasso seems most insistently to organize in the opening years of his exploration of collage. Those signifieds—depth and atmosphere or light—are in no way random, but are prepared for, motivated if you will, by the experience of the preceding five years. It was the entire meaning of the oblique—touch, chiaroscuro, warmth, light—that the frontality of shape progressively occulted and marginalized, driving it from the field of visual representation. And it is this meaning that will now be inscribed on the pictorial surface through the medium of collage: turning, luminosity, transparency, obliquity. The motivation for the sign is in this sense understood as driven by that very carnality of Picasso’s connection to painting and its subject which Leo Steinberg explored in the essay “The Philosophical Brothel.”


morning feast for our personal use to us who aren’t even interested in them, excellently enter into relation, in a particularly exciting and tonic manner, with the recommended ingestion of several throatfuls of café au lait.

—Marcel Proust, “Pastiches et mélanges,” 1907

For the several scholars and critics who have sought a set of concepts in structural linguistics to describe not only what happens in (Picasso’s) collage, but its import as well for something like a general history and theory of representation, their position with regard to this collateral field is sharply different from that of historians seeking to “explain” Cubism via $n$-dimensional geometry, the fourth dimension, X-ray photography, the ideas of Henri Bergson, etc. For in the latter cases the contents of the neighboring field are understood as constituting what could be called a “master signified”: an idea—of space-time; of science’s access to transparency; of the notion of the durée—which the pictorial elements come to illustrate, illustrate always understood, here, in its iconic function, that of picture. And indeed, were the terms set in train by structural linguistics—terms like “sign,” “signifier,” etc.—to be used in this way, we would once again confront the kind of iconological operation that those earlier sorts into the history of ideas produced. We would, that is, use the concept of the sign iconically, as a way of deciphering the referents schematically alluded to by various reductive marks occurring in a given work: the cascades of parallel curves to indicate the folded cloth of a sleeve; the long diagonal flanked by two tiny circles to convey the nose and eyes of a face. But in so doing, we would have ceased to be alert to the distinction that operates at the heart of all modern semiotics, including structural linguistics.

This distinction, which cannot be overstressed, is the great gulf dividing the signified—the signifier’s Siamese twin in semiology’s structure of the sign—from the referent. The signified is a concept; the referent a (real) object. And the point of this difference is that the signifier/signified relationship means that the concept itself is not above the system that produces the sign as a component in a vast network of other signs; rather, the concept is a function of that same system, is affected by it. Which is to say that the signifier is not a label that gets affixed to a real-world object to produce a code name for that object (a bottle, say); instead, since the signifier and the signified are produced in one and the same operation, the meaning of a word is as much a function of the phonological considerations that produced its distinctions from its sonic neighbors (bottle, throttle, battle), as it is a result of perceptible differences in the field of reality (bottle, decanter, jar).

The condition of the master signified, on the other hand, is that it is outside the system—like the positivist truths of science in the field of radiography, or $n$-dimensional geometry. This is in distinction to the structural-linguistic signified, which is never beyond the system, cannot be so. And the consequence of its inclusion is that meaning is always mediated by the system; it is inevitably, irremediably, irrevocably, processed by the system’s own structural relations and conventions.

Thus the impulse toward structural linguistics, in the work of those writers who have acted upon it, is not the drive for a method for unpacking a style or a painting, for decoding it, so to speak, but is instead motivated by a wider consideration about the nature of representation. That wider consideration is one of total resistance to a realist or a reflectionist view of art, namely, the idea that the painting or the text is a reflection of the reality around it, that reality enters the work of art with the directness of the image striking the mirror. And it is in view of that resistance that semiology is welcomed as a way of demonstrating how specifically, the structure of any sign—whether word or image—always mediates the real, constructing not an object—a referent—but a signified.

There is thus a family of theories that the semiotically minded would be interested in, not just those bearing the names Saussure, Jakobson, Hjelmslev, or Martinet; and some of these theories were even developed as an attack on orthodox structural linguistics, although in that very attack they nevertheless maintained the integrity of representation as the construction of a signified, of meaning as something always-already mediated by the operations of the sign. Which of these theories one might turn to depends, it seems obvious, on the nature of a specific historical problem.

Now one of the problems that confronts the historian when looking at the onset of papier collé in the fall of 1912 is the particular choice of materials used as additions to the drawing sheet. For Braque to turn to faux-bois wallpaper would seem merely an expansion of the painterly surfaces he had already been exploring in works of his Analytic period (for example, Homage to J. S. Bach; P&B, p. 215). It is thus less of a disruption than Picasso’s choice, in November and December, of newsprint. A variety of reflectionist readings have been offered to explain this latter choice.

One is a Futurist-based reading that sees Picasso welcoming the anti-establishment associations of industrial and

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mass-cultural materials and objects, in all their noisy ephemerality. Another is a realist reading that interprets the move as welcoming the possibility of directly including the artist's surroundings of café and studio within the picture. A third—the most recent—argues that the newsprint was imported so that Picasso could speak, through it, of his attitudes toward anarchy and war. All of these positions, which argue the embeddedness of the collage material within the social context of the work, take a dim view of the structural-linguistic approach, seeing it as yet another formalism that turns its back on the object's content and the degree to which that content is motivated by the social field.

But the formalism/social and materialist history battle was not invented yesterday. One need only glance at the debates waged in the 1920s in the Soviet Union to see the very same issues argued and with the same mutual lack of comprehension and the same intransigence on both of the opposing sides. Except that in that earlier rehearsal of the argument there was a third position added, one enunciated by Mikhail Bakhtin, who called the field he wanted to articulate "sociological poetics." In this rubric can be heard, of course, a strange oxymoron in the marriage between the very idea of a poetics—the attempt to define the laws internal to a linguistic form—and that of sociology's concern with the context of cultural production. But Bakhtin's conception of the study of art as a medium of social intercourse did involve such a marriage, although it began by cursing both the Formalist and the Marxist theoretical houses. If the opening sentence of his 1928 attack on Formalism, called The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship, reads, "Literary scholarship is one branch of the study of ideologies," the book goes on to reject any simple, reductionist view of art. "There is no experience," Bakhtin wrote, "outside its embellishment in signs. From the outset, there cannot even be a question of a radical qualitative difference between interior and exterior... It is not experience that organizes expression, but, to the contrary, expression that organizes experience." It was Bakhtin's position that expression—by which he meant the field of discourse, and indeed his whole theory was intended to elaborate what was meant by discourse—was the generator or constructor of meaning. And thus he wrote:

It is unfortunate that Marxist criticism, which was called upon to battle Formalism on the essential issues and enrich itself in this battle, refused to meet Formalism on the real territory of the problems of constructive meaning. Most often the Marxists enlisted in the defense of content. In doing so they improperly contrasted what they were defending to the poetic construction as such. They simply evaded the problem of the constructive function of content in the structure of the work.

Now if Bakhtin did agree with the Formalists that meaning is constructed rather than given, with this construction an effect of the very medium of expression, he broke sharply with them about the nature of that medium. In the Formalists' eyes the medium was "language" and the master discipline to which they had recourse was linguistics; indeed they looked to the Moscow Circle of linguists within which figures like Roman Jakobson were developing a version of structural linguistics that paralleled that of Saussure. For Bakhtin, however, the medium was not "language" but discourse; the difference being that language is a logic, a set of grammatical and transformational laws that permit the reiteration of the same words or phrases in a multitude of contexts, or individual speech events, while discourse is, on the other hand, grounded precisely in the concreteness of the single utterance as a nonrepeatable event. As a study of the laws of how such utterances function, discourse's founding principle for Bakhtin is that it is interpersonal. Which is to say it is not—as the impersonal logic of the language model would have it—precipitated out of a set of linguistic rules; instead it is generated reactively, as one half of an already engendered dialogue. "All understanding is dialogical," Bakhtin would insist. "Understanding is in search of a counter-discourse to the discourse of the utterer." Or again he would say, "Meaning is personal: there is always within it a question, an appeal to, and an anticipation of, the answer; there are always two subjects in it (as the dialogical minimum)." But in this question of the intersubjective grounding of meaning Bakhtin would also make very clear that the subjects or persons he had in mind are not the subjects of psychological individualism; they are instead what he would call "semantic subjects," subjects formed in and through discourse, discourse as the ideological matrix, the very stuff of the social field. For his theory no utterance is, then, originary; each is instead a reaction to what has already been said, or what the speaker knows to be already felt, believed, perceived, by his interlocutor—feelings, beliefs, perceptions, which form what could be called the horizon of reception. The speaker is always, in Bakhtin's terms, in an evaluative relation to that horizon, probing it, cajoling it, refusing it, seducing it. And it is that.
relationship between the values of the speaker and those of the receiver which fills every utterance with a condition that is communal and reactive. “No member of a verbal community,” Bakhtin writes, “can ever find words in the language that are neutral, exempt from the aspirations and evaluations of the other, uninhabited by the other’s voice. On the contrary, he receives the word by the other’s voice and it remains filled with that voice. He intervenes in his own context from another context, already penetrated by the other’s intentions.”

Jakobson
context
sender . . . message . . . receiver
contact
code

Bakhtin
object
speaker . . . utterance . . . listener
intertext
language

If we compare the famous graph by Jakobson of the communications model of structural linguistics with the graph that Bakhtin used to critique it, we will see both Bakhtin’s agreement with the Formalists’ concentration on the means of expression and his disagreement with their ideas about meaning. In the Jakobson model we could imagine linguistic exchange working something like the communication between two telegraph operators: one person has a content to transmit (what Jakobson refers to as “context”) and, encoding it with the help of a key, sends it through the air; if contact is established, the other decodes it with the same key, thus recovering the initial content. In refusing such a model Bakhtin states, “Semiotics prefers to deal with the transmission of a ready-made message by means of a ready-made code, whereas, in living speech, messages are, strictly speaking, created for the first time in the process of transmission, and ultimately there is no code.” This is why Bakhtin replaces “message” with “utterance” and “code” with “language.” But the substitution of “intertext” for “contact” needs some more elaboration. For Bakhtin, contact—or the opening of the channel between speaker and listener—cannot be a component of the system he is modeling, because it is the very medium of that system: without the shared horizon—spatial, lexical, ideological—there is no speech event. So the component must be the form of the dialogical relation—“the reaction that endows with personhood the utterance to which it reacts.” This is the intertext: the already given text to which one reacts and the reacting text being created.

There is another component to Bakhtin’s notion of dialogism that needs very briefly to be mentioned. Since meaning involves community, in all the diversity of its members, dialogue will occur between types of irreducibly different discourses, and the utterance can therefore be given by the confluence of different ages, professions, social classes, regional affiliations. This diversity Bakhtin called heterology, and he saw power as always working to reduce this heterology and to instate homogeneous speech. “In modern times,” Bakhtin’s analysis ran, “the flourishing of the novel is always connected with the decomposition of stable verbal and ideological systems [church, absolute power] and to the reinforcement of linguistic heterology.” Modernity in Bakhtin’s eyes thus runs toward a disruption of that unity, which in the field of literature he saw embodied in the form of poetry; the advanced guard of this disruption was the novel, which allowed for a plurality of voices.

Although this excursus into the history of literary-critical debate may seem somewhat digressive, I would like to suggest that, given the parameters of the interpretive conflict between so-called formalists and social historians of art, it might prove extremely useful to try to think about collage through the vehicle of Bakhtin’s model. For that model holds out a way of analyzing the social context’s immanence to the work of art: of seeing how the work, as a discursive event, interpolates the social not through an act of reflection, but through the medium of the intertext.

Suppose we follow Bakhtin in viewing any utterance, enlarged here to include aesthetic decisions—like the interjection of newsprint within the pictorial medium—as a response to another utterance. If we do so, it will not be possible for us to think of such a decision as a direct reflection of a material, such as newspaper, or of a theme, such as popular culture or the Balkan Wars, but rather as something always already mediated by the voice, utterance, or decision, of someone else: another speaking or acting subject for whom this issue—newspaper—counts. Now, on Picasso’s horizon, there were in fact two such subjects. One of them was Guillaume Apollinaire, among Picasso’s most intimate companions from the opening years of Cubism, and the incipient inventor of the calligram; and the other was Stéphane Mallarmé, the poet...
whose star was rising over the late nineteenth century to shine into the twentieth with the light of an austere
defined Symbolist poetics. Because both of these had much
to say on the subject of the newspaper, between the two of
them we can trace the horizon against which Picasso's
utterance can find its discursive specificity.

Mallarmé's position set the newspaper in opposition to
the book, the precious object defended by him as the great
medium of poetic truth. The newspaper's defects were
various. Among them: that it presented to its reader col-
umn upon column of monotonous gray type; that its politi-
cal vocation meant that it organized its contents into a
hierarchy dictated by power—thus the lead article chases
the advertising to a back page; and that (and this seems to
be its worst offense) it confronts its reader with the mon-
strous amorphism of an open, flat-sheet, as distinct
from the precious folds made available by the pages of a
book.48 And indeed Mallarmé's great poem *Un Coup de dés*
(fig. 16), organized as it is, so that poetic lines must be read
across the gulf of the book's central fold, stands as an
aesthetic reproach to this view of the crudeness of the
newspaper form. Each of the three condemnations is, in
fact, countered by the organization of *Un Coup de dés*, in
the way the typographic spacing and diversity refuse the
monotony of the column of gray print, and the dispersal
of the poem's title across the first eleven pages acts to inter-
weave the master typography of the "headline" into the
protracted body of the text. This protraction, or attenua-
tion of a theme, held in a kind of musical suspension across
wave after wave of poetic sound, establishes the analogies
with music that Mallarmé wanted for his poetry (the rele-
vant comparison would obviously be Debussy's similar
kind of suspension of a single music chord or coloration
throughout the length of a whole work). And if this tem-
poral attenuation is finally collapsed at the end of the
poem, where the title's boldface disappears from the last
two pages and the poem conjures the image of the marks
on the dice transposing themselves into the points of a

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starry constellation, this move is not meant to signal time's freezing itself into the rigid present of the page of text. Rather it conjures the text's very transcendence of time through its ascension into the sphere of pure, disembodied concept.

To move from the universe of Mallarmé's book to the broadside of Apollinaire's calligram "La Cravate et la montre" (1914; fig. 17) is to observe the opposition to Mallarmé's poetics that had been building over the years that separate 1897 from 1914. The temporality of the calligram is not that precious distention over page upon page of sound, but instead the insistent presentness of a single page within which the watch ticks off a kind of percussive cycle of numbers—mon cœur is "one," les yeux marks "two," l'enfant is "three," la main is "five," and so forth. Indeed the poem is about the specificity of its temporal present, speaking as it does of the poet, Apollinaire (whose point of view is represented by the watch), and his friend, Serge Féraud, personified in the necktie, who sit around a café table waiting for noon to strike so they can go in to lunch, with the poem's climax reading in the physical center of the page in the words, "It's 5 to 12 at last and everything will be over." Apollinaire, glorying in the very flatness of the page that Mallarmé had despised, clearly believes that the typographic revolution, already at work in the pages of the newspaper and on the surfaces of billboards and advertisements, has loosened up the sheet of print, allowing many different voices to enter, creating in fact a cacophony of tones and speakers. The space of the poem, which is also the circle of the café table physicalized by the page of the calligram in 1914, had already been mapped by the conversation-poem called "Les Fenêtres," which Apollinaire wrote for a Delaunay exhibition catalogue in December 1912. There, sitting around a table Apollinaire spoke the opening line, "From red to green, all the yellow fades," whereupon his friend René Dupuy supplied a second one by saying, "When the macaws sing in their native forests," to which André Billy added, "There's a poem to write on the bird with only one wing." The next line, which Billy added in recognition of Apollinaire's anxiety over the lateness of his text was then, "We'll send it by telephonic message."

That the calligram could capture this immediacy and heteroglossia of conversation in the flat presentness of the single page, and that the newspaper itself offers a model for such a congeries of events, seems to be Apollinaire's position by the time he composed "La Cravate et la montre." Indeed as early as "Zone," the poem he wrote in the autumn of 1912, at the very moment Picasso was decid-


ing to place newsprint inside the space of the collage, Apollinaire was declaring:

You read the handbills, catalogues, posters that sing out loud and clear—
That's the morning's poetry, and for prose there are the newspapers,
There are tabloids lurid with police reports,
Portraits of the great and a thousand assorted stories.52
If we now turn to that question of Picasso's decision that we are trying to track here, we might see that its inaugural gesture, the collage with the words UN COUP DE THÉ (fig. 18), registers his decision precisely as a dialogical event—just as Bakhtin would have predicted. One of the earliest of the newsprint papier collés, this work punningly signals a field skewered to the surface by a headline that slyly summons forth Un Coup de dés in what is perhaps an ironic echo. Mallarmé had thrown down the gauntlet and Apollinaire had picked it up; and collage, too, now responds to the notion of the newspaper as a medium—or the medium—of modernity itself. But though the Bakhtinian model encourages us to see Picasso's decision as totally mediated by the issues formulated in the terms of the Mallarmé/Apollinaire axis, the model leaves it entirely open as to which end of that axis Picasso himself supports; the dialogical response can of course be either a refutation or an identification.

Now, I would argue that for us to understand the specificity of Picasso's utterance—within the intertextual space of this debate—we need to do two things: to trust our eyes about how the newsprint actually looks in this first bout of Picasso's use of it; and to understand something about Picasso's attitude toward Apollinaire's embrace of the newspaper, so enthusiastically proclaimed in "Zone."

If we do the second one first, the following facts are relevant. Apollinaire's conversion to what could be called a Futurist repertoire of images—including the newspaper—was extremely sudden. In fact, in February 1912, when Apollinaire reviewed the first Futurist exhibition in Paris, he was rather cool to the movement—a reserve that reflected the fact that he had gone to the exhibition with Picasso and was influenced by the painter's disdain for Futurism's expressionist aspirations. But that summer Apollinaire received what could be called a "shock of the new," delivered to him by Blaise Cendrars, an unknown poet just arrived in Paris who sent Apollinaire his poem "Pâques à New-York." It was in the light of Cendrars's connection to both the passion and the brutality of the new metropolis that Apollinaire, about to publish his own collected poetry under the projected title "Eau de vie," suddenly realized the arrière-garde, lingering Symbolist quality of his own work. "Zone," which he immediately set to writing and which appeared in his book as its first, explosive statement, is in fact something of a rewriting of "Pâques à New-York," just as Alcools, the title Apollinaire would use for his book, is a revision of the much more Symbolist "Eau de vie," undertaken at the suggestion of Cendrars, who had a kind of genius for these punchy Futurist titles (as Kodak, the title of a subsequent book of his, suggests). Now if the shock of the new catapulted Apollinaire into the newspaper as a poetic space—Cendrars's own "Transsiberian [Express]" (fig. 19) celebrates this columnar organization by early 1913—it also changed Apollinaire's mind completely about the value of Futurism as an artistic movement. Siding with Marinetti about questions of Futurist poetics, Apollinaire wrote a manifesto for the journal Lacerba in the summer of 1915 (fig. 20), in which he says MERDE to certain things and distributes roses to others, prominently the Futurist idea of "words in freedom." And with his declaration that the adjective should be suppressed in poetry, Apollinaire gives his assent in this little broadside to Marinetti's specific attack on Mallarmé's poetics, the kind of attack that appears, for example, in the manifesto "Destruction of

Mais oui, je m’emporte, je le sais bien, nous sommes bien loin
La fille souriait bêtement dans la locomotive.
Je penserai bientôt comme des brumes ardentes sur notre route
Nous disparitions dans la gare en plein dans un tunnel.
La fenêtre, la poussière, sm comportait aux imagier.
Et finales des batailles en l’endroit sans mort
Pas comme elle, pas son attitude.

L’ANTITRADITION FUTURISTE

Manifeste-synthèse

ABAS LEPOMMIER AMINÈSS KOREAN
et EISORAMIR ME MIGNON


This work first appeared as a broadside, in both French and

Italian, in July 1913. It appeared again in French in Gil Blas

August 3, 1913), and then in Italian in Lacerba (September 15,

5).

But this support for Futurism could not have seemed a very happy turn of events for Picasso, bringing with it as it did not only a refutation of Picasso’s own aesthetic distrust of the movement, but also and closer to home a sudden onrush of enthusiasm on Apollinaire’s part for all those artists who had been outside the charmed circle of Picasso, Braque, and their poet supporters. Suddenly Apollinaire was living, in late 1912, with the Delaunays, running around Paris with Léger to look at the urban iconography of billboards and street signs, and worst of all delivering, in October 1912 at the Section d’Or exhibition, a lecture called “The Dismemberment of Cubism.” Having said, “Possibly it is too late to speak of Cubism. The time for experimentation is passed. Our young artists are interested now in creating definitive works,” Apollinaire’s praise in his lecture for Delaunay, Léger, Duchamp, and Picabia could not have pleased Picasso.

That the Futurism suddenly taken up by Apollinaire—who was to rebaptize it “l’esprit nouveau”—was not welcome to Picasso, is something we might suspect at a personal level; but it is also something that is registered in the extraordinary restraint and near austerity of the first group of collages that import newsprint into their midst (fig. 21; see also Pa&B, pp. 261–63, 266; and Daix 543–550, 552–554). In fact, looking at those collages against the cacophonous model of the Futurist “words in freedom” (fig. 22), we get a sense of quite another conceptual world, one ruled by symmetry, clarity, balance—indeed the very kind of austere harmonics that we would associate not with Apollinaire’s position on the horizon we’ve been sketching, but in fact with Mallarmé.

The suggestion that arises from the discursive space I have been filling in would lead one to conclude, I believe, that in late 1912 newsprint had initially to be recuperated by Picasso from a world of Futurist abandon to which he himself was extremely hostile. Yet recuperation means here not simply siding with Mallarmé’s condemnation of the newspaper, but showing that the newspaper can, to the contrary, be made to yield—for the new art—the very qualities Mallarmé condemned it for lacking. Thus without jettisoning its flatness and its columnar monotony, Picasso deploys newsprint to create, at the level of the sign, those precious aesthetic possibilities that Mallarmé had insisted were the exclusive prerogative of the book: the capacity to figure forth the fold as that metaphysical “turn-
ing” of the page that opens the work of art onto the abyss or chasm of meaning; and the ability to transmute the gray drone of the marks on the page into the very sign or constellation forighth.

The intertext reveals, I think, the pressures on Picasso to embrace the materials that were now heralded by his friend Apollinaire and by many others around him as the very stuff of l’esprit nouveau. But it also helps us see that Picasso's very first embrace was so tremendously qualified as almost to appear a kind of rejection, as this material is reworked into what could be called a poetics of the sign. If Cendrars's slogan had become “Poetry is in the streets,” Picasso’s response, in these incredibly balanced and patriotic works, seems to be, “Yes, it is in the streets, but what we must do is to make clear the sense that what is there is revealed to us at the level of poetry.” Thus if at this moment Picasso's Violin (fig. 1) sounds the notes of Apollinaire’s “Zone,” it does so by reminding his friend of the aesthetic rigor and pleasure of the transformational operations of the fold. The opening of the dialogue, at this moment in November–December 1912, is not the necktie and the pocket watch but un coup de thé. The dialogue will then continue from there and become much, much more complex. And perhaps Bakhtin can help us with this burgeoning complexity, but that is for a future discussion.

2. For a definition of paradigm as a structuralist concept, as well as a basic introduction to the field of semiotics, see Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, trans. Annette Levers and Colin Smith (1964; New York: Hill & Wang, 1967), pp. 58-88. Barthes's *The Fashion System* (trans. Matthew Ward and Richard Howard [1967; New York: Hill & Wang, 1985]) is a full-scale attempt to articulate a paradigmatic network. More playfully, Barthes later describes the paradigm by means of the Argonauts' vessel, "each piece of which the Argonauts gradually replaced, so that they ended with an entirely new ship, without having to alter either its name or its form. This ship Argo is highly useful: it affords the allegory of an eminently structural object, created not by genius, inspiration, determination, evolution, but by two modest actions (which cannot be caught up in any mystique of creation): substitution (one part replaces another, as in a paradigm) and nomination (the name is in no way linked to the stability of the parts): by dint of combinations made within one and the same name, nothing is left of the origin: Argo is an object with no other cause than its name, with no other identity than its form" (Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes, trans. Richard Howard [New York: Hill & Wang, 1977], p. 46).

5. For the semological classification of signs, see Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, pp. 55-58.

4. Within semantics, the notational convention for indicating the signified of a sign is between slashes, as in /depth/.

5. Saussure writes, "In language there are only differences. Even more important: a difference generally implies positive terms between which the difference is set up; but in language there are only differences without positive terms"; or again, "putting it another way, language is a form and not a substance" (Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin [New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966], pp. 120, 122).

6. If structural linguistics uses the phonetic term "diacritical" to refer to its fundamental notion of system as the result of paired oppositions, this derives from Saussure's discussions of phonology in which the idea of a sound as such (p, say) is rejected in favor of a concept of sound already operating in systematic opposition (for example, the voiced p of put in contradistinction to the unvoiced p of up). A brilliant treatment of the systematicity of sound is Joel Fineman's "The Structure of Allegorical Desire," *October*, no. 12 (Spring 1980), pp. 47-68.

7. That Picasso uses the collage elements to render passages of drawing—of modeling and of orthogonal marks reminiscent of perspective—superfluous needs to be made explicit. The formal rhyming, for example, between the silhouette of the violin's scroll and the newspaper shape that cups it saps the description of its illusionistic import. Similarly, the implacable visual parallelism between the two newsprint segments—their existence on the absoluteness of the flat surface—drains the orthogonal lines (for example, the ones moving between the left and right segments) of their capacity to organize convincing foreshortening.


Leo Steinberg's "The Intelligence of Picasso," though never published, is a lecture that he began to give in the spring of 1974 (at the American Academy in Rome and at the Grand Palais in Paris) and has continued to transform ever since (I heard it in 1978 at Columbia University). Using concepts from Saussure as well as from linguistics and rhetoric generally, the lecture in part analyzes the significance for Picasso's early Cubism of the difference between the analogue sign (continuously traced from its referent) and the arbitrary, linguistic one.


21. To such a generalization about Braque, William Rubin objects, in the discussion following this paper, that a painting like Harbor (P&B, p. 115) displays the same break between the foreground boats, which are seen from above, and the far houses, which rise vertically (p. 295). My answer would be that though there is such a disjunction in this painting, it is a function of the subject matter and as such is an anomaly in the artist's production. Indeed, faced a few months later with a similar theme (Harbor in Normandy; P&B, p. 126), Braque specifically avoids such an interruption and preserves the continuous parallelism of the representational surface with the plane of vision.


25. Leo Steinberg writes, "Picasso, the boy wonder, had always known how to make objects look three-dimensional and how to breathe in the space between. Such magic feats were the routine of competent students in every accredited school of art. Picasso now [in 1908] asks—and with a gathering momentum of innocence—how this thing which everyone knows how to do can be done at all" ("Picasso's Sleepwatchers," in Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art [New York: Oxford University Press, 1972], p. 95). The problematic of depth—that is, of foreshortening, of turning in space, of the oblique, and the implications of this for the backs of objects—has been a constant subject of Steinberg's work on Picasso.


27. For Saussure's discussion of the arbitrariness or unmotivated character of the sign, see Course in General Linguistics, pp. 111-22. See also Barthes, Elements of Semiology, pp. 50-51. Section 25 ("The Vestimentary Sign") of Barthes's The Fashion System contains a subsection headed "The Motivation of the Sign," from which my own title is drawn.

28. The culmination of Steinberg's analysis of Picasso's Demoiselles d'Avignon reads: "The space of the Demoiselles is a space peculiar to Picasso's imagination. Not a visual continuum, but an interior apprehended on the model of touch and stretch, a nest known by intermittent palpation, or by reaching and rolling, by extending one's self within it. Though presented symbolically to the mere sense of sight, Picasso's space insinuates total initiation, like entering a disordered bed ("The Philosophical Brothel," p. 65). Steinberg's analysis has often been read as license to elaborate an erotic iconography for the painting. It would seem less an iconographic analysis, however, than a phenomenological one.

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(see my “Editorial Note,” October, no. 44 [Spring 1988], p. 5).
30. For a lengthier discussion of this point, see the essay by Yve-Alain Bois in the present volume.
31. Limiting references here just to those of us who have written on Cubism, our further concern with representation as such has led to seminal considerations of abstract art, as in Yve-Alain Bois, “Piet Mondrian: New York City;” in his Painting as Model, and the introduction to the same volume; or my “Reading Jackson Pollock, Abstractly,” in The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985), pp. 221–43.
34. Patricia Leighten, Re-Ordering the Universe: Picasso and Anarchism, 1897–1914 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), chap. 5. This is a presentation of the material in her earlier essay, “Picasso’s Collages and the Threat of War, 1912–1915” (Art Bulletin, 67, no. 4 [December 1985], pp. 653–72). David Cottington’s essay “What the Papers Say: Politics and Ideology in Picasso’s Collages of 1921” (Art Journal, 47, no. 4 [Winter 1988], pp. 350–59) insists that any literalist reading of the newspaper reports must be mediated through a conflicting social fact of the situation in which Picasso found himself in the early teens, namely, the restriction of his patronage to a small group of bourgeois collectors, and the effect this has on the thematic tenor of the collages. See as well Cottington’s essay in this volume.
35. Leighten has been the most explicit about this. See, Re-Ordering the Universe, p. 11; and her “Editor’s Statement: Revising Cubism,” Art Journal, 47, no. 4 (Winter 1988), p. 275.
37. The best introduction to the work of Bakhtin is Tzvetan Todorov, Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogic Principle, trans. Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). Discussing Bakhtin’s intervention in the debates between the Formalists and the Marxist critics in the 1920s, Todorov says, “In the preface to Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics (1939), Bakhtin indicates that his objective is to go beyond ‘narrow idealism’ as well as ‘narrow formalism’; he uses almost the same phrase in the preambles to ‘Discourse in the Novel’: The guiding idea of this work is that the study of verbal art can and must overcome the breach between an abstract ‘formal’ approach and an equally abstract ‘ideological’ approach’” (p. 35).
41. Voloshinov, Marxism and the Philosophy of Language, p. 122.
42. Or again Bakhtin writes, “I call meaning the answers to the questions. That which does not answer any question is devoid of meaning for us... The answering character of meaning. Meaning always answers some questions” (in Todorov, Mikhail Bakhtin, p. 54).
44. This analysis is based on that of Todorov, Mikhail Bakhtin, pp. 54–55.
45. Ibid., p. 56.
46. Bakhtin, Dostoevsky’s Poetics, p. 246.
50. "Il est—[moins] 5 enfin / Et tout serra fini"
51. Francis Steegmuller, Apollinaire, Poet Among the Painters
52. “Tu lis les prospectus les catalogues les affiches qui chantent tout haut
Voilà la poésie ce matin et pour la prose il y a les journaux
Il y a les livraisons à 25 centimes pleines d'aventure policières
Portraits des grands hommes et mille titres divers"
53. Robert Rosenblum was the first to make this connection, echoed ever since in the literature on Cubism (“Picasso and the Typography of Cubism,” pp. 55–56). Rosenblum was careful to include a source for Picasso's knowledge of Un Coup de dés, which was not published in book form until 1914. It had been published, however, in the May 1897 issue of Cosmopolis, where, most Apollinaire scholars agree, the young Apollinaire would have encountered it. Since many of Apollinaire's activities (for example his position in 1908–09 as critic on La Phalange, a literary review edited by a Mallarméan, Jean Royère) connected him not just with Symbolism in general, but with the Mallarméans in particular, this youthful encounter was undoubtedly prolonged. The fame of Un Coup de dés was such that Thibaudet's 1913 book on Mallarmé focused on its analysis. See Scott Bates, Guillaume Apollinaire (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1967), p. 76; and Cecily Mackworth, Guillaume Apollinaire and the Cubist Life (New York: Horizon Press, 1965), pp. 16, 96.

As he will in the discussion following this paper (p. 293), Kirk Varnedoe—in his catalogue text for High and Low—objects to the overly literary cast of the idea of a reference to Un coup de dés by Picasso here: “Or (since Picasso's French at the time was laughable, and the chances that he had read the poem, as opposed simply to knowing its title, are slim) the strategically omitted letters may have conjured something more prosaic, associated with café consumption: a cup (coup), or in slang a 'hit' or 'dose' (coup) of tea” (Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik, High and Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture [New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1990], pp. 57–58). Since Varnedoe's suggestion has already been picked up and enthusiastically repeated by at least one writer (Arthur Danto in his review of High and Low ["Art: High and Low at MoMA," The Nation, November 26, 1990, pp. 654–58]), it seems necessary to address its plausibility. Simply put, a coup de thé, used to mean something like “a spot of tea,” is impossible in French. The parallel Varnedoe is invoking is with un coup de rouge (“a hit of red [wine]), an idiom which has very specific class and use connotations, ones in which workers slugging back a glass of wine between jobs conjure up a situation in which the physicality of coup (“hit”) is possible. Since the drinkers of un coup de rouge would never be caught dead drinking tea, there is no possibility of a French association between wine and tea in this expression. Instead, the literal use of un coup de thé would be like someone picking up a handful of tea leaves and hurling it in someone else's face, both an improbable idea and a non-idiomatic French construction. Since, throughout the decade leading up to this collage, Picasso attended the weekly poetry readings at the Closerie de Lilas, his French, although putatively "laughable," allowed him nonetheless an avid taste for the literary.

54. See Steegmuller, Apollinaire, Poet Among the Painters, p. 262. In L'Intransigeant (February 7, 1912), Apollinaire wrote of the Futurists: “The simultaneity of states of mind in the work of art: that is the intoxication of our art.’ This declaration by the Italian Futurist painters reveals both the originality and the weakness of their painting. They want to paint forms in movement, which is a perfectly legitimate aim, and at the same time, they share the mania of the majority of pompiers who want to depict states of mind.... Boccioni's best canvas is the one most directly inspired by Picasso's recent works” (Apollinaire on Art: Essays and Reviews, 1902–1918, ed. L. C. Breunig, trans. Susan Suleiman (New York: Viking Press), p. 199.

55. For the relationship between Apollinaire and Cendrars, see Jay Bochmer, Blaise Cendrars: Discovery and Re-creation (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), pp. 45–55. Apollinaire scholars are often insistent that the "Pâques à New-York/"Zone influence ran the other way (see Bates, Guillaume Apollinaire, p. 182).


57. Steegmuller, Apollinaire, Poet Among the Painters, p. 235.