

PICASSO BY STEIN

By

Mia Minjung You

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Professor Charles Altieri, Chair

Professor Lyn Hejinian

Professor Damon Young

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## ABSTRACT

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*Picasso by Stein* contains five sections and a postscript that are structurally linked by, and radiating widely from, Gertrude Stein's 1938 booklet *Picasso*. The booklet originally was written and published in French (an exceptional endeavor for Stein) and then translated to English by Alice Toklas and significantly re-edited by Stein. This dissertation offers a comparative study of the French and English publications as well as considers the role and function of art criticism and biographical writing within Stein's oeuvre, particularly in how they overlap with or become part of her broader poetic project.

Rather than reading *Picasso* to glean express information on Pablo Picasso's art, or to correlate Stein's projects with Picasso's in order to explicate, or to add luster, to her writing, I argue that Stein figures the rise of modern art, illustrated through Picasso, as the development of a language-based and ultimately *poetic* thinking in pictures. Stein's insights into Picasso's achievements – with her studies ranging from *Young Girl With a Basket of Flowers* (1905) to *Guernica* (1938) – are as necessary to understanding his role in modern art as the writings of Guillaume Apollinaire and David-Henry Kahnweiler, and they direct us to the foundational, but often overlooked, presence of poetry in the trajectory of twentieth and twenty-first century art. Further, they foreshadow critical insights on abstraction and semiotics made in later art writing, such as those by Rosalind Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois. I propose that in writing about Picasso, Stein in fact writes about poetry (including, of course, her own poetry) as a conceptualist force: how it frames, re-frames, our perceptual procedures and capacities; how it provide us with experimental and expansive models of seeing and reading, or what Stein calls “direct vision;” and ultimately how it provides us with models for producing *opposition* against dominant structures of identification and interpretation. This sense of the genre as a both a perceptual and persuasive mode, rather than a set

of fixed forms, underlies Stein's crucial legacy in American avant-garde writing – illustrated here through citations of the ways Stein has been read by, or demonstrates clear affinity to, contemporary writers such as David Antin, Charles Bernstein, Lyn Hejinian, Jamaica Kincaid, Harryette Mullen, Eileen Myles, Bob Perelman, Lisa Robertson, and Juliana Spahr.

Stein's notion of "direct vision" becomes an imperative in the context of the booklet's composition, which occurs at the cusp of war. Ultimately I read in Stein the potential for an ethical dimension to formalist readings; this places her art writing between Friedrich Nietzsche's call for "reading as an *art*" in *On the Genealogy of Morality* and recent theorizations of how aesthetic experience might establish the organizing principles of social and political experience.

*for Hugo*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

During my first year in Berkeley, 2006, I found a poster-sized print for sale at Moe's Books. On it, W. Schumaker's black-and-white rendering of Gertrude Stein's profile declares, "No one knows what I am trying to do but I do and I know when I get it right." This print sat next to me in Utrecht while I wrote this dissertation, reminding me how extraordinarily lucky I've been to meet Lyn Hejinian, Charles Altieri and Damon Young. Not only have they tried valiantly to know what "I am trying to do" – whether in poetry, scholarship or life – they've never lost faith in me that one day I might get it right. I carry this gift and imperative with me beyond the Ph.D.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.

Frontispiece

2.

Still Life / Young Girl

3.

Buttonholes

4.

The Vibrant Line

5.

A Large Picture About Spain

*Postscript*

On Splendor

Bibliography

## FRONTISPIECE

On the front flap of its dust jacket, the book introduces itself:

Picasso is now accepted almost without question as the most versatile and influential artist alive. Gertrude Stein belongs to that rare category, the genuine literary innovator, and it was a happy idea that prompted her to take as the subject of a short book this great creative figure, who has also been, for many years, her close friend. Picasso's artistic career is here interwoven with the story of his life in a manner that could have been achieved by no other writer than Miss Stein. The result is a piece of writing whose perusal will be a necessity to all interested in modern ideas and their expression, while its illustrations, eight of them in color, provide a miniature gallery of Picasso's achievement, from youth to his present splendid maturity.<sup>1</sup>

In these pages, the twentieth century's "great creative figure" – the "most versatile and influential artist alive" – is reunited once more with the "genuine literary innovator." Picasso, "now accepted almost without question," is rendered into text by Miss Stein, "rare." And thankfully, still, there are pictures.

This is *Picasso* by Gertrude Stein. In 1938, a year after the Paris World Fair and *Guernica*, Stein published a book-length study of the life and career of "her close friend," portraitist, and decades-long source of both inspiration and illustration. True to its promise, the volume includes sixty-one reproductions (eight in color) of Picasso's work, ranging from his early harlequin paintings to recent portraits of Dora Maar as *La Femme Qui Pleure*. It also features two photographs by Cecil Beaton: one of the artist, and the other of the writer.

But this particular book, with the dust jacket that adorns it, is actually the first *English*-language edition, published in 1938 by B. T. Batsford, Ltd., in London. Remarkably, Stein's "original" text was published earlier that spring by the Librairie Floury, and it is

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<sup>1</sup> Gertrude Stein, *Picasso* (London: B. T. Batsford, Ltd., 1938).

in French, not English.<sup>2</sup> This is a significant deviation from Stein's famous assertion that she needs to have "english be all and all to me," and that while living in France, "I like living with so very many people, and being all alone with english and myself."<sup>3</sup> The monograph was commissioned for Libraire Floury's series "Anciens et modernes," which included *Lautrec* by novelist Pierre Mac Orlan and *Renoir* by art critic Claude Roger-Marx. According to Vincent Giroud, in *Picasso and Gertrude Stein*, possibly David-Henry Kahnweiler proposed Stein's volume on Picasso, and he, alongside Stein's friend the Baroness Pierlot, edited the manuscript. Subsequently Alice Toklas translated the text into English, "which Stein revised, or rather rewrote and expanded."<sup>4</sup>

Giroud remarks, "It is fair to describe her original [French] manuscript, preserved at Yale, as fluent rather than pedantically correct." He interestingly frames her French similarly to the ways in which many critics might assess her English, granting her some leeway for poetic license. She writes *fluently* rather than *correctly*. Stein clearly was proud of her accomplishment. On several occasions she boasts of composing *Picasso* in French; as she inscribes in the volume given to art critic Henry McBride: "My dear Henri / I did write it in French / yes I did, corrected if you / like but I did lots of love / Gtde."<sup>5</sup>

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Note that "Henry" is given a little French spin here as *Henri*. This becomes a surprisingly pointed declaration if we recall what another Henri, Henri Matisse, wrote about *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* just a few years earlier: "Gertrude Stein's translator doesn't seem to have understood her. Nor does he seem to understand the things he is talking about and I suppose that Gertrude Stein is not sufficiently acquainted with the French language to have realized this."<sup>6</sup> But if she couldn't read French, how could she have dreamt of writing it? In the same 1935 booklet, *Testimony Against Gertrude Stein*, Matisse is echoed harshly by Georges Braque, who announces, "Miss Stein understood nothing of what went on around her. I have no intention of entering into a discussion with her, since it is obvious that she never knew French

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<sup>2</sup> Gertrude Stein, *Picasso* (Paris: Libraire Floury, 1938). Henceforth, all references in the footnotes to "Stein, *Picasso*" indicate the English language version. I will use the citation "Stein, *Picasso* (Libraire Floury)" when quoting from the French.

<sup>3</sup> Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank: Paris, 1900-1940* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 119.

<sup>4</sup> Vincent Giroud, *Picasso and Gertrude Stein* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art, 2006), 42.

<sup>5</sup> From the association copy for sale by James Cummins Bookseller, last found online on July 11, 2016, cache accessed April 14, 2017, [www.vialibri.net/item\\_pg\\_i/1151970-1938-stein-gertrude-picasso.htm?l=FR](http://www.vialibri.net/item_pg_i/1151970-1938-stein-gertrude-picasso.htm?l=FR).

<sup>6</sup> Eugene Jolas, ed. *Testimony Against Gertrude Stein* (The Hague: Servire Press, February 1935), 7-8.

really well and that was always a barrier. But she has entirely misunderstood cubism which she sees simply in terms of personalities.”<sup>7</sup>

*And so what?* Stein seems to say with the 1938 *Picasso*. Here is Stein writing an *entire book* in French and unabashedly focusing on that one, singular personality that Matisse, Braque, and the other authors of the *Testimony Against Gertrude Stein* find so unfairly favored and canonized in the *Autobiography*. “Gertrude Stein had a sentimental attachment for Picasso,”<sup>8</sup> Matisse surmises, and the implication is that a sentimental attachment impedes the clarity of aesthetic judgment. But can the two truly be separate? Matisse himself clearly has difficulty maintaining rigorous differentiations between artistic endeavors and personal affinities – of not allowing emotion to blur his evaluative capacities. He concludes his testimony with a jab at Stein-as-writer, which is not hard to decipher as one last jab at Stein and Picasso’s mutual affection:

Her book is composed like a picture puzzle, of different pieces of different pictures which at first, by their very chaos, give an illusion of the movement of life. But if we attempt to envisage the things she mentions this illusion does not last. In short, it is more like a harlequin’s costume the different pieces of which having been more or less invented by herself, have been sewn together without taste and without relation to reality.<sup>9</sup>

Had this been written a decade later, Matisse might have tossed in a Minotaur reference for good measure, with disdain for its bodily inconsistency. *Her book is like a picture puzzle; her book is like a harlequin’s costume*. Here, in these similes, the tenor essentially evaporates, and the vehicle is steered to the foreground. *This illusion does not last. It has been sewn together without taste and without relation to reality*. These refer literally to the picture puzzle and the harlequin’s costume, rather than to the book. We’re left wondering: Is Matisse’s critique, in fact, of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, or of the enduring stylistic trademarks of his rival, Picasso?

A book whose composition draws evocative links to Cubism and collage would generally be considered a positive achievement within modernism’s context – not so to Matisse. Let’s put to the side the fact that the *Autobiography*, of all Stein’s writing, is a remarkably unlikely candidate for this association. After all, the *Autobiography* is frequently referred to as Stein’s “most accessible” work, with Ulla Dydo referring to it

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<sup>7</sup> Jolas, *Testimony Against Gertrude Stein*, 13.

<sup>8</sup> Jolas, *Testimony Against Gertrude Stein*, 6-7.

<sup>9</sup> Jolas, *Testimony Against Gertrude Stein*, 8.

as Stein's attempt "to get away with a book of memoirs, *not her kind of writing*, as a favor to Toklas."<sup>10</sup> James E. Breslin goes as far as to say of the book: "the autobiographical act is one at odds with, even a betrayal of, Gertrude Stein's aesthetic principles."<sup>11</sup> The nature of Stein's general "aesthetic principles" (and what exactly is "her kind of writing") is debatable. In truth, I find the *Autobiography* to be one of Stein's most remarkable literary achievements – a work that is further ahead of its time than acknowledged by most orthodox Steinians and that most likely will get its due with the increasing recognition of life writing as a literary field. Nonetheless, as Dydo's and Breslin's remarks illustrate, the talky, easily readable and even commercially successful *Autobiography* is far from being "composed like a picture puzzle," in spite of Matisse's claims.

Even more striking, and worth more interrogation, is the sense that Matisse's "testimony against Stein" lands in effect as a testimony against Picasso. His indictments against the *Autobiography*, that "this illusion does not last," and that the different pieces have been "more or less invented by herself, have been sewn together... without relation to reality," sound remarkably akin to what many art historians have praised as Cubism's, and most certainly collage's, *achievement* with regard to realism. In an essay by Rosalind Krauss, "The Circulation of the Sign," which expounds upon a semiological reading of collage, Krauss writes of Picasso's early experiments:

Does Picasso need to state any more clearly the sense in which the sign here, like the linguist's tokens, has no natural relation to a referent, no real-world model that gives it a meaning or secures its identity? Does he need to declare any more forcefully that here, in the fall of 1912, with his new medium of collage, he has entered a space in which the sign has slipped away from the fixity of what the semiologist would call an iconic condition – that of resemblance – to assume the ceaseless play of meaning open to the symbol, which is to say, language's unmotivated, conventional sign?<sup>12</sup>

According to Krauss, Picasso's groundbreaking declaration via collage is the *transformation* of the sign when placed within a new composition. For example, a newspaper article on the Balkan Wars can be cut, turned around, pasted – now to be

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<sup>10</sup> Ulla Dydo and William Rice, *Gertrude Stein: The Language That Rises, 1923-1934* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2003), 536. Emphasis mine.

<sup>11</sup> James E. Breslin, "Gertrude Stein and the Problems of Autobiography," *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism*, ed. Estelle C. Jelinek (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 149.

<sup>12</sup> Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Picasso Papers* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998), 28.

read as material composing the body of a bottle. Now look at the illustrations that accompany Krauss' essay: a *Bottle on a Table* comprised of a sheet of paper, cut-outs from a newspaper, and a series of black, drawn lines; a *Guitar, Sheet-music and Glass* that emerge only in relation to and as composed by each other, taking various scraps of paper (including wallpaper, faux-bois lining, and newsprint) as their material. Wouldn't a harlequin costume that suddenly becomes visible – having been sewn together of various different pieces invented by the artist himself, “without relation to reality” (and “no real-world model”) – fall perfectly in place? Is this the most damning image Matisse can come up with while denouncing Stein's writing?

It is, perhaps, if we demand a strict, conventional form of realism from Stein, akin to how art critics in 1907 may have looked at the *Desmoiselles d'Avignon* and declared, “But what women in Avignon actually look like that?” But Matisse is not our antagonist here. His proprietary reaction to seeing his own name, work, and personal life floating through Stein's text and his frustration with Stein's perceived trespassing are understandable. Matisse is only human. Experiment is fine, but not many of us want to be experimented *with*. Still, I draw upon Matisse's critique to illustrate the tension between *representation* and *re-creation* that underlies – and makes ceaselessly interesting, I would say – Stein's purported non-fiction writing. This includes both *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and *Picasso*, both of which ostensibly take another person as the title subject but remain nonetheless, and obviously, centered on Stein herself, “the genuine literary innovator.”

Both texts, of course, have “real-world models;” in the case of the *Autobiography*, Matisse, Braque, Picasso, Alice B. Toklas (without the “B.”) and so forth are figures who lived, breathed, and created their own narratives before and beyond their inscriptions by Stein. A book-length text titled as an “autobiography” certainly has a different accountability – in its circulation of signs – than a 62 x 47.5 cm modernist collage<sup>13</sup> depicting a bottle on a table. But to what degree can readers, Matisse included, expect the text to function as historical reportage, written with the intention to be as accurate as possible in its documentation?

Let's take a moment to state the obvious: an autobiography is *by definition* self-centered and, by implication, subjective. An autobiographer might know far more about her subject matter than a reporter, historian, or even generic biographer, but paradoxically she has a far lower bar of ethical responsibility toward it. We allow for the autobiographer to be an unreliable narrator, even to tip her toes into the domain of “fiction,” without discrediting the value of her perspective. This is, in part, because we

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<sup>13</sup> Pablo Picasso, *Bottle on a Table* (1912).

read an autobiography to experience, with the fantasy of direct address, the writer's voice, as much as we may read it to find out "what happened." That voice, with its particular shape and sound through the page, is a crucial aspect of the autobiography's exclusive information. Here, form is absolutely content. (Take note, ghostwriters!) From *The Making of Americans* to her *Lectures in America*, Stein presents herself as a restless taxonomizer, compelled to fashioning and enumerating – as well as delighting in deconstructing – categories, whether they relate to human psychologies or literary genres. At the heart of the *Autobiography* is an exposé of the expectations and possibilities for "truth" that arise from classifying a text as autobiography, and the role that voice and perspective have in shaping and constructing the truthfulness of a narrative. Consequently, Stein puts the subjective slippage and structuring license of the autobiographical genre into play, as a disclaimer against reading the text as an objective history, even before we get to the famous gesture of fictionality in the book's byline: *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* by Gertrude Stein.

This is why, I think, Matisse begins by critiquing Stein on the accuracy of her facts but ends up commenting on her mode of composition ("Her book is *composed* like a picture puzzle"). He might, on a personal level, recoil from some of the *Autobiography's* claims, but nonetheless Matisse, certainly no fool, seems to sense that Stein's project here is an engagement and experimentation with *narrative form*. In other words, Stein emphasizes aesthetics as much as ethics here, putting both pressure and emphasis on the form (or frame) of autobiographical writing, and how it is organized, presented, and authored, rather than employing the genre for a standard authorization of facts. The *Autobiography's* unsettlingly ambivalent stance between fiction and non-fiction, and its emphasis on aesthetic recreation over representational responsibility, is expounded upon by Tristan Tzara in his own "Testimony:"<sup>14</sup>

I cannot believe it necessary for me to insist on the presence of a clinical case of megalomania. This in itself would not be extraordinary if, through the curiosity it has excited, it did not give the measure of the poverty of what we are accustomed to call today "intellectual life." It is necessary to point out, however, that in the realm where lie and pretention meet, the depraved morals of bourgeois society are now opposed by the strong loathing which is felt by a few rare beings who have posited the problem of man's

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<sup>14</sup> We might be surprised that Tzara, the original Dadaist, and Matisse, the original Fauvist, had anything in common, but the 1930s were strange years. In this decade, Tzara also published a poem titled "A Henri Matisse" in *Cahiers d'art* 11, 3-5 (1936), a special issue dedicated to "Dessins de Matisse," and the two collaborated on a book titled *Midis gagnés* (Les Editions Denoel, 1939). Later, they also collaborated on the book *Le Signe de vie* (Bordas, 1946).

destiny and dignity with a gravity that is very different from the attitude which approaches it under the form of certain politely esthetic games.<sup>15</sup>

*Alas, poor Megalomania! I knew him.* If we work to unpack Tzara's denouncement of Stein, we find that his critique hinges on the *Autobiography's* subjective, self-centered perspective ("a clinical case of megalomania") and how it addresses "the problem of man's destiny and dignity," or of an "intellectual *life*," via "politely esthetic games." The *Autobiography* rests in that "realm where lie and pretention meet" – but I want to argue that during another time, in another context, under the eye of a more sympathetic reader, "lie and pretention" might have been called "fiction and empowerment," and those "politely esthetic games" could be seen as radically political subversions. For what it's worth: I, in 2017, read the *Autobiography* as an inquiry into how much perspective and voice contribute to, and can alter, those histories we think we already know. It's an answer to questions many of Stein's contemporary readers didn't yet know they should ask: What if modernism is articulated by a woman, an immigrant, a homosexual, a domestic worker, a *wife*? What if the struggle to produce the "heroic" art of the early twentieth century is told from the position of *reproductive labor*?<sup>16</sup> What if we – those of us who rarely have encountered any artistic or literary "heroes" that seem to resemble us – might find a model for self-authorization in the audacity, irreverence and idiosyncrasy of the *Autobiography's* voice, and thereby see an offering of permission to recreate how we see and read the world around us?

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In her 2016 essay "Periperformative Life Narrative: Queer Collages," Anna Poletti elaborates upon Eve Kosofsky Sedwick's conceptualization of the "periperformative," as an extension of Judith Butler's work on the performative constitution of the subject. Poletti considers how the concept "might allow us to account for the role of aesthetics in autobiographical acts," particularly those "that take a critical stance in regard to the discourses that authorize the subjectivity of the author and the act of self-representation itself."<sup>17</sup> She writes:

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<sup>15</sup> Tristan Tzara, *Testimony Against Gertrude Stein*, 13.

<sup>16</sup> By "reproductive labor," I turn to Marxist feminist discourse in order to refer to domestic labor – such as cleaning, cooking, caregiving, hosting – that has long been delegated to "wives" and unrecognized by a capitalist, patriarchal system that values only what it designates as "productive labor." Alice B. Toklas famously states in the *Autobiography*, "I had often said I would write, The wives of geniuses I have sat with. I have sat with so many... I have sat with wives of geniuses, of near geniuses, of would be geniuses, in short I have sat very often and very long with many wives and wives of many geniuses." See Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, 17.

<sup>17</sup> Anna Poletti, "The Periperformative Life Narrative: Queer Collages," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 22:3 (2016): 360.

[T]his essay identifies a class of life narrative texts that critique its aesthetics and their cultural dominance as a site of performative utterances about the self and life. I examine how formal innovation in life narrative can be a way to critique the terms under which the truth claims of memoir are made while still insisting on the unique force of the nonfictional mode of life narrative to make claims about living.<sup>18</sup>

If we consider the *Autobiography*, which Poletti mentions briefly in her essay, as periperformative, we could say that its stance, as a history of modernism articulated by a woman, immigrant, homosexual, domestic worker, and wife, is striking and notable, but still is not an end in and of itself. The *Autobiography* does not attempt simply to replace one set of truth claims about modernism with yet another. Instead, it exemplifies how particular truth claims arise from particular subject positions (even that of the imagined, objective “neutral”), and it pressures how we read identity, authorship and authorization as they are composed by a text. I think Poletti’s proposal, later on in her essay, is especially apropos here: what if we adopt another way “of thinking about a life – not as a subject made visible or precarious through the citation of discourses of identity but as an ongoing process of being made up of activities, fantasies, attachments, and orientations?”<sup>19</sup> Or as Eileen Myles puts it, when asked about the shifting position of the “I,” and how it articulates its presence in the world, in her work: “But Gertrude Stein is looking at a world in which everything is moving too.”<sup>20</sup> So how do “I,” as a writer, translate this movement into the work, as a rehearsal of the authority “I” might (at least aspire to) achieve over *life*?

I want to use this meditation on the *Autobiography* – a far better read and studied text – as a periperformative narrative of a life, and its complicated engagement with “truth,” as the groundwork for reading *Picasso*, another work that troubles the line between the conventional categories of autobiography and biography, non-fiction and fiction. *Picasso* offers the gestures of a critical biography, attempting to situate the artist’s work in the history of modern painting, while also providing such details as the Italian origin of his name and what his father looked like. Stein moves swiftly between statements such as, “Picasso was born in Malaga the 25<sup>th</sup> of October 1881,”<sup>21</sup> to, “His drawings were not of things seen but of things expressed, in short they were words

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<sup>18</sup> Poletti, “The Periperformative Life Narrative: Queer Collages,” 361.

<sup>19</sup> Poletti, “The Periperformative Life Narrative: Queer Collages,” 367.

<sup>20</sup> Stacy Szymaszek, “An Interview with Eileen Myles,” *Rattapallax*, accessed July 26, 2017, [www.rattapallax.com/eileen-myles/](http://www.rattapallax.com/eileen-myles/).

<sup>21</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 3.

for him and drawing always was his only way of talking and he talks a great deal.”<sup>22</sup> However, we soon realize that a lot of what Stein has to say about the life of Pablo Picasso deals with the life of Gertrude Stein. The word “I” opens the third sentence of the volume, appearing even before she mentions Picasso by name (the first two sentences are general remarks about painting in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.)<sup>23</sup> Further, as she does in the *Autobiography* to Toklas, Stein skims through the first decades of Picasso’s life in just a few pages, until he arrives in Paris where he meets Gertrude and her brother Leo Stein.

*Picasso* is littered with phrases that assert the presence of the narrator, that tear down any notion that Stein intends to maintain the veneer of transparency. “Well,” “But I say,” and “I remember”<sup>24</sup> superfluously begin her sentences, or she punctuates statements with what I want to call a characteristic “colloquial nod,” such as when she claims, “So then Spanish cubism is a necessity, *of course it is,*” or “He was indifferent as to what might happen to his pictures even though what might happen to them affected him profoundly, *well that is the way one is, why not, one is like that.*”<sup>25</sup> The entire book concludes suddenly as if she has been giving a lecture – as if she stands directly in front of us – although we know of no such intention for this text: “So then Picasso has his splendor. / *Yes. Thank you.*”<sup>26</sup> Occasionally Stein spells out and justifies her tendency toward self-assertion: “I was alone at this time in understanding him, perhaps because I was expressing the same thing in literature.”<sup>27</sup>

A particular *formal* structure fosters Stein’s expression in *Picasso*, and it is worth noting because it is quite literally reflective of the affinity between the artist and the writer. An example best illustrates the design. First, Stein stresses the importance of writing in the artistic development of Picasso, stating, “His friends in Paris were writers rather than painters, why have painters for friends when he could paint as he could paint... He needed ideas, anybody does, but not ideas for painting, no, he had to know those who were interested in ideas, but as to knowing how to paint he was born knowing all of that.”<sup>28</sup> She explains further:

The egotism of a painter is entirely a different egotism than the egotism of a writer.

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<sup>22</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 2.

<sup>23</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 1.

<sup>24</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 18. Emphasis mine.

<sup>25</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 27. Emphasis mine.

<sup>26</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 50. Emphasis mine.

<sup>27</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 16.

<sup>28</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 3.

The painter does not conceive himself as existing in himself, he conceives himself as a reflection of the objects he has put into his pictures and he lives in the reflections of his pictures, a writer, a serious writer, conceives himself as existing by and in himself, he does not at all live in the reflection of his book, to write he must first of all exist in himself, but for a painter to be able to paint, the painting must first of all be done, therefore the egotism of a painter is not at all the egotism of a writer, and this is why Picasso who was a man who only expressed himself in painting had only writers as friends.<sup>29</sup>

Stein initially appears to make an ontological distinction between “the painter” and “the writer.” The writer, she claims, “conceives himself as existing by and in himself,” whereas the painter “conceives himself as a reflection of the objects he has put into his pictures.” She adds, however, “for a painter to be able to paint, the painting must first of all be done.” A red flag goes up. How can this be? How can the painting “be done” if the painter is not yet able to paint? Can we read this as Stein setting up an impossible scenario – no painting is made, thus no painter is able to paint – in order to cancel out the existence of the painter (Picasso) altogether, asserting further the egotism of the writer (Stein)? Then consider the repetition of the word “reflection.” Reflection is essential for the painter’s self-conception; and while it may not be so for the writer, “the reflection of his book” nonetheless appears in this sentence and is presented as a possibility. While Stein’s logic, as it takes shape through her unwieldy sentences and ostensible paradoxes, might grow more obscure to us, the word “reflection” draws our attention to the *structure* of Stein’s argument. Stein creates a chiasmus here: Picasso’s writer-friends; the egotism of the painter and writer; how both conceive themselves as existing; the egotism of the painter and writer; Picasso’s writer-friends. The painter and the writer are positioned, and inextricably linked, as a kind of negative reflection of each other.

Such chiasmi occur throughout *Picasso*, and they signal to us that there is an art to Stein’s sentences that go beyond simply relaying facts about Picasso. Or, rather, they contribute to and shape how we understand the book’s facts about Picasso; they compose what we understand *to be* the facts. In 1939, coincidentally a year after the publication of *Picasso*, Virginia Woolf writes in an essay titled “The Art of Biography,”

By telling us the true facts, by sifting the little from the big, and shaping the whole so that we perceive the outline, the

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<sup>29</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 4.

biographer does more to stimulate the imagination than any poet or novelist save the very greatest. For few poets and novelists are capable of that high degree of tension which gives us reality. But almost any biographer, if he respects facts, can give us much more than another fact to add to our collection. He can give us the creative fact; the fertile fact; the fact that suggests and engenders.<sup>30</sup>

Woolf clarifies that such “creative” or “fertile facts” are not what we conventionally have categorized as facts; instead of being something we simply assume and accept, these facts *suggest*, *engender* and (I would add) *activate* upon encounter.

But these facts are not like the facts of science – once they are discovered, always the same. They are subject to changes of opinion; opinions change as the times change. What was thought a sin is now known, by the light of facts won for us by the psychologists, to be perhaps a misfortune; perhaps a curiosity; perhaps neither one nor the other, but a trifling foible of no great importance one way or the other. The accent on sex has changed within living memory. This leads to the destruction of a great deal of dead matter still obscuring the true features of the human face. Many of the old chapter headings – life at college, marriage, career – are shown to be very arbitrary and artificial distinctions. The real current of the hero’s existence took, very likely, a different course.<sup>31</sup>

*Facts are subject to changes of opinion. And: The real current of the hero’s existence doesn’t necessarily follow the trajectory established by convention, in this case college, marriage, career.* Both, remarkably, are statements we have been hearing on repeat in 2017, whether with regard to “media bias” and “alternative facts,” or as a re-assessment of what feminism or the “good life” might mean. I have my own opinions with regard to these assertions; nonetheless I am not sure what their consequences are or will be. Still, however, I want to underscore that in the late 1930s, such ideas were already in circulation, and that subsequently the composition of biography was starting to be viewed as a potentially transformative, creative, artistic project.

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<sup>30</sup> Virginia Woolf, “The Art of Biography,” *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays*, eBooks@Adelaide, University of Adelaide, September 14, 2015, accessed July 26, 2017, [ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/w/woolf/virginia/w91d/chapter23.html](http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/w/woolf/virginia/w91d/chapter23.html).

<sup>31</sup> Woolf, “The Art of Biography.”

Thus, when I read Stein cited in art history books such as Krauss' *The Picasso Papers*, with information from her writing treated as "scientific facts" about Picasso, I can't help but reflect on the irony. Krauss is a notable art historian who actually takes Stein's writing seriously; many, through omission, seem to think she matters very little for thinking about Picasso's trajectory. Still Krauss, who is so deeply attuned to how Picasso's formalist experiments intervene upon literal readings of his work, does not read Stein with any interest in form at all. For example, Krauss writes, "Two stories touching on Fernande are told by Gertrude Stein through the voice of Alice Toklas. The first – addressing Fernande's literary tastes – is the jealousy she exhibited during her separation from Picasso in 1907."<sup>32</sup> The second deals with Picasso's "eight years of boredom," produced by his being with this proprietary and materialistic lover. This allows Krauss to read a Fernande-like character under critique in the 1912 collage *Au Bon Marché*. What happens to Krauss' earlier, radical declaration that Picasso's papier collé "has no natural relation to a referent, no real-world model that gives it a meaning or secures its identity?" Is Stein maneuvered here as the scapegoat for when Krauss decides it *does*? Why does Stein, of all writers, have to be the source for a "natural relation to a reference," a "real-world model?"

Later in *The Picasso Papers*, Krauss dismisses Stein's "patently absurd remark" from *Picasso* regarding the artist's decision not to paint a still-life arrangement he photographed; Stein claims Picasso was satisfied enough by the photographs.<sup>33</sup> What propels Krauss to single out *this* anecdote – as opposed to, let's say, Stein's proclamation that "for a painter to be able to paint, the painting must first of all be done" – as absurd? Krauss appears to read Stein only in order to glean facts about Picasso. And, yes, in *Picasso* or in the *Autobiography* or in any number of texts Stein writes about him, we all do to a certain extent. But what if – instead of taking such facts as "scientific facts," which can prove or disprove, be proven or disproven – we read *Picasso* for its "fertile facts?" What do we start to see both in the painter and in the writer by doing so? How does this affect, or allow *us* to affect, the meanings that become available to these artists' works?

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The biography *Picasso* is in fact comprised of several biographies of Picasso. Chronology moves in this book as if we occasionally get trapped in revolving doors: we think we've moved forward to 1921, and then we find we're back in 1906 again. Further, Stein refuses to be consistent with dates. Midway through the book, Stein

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<sup>32</sup> Krauss, *The Picasso Papers*, 61.

<sup>33</sup> Krauss, *The Picasso Papers*, 121.

introduces Picasso's "last period of pure cubism, that is to say from 1912 to 1917."<sup>34</sup> Then, across the next two pages, these dates shift from "this last period of pure cubism, 1914-1917," to "this period, 1913 to 1917,"<sup>35</sup> when "his pictures have the beauty of complete mastery." *The difference of a couple years, big deal!* we might say. For a biographer, especially that of an artist as prolific as Picasso, the difference of a couple years is *certainly* a big deal. Stein is making a statement here, and we, as her readers, need to interrogate it.

I want to argue that such chronological instability occurs primarily because Stein juggles, and periodically overlaps, several varying narratives of Picasso's development. First Stein gives us the portrait of the artist as "a Spaniard," who functions to some extent as the representative of Spain's (alongside America's) significant influence on the twentieth century. Therefore, the different phases of Picasso's artistic career depend on when he "forgot all the Spanish sadness and Spanish reality,"<sup>36</sup> when "he became once more completely Spanish,"<sup>37</sup> and so forth. Stein also recounts to us the history of Picasso as a *writer in pictures*. She begins by noting how "Picasso wrote painting as other children wrote their a b c,"<sup>38</sup> and concludes with him painting "a large picture about Spain," *Guernica*, which "was written in a calligraphy continuously developed."<sup>39</sup> This "large picture about Spain" also signals the end to another story about Picasso, one that is told through his colors. Stein briefly interrupts her discussion of his work as "calligraphy," as writing, with the statement, "Later I will tell something about Picasso's color which too, in itself, is a whole story."<sup>40</sup> When she finishes describing *Guernica* as the moment he "found his color, his real color in 1937," she writes, straight to the point: "Now this is the end of this story, not the end of his story, but the end of this story of his story."<sup>41</sup>

Picasso's story, according to Stein, begins again and again. One of the verbs Stein uses most frequently in *Picasso* – to describe what, exactly, Picasso *does* – is "to commence," and it often is paired with "again." Stein writes, "in Paris, he commenced again to be a little French,"<sup>42</sup> "Spanish commenced again to be active inside him,"<sup>43</sup> "at present another composition is commencing,"<sup>44</sup> "Picasso commenced his long struggle to

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<sup>34</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 35.

<sup>35</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 36.

<sup>36</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 20.

<sup>37</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 5.

<sup>38</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 2.

<sup>39</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 48.

<sup>40</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 40.

<sup>41</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 48.

<sup>42</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 7.

<sup>43</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 8.

<sup>44</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 11.

express head faces and bodies of men and of women in the composition which is his composition;”<sup>45</sup> “Picasso commenced and little by little there came the picture Les Desmoiselles d’Avignon;”<sup>46</sup> “perhaps this was the commencement of the end;”<sup>47</sup> “Picasso commenced again he recommenced the struggle;”<sup>48</sup> “Picasso commenced to work, he commenced to speak as he has spoken all his life;”<sup>49</sup> and soon after, “in 1937 he commenced to be himself again.” These examples are selected almost at random. I flipped a few pages, put down my finger and found an instance of “commencing” happening nearby. But Stein is deliberate, even self-conscious, about the frequent appearance of this word. At one point she winks at us: “To commence with the commencement.”<sup>50</sup>

Here we should recall that this text is the English version of the original French text, and we might wonder – following Matisse and Braque – if perhaps Stein’s limited French vocabulary led to this insistent “commencing.” However, as Giroud points out, Kahnweiler and the Baroness Pierlot were allowed a heavy hand in the French text, and Stein significantly rewrote the English text. Kahnweiler also added “explanatory footnotes” to the French text that are not present alongside the English one. Giroud writes,

The English text does not retain the footnotes (many of which were references to *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*) or Flourey’s division into six chapters... Considering the numerous textual differences between the English and French, not to mention completely different layouts and punctuation, Stein’s 1938 *Picasso* can be said to exist in two distinct versions.<sup>51</sup>

The French *Picasso* and the English *Picasso* are strikingly different texts. In addition to being divided into six chapters, the French *Picasso* frequently divides the dialogue in Stein’s writing into separate voices. For example, the chiasmus-like, subject-switching sentence in English, “Picasso went red, he said, it’s not possible, she had been painting in secret for a long time, never I tell you, I said to him,”<sup>52</sup> appears as such in the French: “Picasso devint rouge: / – *C’est impossible*, dit-il, *elle a dû peindre depuis*

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<sup>45</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 13.

<sup>46</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 18.

<sup>47</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 33.

<sup>48</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 35.

<sup>49</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 48.

<sup>50</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 44.

<sup>51</sup> Giroud, *Picasso and Gertrude Stein*, 42.

<sup>52</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 4-5.

*longtemps en secret. / – Jamais, je vous le jure.*”<sup>53</sup> Further, the French text attempts to provide chronological clarity and order, with paragraphs often beginning with a statement of the year in question: “1901. Picasso, qui est allé passer la Noël en Espagne, revient à Paris;”<sup>54</sup> “1905. Les peintres ont toujours aimé le cirque et même maintenant où les cirques sont souvent remplacés par les night-clubs et les cinémas.”<sup>55</sup> Chapter 3 begins dramatically with a two-sentence paragraph, “1914! La guerre.”<sup>56</sup> The counterpart in English to this line appears in the middle of a continuous page of text and reads, “Then there was war and all his friends left to go to the war.”<sup>57</sup> This shift in tone between the French and English is obvious; but we also should note that in the French, the First World War stands alone, as an acknowledgement of its world historical, singular significance. In the English, *the* war becomes *a* war; it is brought up as the place to which Picasso’s friends leave to go.

With the versions’ discrepancies in mind, we now might try to “commence” again: the excessive repetition of “commencing” in the English text actually appears to be a calculated addition. Where Stein writes, “Picasso commenced to work, he commenced to speak as he has spoken all his life,” and “in 1937 he commenced to be himself again,” she writes in French, “Picasso recommence à travailler, il parle comme il a toujours parlé,” and “en 1937, il est de nouveau lui-même.”<sup>58</sup> I want to read Stein’s insistence on “commencing again” in the English *Picasso*, and this deviation from the French, as a signal that various versions of Picasso’s story – even various versions of *Stein’s version* of Picasso’s story – are in circulation. Picasso’s story begins again and again. And can we say that any one of these stories is the *true* one? Can we isolate any of these as entirely *untrue*?

In *Picasso*, Stein shows us that a variety of narratives are possible, present, while also revealing that they are all inextricably linked to or fused into one another. “This is his life.”<sup>59</sup> The way that one narrative develops has implications and consequences for the others; even if we accept Woolf’s contention that facts “are subject to changes of opinion,” narratives can only co-exist if they don’t negate each other, if they, even in shifting interpretive contexts, can remain plausible. A narrative might be a way of organizing a life and streamlining so it is legible in text, but once it exists, it doesn’t stay in its own lane; it becomes a determining factor of life, a *part* of life. Narratives don’t remain tidily and respectfully discrete. They reach over to take a “scientific fact”

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<sup>53</sup> Stein, *Picasso* (Libraire Floury), 11.

<sup>54</sup> Stein, *Picasso* (Libraire Floury), 12.

<sup>55</sup> Stein, *Picasso* (Libraire Floury), 24-25.

<sup>56</sup> Stein, *Picasso* (Libraire Floury), 87.

<sup>57</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 28.

<sup>58</sup> Stein, *Picasso* (Libraire Floury), 160.

<sup>59</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 22.

and turn it into a “fertile fact.” They form a composition. They recreate life. As Stein writes, “At present another composition is commencing, each generation has its composition, people do not change from one generation to another generation but the composition that surrounds them changes.”<sup>60</sup> This is where the power (or empowerment) of writing lies for Stein. “The creator in the arts... is sensitive to the changes in the way of living and his art is inevitably influenced by the way each generation is living, the way each generation is being educated and the way they move about, all this creates the composition of that generation.”<sup>61</sup>

In *Picasso*, Stein composes (or recreates) the past life of the artist so that it will remain in the “continuous present.” In “Composition as Explanation” (1926), Stein posits, “Beginning again and again is a natural thing even when there is a series. / Beginning again and again and again explaining composition and time is a natural thing.”<sup>62</sup> She clarifies, however, that the “continuous present” and “beginning again and again” are not the same thing; nonetheless, “beginning again and again” is how one naturally tries to achieve (or, as Stein puts it, “grope for”) the “continuous present.” In a 2013 interview, Lisa Robertson describes the influence of Stein’s concept of the “continuous present” on the ways in which her writing engages philosophy and history, as well as on her use of repetition both to express and to affect subjectivity. Robertson articulates perfectly what I see as Stein’s project in *Picasso*, how the book, as a periperformative life narrative of a *friendship* (of both Stein and Picasso), keeps this relationship vital in the present:

The question of the continuous present was introduced to me by Stein through her practice of repetition and then I began to diversify my thinking about it through my readings of philosophy... But my sense of the present is quite poly-temporal. I mean to me, to talk about the “continuous present” doesn’t exclude a profound interest in historical style or historicity per se. I’ve always been deeply motivated by thinking about sentences and sentence structure, the shapeliness of the sentence, and exploring historical transformations and transitions in the conceptions of what a

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<sup>60</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 11.

<sup>61</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 10.

<sup>62</sup> Gertrude Stein, “Composition as Explanation,” EPC Digital Library, accessed July 30, 2017, [www.writing.upenn.edu/library/Stein\\_Composition-as-Explanation.html](http://www.writing.upenn.edu/library/Stein_Composition-as-Explanation.html). Originally published in London by Hogarth Press, 1926.

sentence can perform, how a sentence unfolds and shapes itself, and how utterances themselves shape subjectivity.<sup>63</sup>

Robertson underscores that “historical transformations and transitions” can be observed through “conceptions of what a sentence can perform” – both in how these transitions have shaped the sentence, and how the sentence, as “utterance,” can shape subjectivity and, subsequently, the trajectory of history.

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Stein spends a significant portion of *Picasso* describing what “a creator” does, but still by the end of the book we’re left with an essential question: does a creator actually produce something *new*, or is a creator one who is able to see things *as they are*, who has, as Stein calls it, “a direct vision?”<sup>64</sup> On one hand, Stein writes, “A creator is not in advance of his generation but he is the first of his contemporaries to be conscious of what is happening to his generation.”<sup>65</sup> But then Stein also describes Picasso as creating the “beauty of realization,” which “during its creation is not beauty, it is only beauty when the things that follow it are created in its image. It is then that it is known as beauty on account of its quality of fecundity, it is the most beautiful beauty, more beautiful than the beauty of serenity. Well.”<sup>66</sup> Here, something new certainly seems to emerge from the creator’s work. We might consider how Stein compares Picasso to other would-be creators to help resolve this question. When Stein describes the Surrealists,<sup>67</sup> with whom Picasso briefly aligned himself in the 1930s, she writes,

The surrealists still see things as every one see them, they complicate them in a different way but the vision is that of every one else... Picasso only sees something else, another reality. Complications are always easy but another vision than that of all the world is very rare. That is why geniuses are

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<sup>63</sup> Julie Carr, “An Interview with Lisa Robertson,” *The Volta/Evening Will Come* 25, January 2013, accessed July 30, 2017, [www.thevolta.org/ewc25-jcarr-p1.html](http://www.thevolta.org/ewc25-jcarr-p1.html).

<sup>64</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 47.

<sup>65</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 30.

<sup>66</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 36.

<sup>67</sup> In his essay “The Semiology of Cubism,” Yve-Alain Bois recounts a 1933 conversation between Picasso and Kahnweiler, in which the artist comments on the Surrealists: “That’s why Surrealism is so harmful. The Surrealists have neglected the most important thing – painting – all for the sake of bad poetry, the sort that finds a pale young girl more poetic than a healthy one, and moonlight more poetic than the sun, etc... They didn’t understand what I meant by ‘Surrealism’ when I coined the word, which Apollinaire then published: *something that is more real than reality*.” This is a telling statement, the kind that reveals much more about how Picasso tries to frame his own work than about Surrealism, as I’ll attempt to show in upcoming chapters. See Yve-Alain Bois, “The Semiology of Cubism,” *Picasso and Braque: A Symposium*, ed. William Rubin, Kurt Varnedoe and Lynn Zelevansky (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1992), 172.

rare, to complicate things in a new way that is easy, but *to see the things in a new way* that is really difficult, everything prevents one, habits, schools, daily life, reason, necessities of daily life, indolence, everything prevents one, in fact there are very few geniuses in the world.<sup>68</sup>

I am struck by Stein's insistence that a creator does not simply create something new (or *complicate* in a new way), but "sees the things in a new way," which she also calls "knowing them as they have existed."<sup>69</sup> Stein, akin to how Woolf asserts a necessary respect for "facts," holds onto the idea that a creative subject must have some kind of responsibility or *ethic* toward her object; the imperative we read in *Picasso* is to see things more *directly*, rather than more *complicatedly*. Picasso in this book is a figure that both aptly *perceives* and radically *directs* the development of the twentieth century – not just its art, but even its wars. But *how* does he do this? Well, in part, through this book. In 1938, the readers of *Picasso* still had sixty-two years to shape the composition of the twentieth century. Stein broadly conflates perception and causation here – or, to adopt our earlier terms, representation and recreation – and even if her readers can't quite work out the mechanics of this, even through Picasso's artwork, don't they go forward now "seeing the things in a new way?" Doesn't Stein's book ask *us* to perform a certain kind of vision, and doesn't the composition of the future happen around *us*? Isn't the very *real* potential of this what alarmed Matisse, Braque and Tzara earlier?

As *Picasso* tells us on its dust jacket, this is "the story of his life in a manner that could have been achieved by no other writer than Miss Stein." When Stein transforms herself into an art critic, she inevitably transforms the artist into a work of criticism. She even suggests that the artist himself authorizes this, recounting how once Picasso "said further, after all, later, no one will see the picture, they will see the legend of the picture, the legend that the picture created, then it makes no difference if the picture last or does not last."<sup>70</sup> Thus, I read *Picasso* less as a "truthful" account of this particular creator's life and achievements, than as an account of how powerfully *criticism* – through its inscription onto and conceptualization of its object, through its capacity to render a picture into a legend – can create.

Ultimately, the "fertile fact" for me here, however, is that criticism, in the ways it creates or recreates, can also guide us to *oppose*. The notion of "opposition" appears significantly in each of the following chapters on how Stein writes Picasso's art. Stein,

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<sup>68</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 43. Emphasis mine.

<sup>69</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 47.

<sup>70</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 27.

in illustrating the figure of a young girl, describes “the feminine, the subtle *opposition*, showing so early always in a young girl’s nature.”<sup>71</sup> She also proposes that “Nature and man are *opposed* in Spain, they agree in France and this is the difference between French cubism and Spanish cubism and it is a fundamental difference,” and that “Spaniards know that there is no agreement.”<sup>72</sup> In regard to what she sees as Picasso’s extraordinary understanding of color, she observes that “he played with colors to *oppose* the colors to the drawings.”<sup>73</sup> Ultimately, it’s impossible not to see opposition in play within Stein’s description of poetry’s losing, refusing, betraying relationship to the noun: “Poetry is doing nothing but using losing refusing and pleasing and betraying and caressing nouns.”<sup>74</sup> After all, in order to adequately, consequentially oppose anything, we must first see and know (please and caress) that thing very well. I propose that poetry for Stein arises from her encounter with, and implementation of, various forms of opposition within her writing. The quality of opposition is the privilege she grants poetry – not as a genre of writing dictated by rhymes and rhythms, or other elements of conventional poetic forms, but as a conceptual practice. Poetry is an expression of protest, sabotage or discontent even if there is no clear object it opposes, even if the object opposed is itself. This is the turn in modernist poetry’s objectives that I see Stein’s writing initiating. And thus her writing raises the question: what if *poetry*, in fact, was the most “splendid” expression of the twentieth century?

As Stein writes about her century:

The twentieth century has much less reasonableness in its existence than the nineteenth century but reasonableness does not make for splendor... So the twentieth century is that, it is a time when everything cracks, where everything is destroyed, everything isolates itself, it is a more splendid thing than a period where everything follows itself. So then the twentieth century is a splendid period, not a reasonable one in the scientific sense, but splendid.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Gertrude Stein, *Three Lives* (New York: Random House, 1990), 14. Emphasis mine.

<sup>72</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 23. Emphasis mine.

<sup>73</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 45. Emphasis mine.

<sup>74</sup> Gertrude Stein, “Poetry and Grammar.” *Gertrude Stein: Writings 1932-1946*. Ed. Catharine R. Stimpson and Harriet Chessman. New York: The Library of America, 1998. 327.

<sup>75</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 49.

In the next four chapters, I employ Stein's writing in *Picasso* to present a critical reading of both Picasso and Stein's twentieth-century achievements. I take the material found in *Picasso* as "fertile facts" that might suggest, engender and activate new readings of the two creators' works. In "Still Life / Young Girl," I consider how Stein recounts her reaction to Picasso's *Young Girl With A Basket of Flowers* (1905), her first purchase from the painter, and align this with how we might figure the role of reproductive labor in *Three Lives* (begun in 1905). The next chapter, "Buttonholes," engages more recent art historical discourse on Cubist collage as a semiological project and demonstrates how Stein simultaneously (not belatedly) performed a similar experiment through *Tender Buttons* (1912-1914). I want to raise the possibility that Stein recognizes, before most art critics, that through his *papiers collés*, and even through Cubism in general, Picasso employs a *poetic* thinking in pictures. In "The Vibrant Line," I consider the implicit role of Francis Picabia in *Picasso* and what his *transparencies* from the 1930s show us about how to read the textual history and shifting composition of *Stanzas in Meditation* (1932). Finally, in "A Large Picture About Spain," I investigate Stein's extraordinary account of the color "grey" in *Guernica* (1937), and I attempt to make a case for what formalist analysis can offer to more abstract thinking on empathy and engagement.

Some of the readings presented in these chapters will seem less reasonable than others; others will follow themselves a bit too suspiciously. Can we read revolutionary feminist thinking in Stein's writing, when Stein was neither overtly feminist nor anything close to revolutionary as a person? Can Stein's writing offer anything new to this thinking today? What does the seemingly endless tracking of a poem's publication history offer to those of us who want to know how to read within its lines? Hasn't there already been enough written about Stein's friendship with Picasso? I'm tempted here to respond with a quote from Ezra Pound, the conclusion to his *A Lume Spento* (1908), which hangs as a letterpress above my desk: "Make strong old dreams lest this our world lose heart."<sup>76</sup> I take this as my imperative for scholarship.

Yes, certainly there has been enough written about Stein and Picasso, but not enough has been written about the *form* of her art writing. What does Stein achieve in her art writing if we take it to be a literary art? Further, even among poets Stein's writing too often is regarded or treated as secondary to, as following, Picasso's artistic achievements. David Antin, even as he heroicizes Stein over Pound and T. S. Eliot in "Some Questions about Modernism," attributes the innovation in her writing to her proximity to and understanding of painting. He writes, "Gertrude Stein was our only pure modernist. // I say this because I think we can assert with some strong reason

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<sup>76</sup> Ezra Pound, *A Lume Spento* (Venice: A. Antonini/self-published, 1908).

that the main issue of ‘modernism’ between 1908 and 1914 was the struggle over the issues of representation, and that the art that was the most ‘advanced’ in this struggle was not music but painting.”<sup>77</sup> Why not consider the possibility that the art most advanced of all in this struggle was, in fact, poetry – or at least that it was a possible influence and rival to painting?

This dissertation approaches Stein and Picasso’s affinity for each other with the idea that she was absolutely his *contemporary* and even occasionally provided the model *he* had to follow “in modern ideas and their expression.” I am struck by the general reluctance amongst both literature and art scholars to see Stein and Picasso as rivals. The rivalry between Picasso and Matisse is raised again and again, often with the Stein family positioned between them. John Richardson, in his review for *Vanity Fair* of the blockbuster 2003 exhibition *Matisse Picasso*, describes the two artists as having a “relationship that crackles with I-can-do-anything-better-than-you rivalry and flashes of contagious genius.”<sup>78</sup> Why are we less likely to frame the mercurial relationship between Picasso and Stein in a similar way? They (both) certainly provide us with enough material to do so. Is it because we offer the visual arts a higher status than poetry, even as artists have turned further and further toward poetry for inspiration, for material, for compelling conceptual frameworks across the last century? Is it because we don’t see rivalry as translating across genders?

With the hope of illuminating the “flashes of contagious genius” the artist and the writer offered to each other, I have organized my chapters chronologically and presented contemporary pairings of art and literature in them. I should note that the narrative proffered here of Stein and Picasso’s friendship runs in the opposite direction of my own life narrative. The chapter on *Guernica* came first – in 2008. Then a semester teaching art history at Harvard led to research on Picasso and Stein’s surprising friendship; a memorable Modernist Studies Association conference in Las Vegas brought together both *Tender Buttons* and Yve-Alain Bois; and finally I joined a reading group on revolutionary feminism, which met monthly in Utrecht, The Netherlands, while I’ve been raising a young girl. This introduction is completed last. What happens next? As Stein writes in *Picasso*: “Then a curious story commenced.”<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> David Antin, “Some Questions About Modernism,” *Radical Coherency: Selected Essay on Art and Literature, 1966 to 2005* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 201.

<sup>78</sup> John Richardson, “Between Picasso and Matisse,” *Vanity Fair*, May 18, 2009, accessed July 1, 2017, [www.vanityfair.com/culture/2003/02/picasso-matisse200302](http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2003/02/picasso-matisse200302).

<sup>79</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 40.

## STILL LIFE / YOUNG GIRL

This Young Girl is introduced to us with her price.

Gertrude Stein's brother happened one day to find the picture gallery of [Clovis] Sagot, an ex-circus clown who had a picture shop further up the rue Laffitte. Here he, Gertrude Stein's brother found the paintings of two young Spaniards, one, whose name everybody has forgotten, the other one, [Pablo] Picasso... In a few days [Sagot] did have a big one and *it was very cheap*. When Gertrude Stein and Picasso tell about those days they are not always in agreement as to what happened but I think in this case they agree that *the price asked was a hundred and fifty francs*. The picture was the now well known painting of a nude girl with a basket of red flowers.<sup>80</sup>

In *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Stein describes one of the first art purchases she made with her brother Leo in Paris – their very first purchase of a painting by Picasso. As Stein tells it, the *Young Girl With a Basket of Flowers* (1905)<sup>81</sup> was big and cheap; both seller and buyer confirm that her value was 150 francs at the moment of purchase; and since then, the Young Girl has become widely known. It's hard to know what Stein's standard of measurement was back then, but her declaration appears prescient, possibly even contrived, from our perspective. In 1968, two decades after her death, a bulk of Stein's Picasso and Juan Gris collection was sold by her estate to a group of trustees of New York's Museum of Modern Art. *The New York Times* reported in 1970, "The buyers divided their haul by drawing lots, and Gertrude's ape-footed maiden wound up in the possession of David Rockefeller, MOMA's board chairman."<sup>82</sup> Since then, the Young Girl periodically shows up on the MOMA's walls and in exhibitions such as *Four Americans in Paris: The Collections of Gertrude Stein and Her Family* (1970) and *The Steins Collect* (2011-2012), labeled as "a fractional gift by a private collector."

We wonder what this means for how the Young Girl is valued now.

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<sup>80</sup> Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, Inc., 1933), 51-52. Emphasis mine.

<sup>81</sup> The painting is also known as *Young Nude Girl With Basket of Flowers*, as well as called *The Young Girl With a Basket of Flowers*, *The Girl With a Basket of Flowers*, and *A Little Girl With a Basket of Flowers* in Stein's 1938 *Picasso* alone.

<sup>82</sup> Grace Glueck, "The Family Knew What It Liked," *New York Times*, December 13, 1970, accessed July 1, 2017, [www.nytimes.com/books/98/05/03/specials/stein-family.html](http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/05/03/specials/stein-family.html).

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Despite her pivotal role in the Young Girl's, and her painter's, increased appreciation, Stein initially didn't want her; "she found something appalling in the drawing of the legs and feet, something that repelled and shocked her,"<sup>83</sup> she confesses in the *Autobiography*. In fact, the *Times*' epithet, "ape-footed girl," is derived from a remark allegedly made by Stein to her brother. The *Times* article begins with the following anecdote:

Gertrude Stein threw down her knife and fork at the dinner table when brother Leo announced he'd bought Picasso's 1905 nudelet, 'Young Girl With a Basket of Flowers.' 'Now you've spoiled my appetite,' she said according to his later recollection. 'I hated that picture with feet like a monkey's.'<sup>84</sup>

By both Stein's and her brother's accounts, the Young Girl appears to Stein less like the conventional female nude, to be found again and again in the history of paintings, than a shockingly iconoclastic beast, practically obscene in her crudeness. The figure is reduced to legs and feet, an evocative playing field for both fetishism and zoomorphism. And Stein's expressions of horror are so resoundingly bourgeois, they verge on the comical. She throws down her cutlery; her appetite is spoiled. She articulates her own disgust by recounting in the *Autobiography*: "She and her brother almost quarreled about this picture. He wanted it and she did not want it in the house."<sup>85</sup> An overt, blowout fight would have been improper, of course. Thus the siblings are pushed to the limit of *almost quarrelling*.

As insouciant as Stein's writing style can appear to be, particularly in the *Autobiography*, we should keep in mind how clever Stein is in maintaining this ruse. Her phrasing, more often than not, is deliberate, precise even in its ambiguity, and carries in it as much information about her argument as the literal meanings of her words. When Stein states that she and her brother "almost quarreled" – when we know by 1932, when the book was written, that they indeed quarreled throughout and most notably at the end of their relationship – she offers a small commentary on the siblings as they *were*, situated in that moment of 1905. If Stein appears to us here as a bit petty and bourgeois, scandalized by a rising modernist's (and soon-to-be ally's) depiction of a naked young girl, this is because Stein appears in the same way to herself.

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<sup>83</sup> Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, 52.

<sup>84</sup> Glueck, "The Family Knew What It Liked."

<sup>85</sup> Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, 52.

In the sentence that follows their almost-quarrel, Stein elaborates on her and her brother's opposing positions: "He wanted it and she did not want it in the house." Despite the sentence's brevity and blunt repetition, Stein is able to infuse it with a bit of both *exposé* and melodrama. "He wanted it." And that's it. There is no real reasoning offered for Leo Stein's desire, nor any sense of functionality. We don't read that he wants the Young Girl because he wants to study Picasso's particular brushwork on nudes, nor to fill an empty dining room wall. It is big and cheap; they can afford it; he wants it. For Stein, however, looking upon the Young Girl in 1905, the matter wasn't simply if she wanted it or not. He wanted it and she did not want it *in the house*.

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What did it mean for Stein to bring the Young Girl into her house? Why does Stein set up, in this sentence, a conflict between the painting and the domestic sphere? Something one does not want "in the house" is something one sees as a threat, a danger, a trespass; it is an affront to one's sense of aesthetic or social propriety, as well as an attack on one's domestic authority. But what was the worst this inanimate Young Girl could do in Stein's home? What could she do *to* it, at all?

Let's return to how Stein describes her initial refusal:

Gertrude Stein did not like the picture, she found something rather appalling in the drawing of the legs and feet, something that repelled and shocked her. She and her brother almost quarreled about this picture. He wanted it and she did not want it in the house. Sagot gathering a little of the discussion said, but that is alright if you do not like the legs and feet it is very easy to guillotine her and only take the head. No that would not do, everybody agreed, and nothing was decided.<sup>86</sup>

If we look closely at the painting, Stein's focus on the Young Girl's legs and feet seems peculiar, even arbitrary. On their own, they are far from appalling, repellent or shocking. Ultimately, they appear to be a rather realistic depiction of a girl's – and not an ape's – feet, with shadow falling against their backs and giving definition to her ankle and the gradual slope below it. But what *is* disturbing, in fact, is how the feet

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<sup>86</sup> Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, 52.

seem to be modeled, just as the Young Girl's face, while everything below her neck and above her hip appears undefined, generic and abstracted. Compare the shading under her ankle and the clearly articulated tip of her nose to the blurry protrusion we read as her budding breasts, the smudge of pink that indicates her nipple. This pink is thin, incidental, almost illusory, compared to the blush of her cheeks, the ribbon in her black hair and the flowers held against her body. The Young Girl's face and legs are rendered at a different degree of realism than her torso, and Picasso, who was already an accomplished draughtsman in 1905, emphasizes this disjunction through an obvious and awkward foreshortening of the Young Girl's arm as it rests against her belly. Her hand is nearly the same length as her forearm, and the crudely flat expanse of white here contrasts with the shading and skin texture we see through the varieties of beige and gray in her feet. This is not a "real" girl – caught at a moment between childhood and womanhood – Picasso asserts through this passage, but a drawn, composed, painted one.

The Young Girl is neither beautiful nor ugly, and she is both simultaneously. But contained within her long, narrow frame, accessorized with an emphatic *quaintness* (the pink ribbon in her hair, her costume jewelry, the basket of flowers held awkwardly in front of her), the Young Girl also resists that aesthetic category to which we relegate contradictory, unnervingly indeterminate judgments: the sublime. She is the anti-sublime, she is appalling rather than wondrous, she is the radical young Picasso's declaration (two years before *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*), "You, the bourgeois, want to see beauty in the nude, or you want to study the realism of her nakedness,<sup>87</sup> but I'll give you neither." In *On Beauty and Being Just*, Elaine Scarry describes the progressive diminution of beauty that occurred after the eighteenth century, after the aesthetic realm was divided into the beautiful and the sublime, and beauty, associated with "idealized conceptions," was stripped of its capacity for political and moral critique. She writes, "Permitted to inhabit neither the realm of the ideal nor the realm of the real, to be neither aspiration nor companion, beauty comes to us like a fugitive bird unable to fly, unable to land."<sup>88</sup> The *Young Girl With a Basket of Flowers* renders that lack of permission into an active rejection. What is seen as *fugitive* also can be seen as *oppositional*.

This incoherent presentation of the Young Girl as both natural and artificial, real and ideal, turns the display of her nakedness into a confrontation with the viewer. She is unnerving, unsettling. Her head and feet appear after life, closely replicated from an existing model, but her arms, breasts, belly and pelvis are contrived from the artist's

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<sup>87</sup> For the distinction between the nude and the naked, and an account of their value in the history of art, see Kenneth Clark, *The Nude: A Study of Ideal Art* (Edinburgh: R. & R. Clark Ltd, 1956).

<sup>88</sup> Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 86.

imagination. She is both a portrait and an idea, and as her striking, idiosyncratic face stares straight at us with visible disdain, she refuses to give way to either. Picasso's Young Girl is, to borrow a term once used to describe a famous foremother, *disobedient*.

In his essay, "Preliminaries to a Possible Treatment of 'Olympia' in 1865," T. J. Clark considers how *Olympia's* hand ("the one spread over her pubic hair") significantly affected the viewing of her nudity by Manet's critics:

[The hand] disobeys, crucially, the conventions of the nude. The hand is *shamelessly flexed*, it is *improper*, it is *in the form of a toad*, it is *dirty*, it is in a state of *contraction*. It comes to stand for the way Olympia's whole body is disobedient: the hand is the sign of the unyielding, the unrelaxed, the too-definite where indefiniteness is the rule, the non-supine, the concealment which declares itself as such: the 'unfeminine,' in short. Or again: the figures of physical violence done to the body, or of a hideous constraint.<sup>89</sup>

Would you want such a body displayed in your house? Or yet another body, performing similar operations, but looking at you with sullenness rather than *Olympia's* frankness, daring your gaze to transgress the added taboo of her young age? Clark indicates that *Olympia's* "disobedience" of the nude's conventions was more than a snub to an artistic tradition; it disrupted the bourgeoisie's properly determined and delineated discourse on Woman. He writes:

The nude is indelibly a term of art and art criticism: the fact is that art criticism and sexual discourse intersect at this point, and the one provides the other with crucial representations, forms of knowledge, and standards of decorum. One could almost say that the nude is the mid-term of the series which goes from *femme honnête* to *fille publique*: it is the important form (the complex of established forms) in which sexuality is revealed and not-revealed, displayed and masked, made out to be unproblematic. It is the frankness of the bourgeoisie: here, after all, is what Woman looks like; and she can be known, in her nakedness, without too much danger of pollution.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> T. J. Clark, "Preliminaries to a Possible Treatment of 'Olympia' in 1865," *Screen* 21:1 (1980): 25.

<sup>90</sup> Clark, "Preliminaries to a Possible Treatment of 'Olympia' in 1865," 24.

Stein, in her immediate repulsion from the Young Girl, reenacts the disgust initially circulated by art critics against *Olympia*. *Young Girl With a Basket of Flowers*, like *Olympia*, also problematizes bourgeois representations of Woman, with the additional step of turning Woman into a pubescent girl – placing her, in her state of nakedness and disconcerting liminality, at a moment when there is *only* and *inescapably* danger of pollution. The Young Girl’s expression tells us that neither she, nor the viewer, nor the painter can turn away untouched.

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In 1938, three decades after their encounter at Sagot’s gallery, and with various avant-garde movements waxing and waning in the meantime, Stein retells the biography of the Young Girl in *Picasso* and narrates her crucial role in Picasso’s own coming-of-age.

The first picture we had of his is, if you like, rose or harlequin, it is The Young Girl With a Basket of Flowers, it was painted at the great moment of the harlequin period, full of grace and delicacy and charm. After that little by little his drawing hardened, his line became firmer, his color more vigorous, naturally he was no longer a boy he was a man, and then in 1905 he painted my portrait.<sup>91</sup>

This description of the Young Girl as “full of grace and delicacy and charm” is a far cry from Stein’s initial reaction to Picasso’s work. Certainly the shock of the Young Girl, like the shock of any artwork, can be assimilated, co-opted and normativized by bourgeois taste. It is possible that Stein’s perspective on the Young Girl shifted entirely after having her in the house for so many decades. We should recall, however, that *Picasso* was written only four years after Stein inscribed the Young Girl’s contentious purchase in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. What Stein attempts to do in *Picasso*, then, is to place the Young Girl along the same trajectory as her own portrait, as well as set the young Picasso who created the Young Girl within a particularly rosy, similar light. Something in the experience of painting *Young Girl With a Basket of Flowers* initiates a shift in Picasso’s development: “little by little his drawing hardened, his line became firmer, his color more vigorous.” Stein then equates this shift in style with Picasso’s transformation from a Young Boy to a Man, with his adulthood realized as he paints Stein’s iconic portrait.

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<sup>91</sup> Gertrude Stein, *Picasso* (London: B.T. Batsford, Ltd, 1938), 7.

The differences (in color, line, composition, and so forth) between *Young Girl With a Basket of Flowers* and *Gertrude Stein* are immediate to the eye, but what is the common thread that takes Picasso from one to the other? In both paintings, the figures are a mélange of modeling and abstraction; whether anonymous or named, lavishly adorned or stripped bare, both Women (or Girls) simultaneously inhabit and reject the status of portrait or idea. In the case of *Gertrude Stein*, the head is where we most clearly see the distinctive hand of the artist, where the workings of his imagination become most explicit. Stein's face has a flatter color and texture, a more unrealistic or unnatural appearance, than the rest of her; we only need to compare the skin on the face to the skin on the hands. The story of its composition is well known and well repeated:

We met at Sagot's, the picture dealer, from whom we had bought *The Girl with a Basket of Flowers*. I posed for him all that winter, eighty times and in the end he painted out the head, he told me that he could not look at me any more and then he left once more for Spain. It was the first time since the blue period and immediately upon his return from Spain he painted in the head without having seen me again.<sup>92</sup>

Stein then declares about the painting, "for me, it is I, and it is the only reproduction of me which is always I, for me," a remarkable affirmation of a visage that most scholars and critics agree cites Iberian sculpture<sup>93</sup> more directly than any distinctive characteristics of Stein's face.

It might be tempting to read Stein's account in *Picasso* as yet another example of a male artist extracting inspiration from, and projecting his own fascinations and aspirations upon, female bodies. Isn't Picasso, after all, the twentieth century's favorite example of the artist-genius bedding and bestowing immortality on his many muses? But in Stein's formulation, Picasso does not fit neatly in opposition, static on the other side of the gender binary, to the *Young Girl* and *Gertrude Stein*. Picasso, in fact, enacts, and subsequently comes to exemplify, the transformation that lies between the *Young Girl* and *Gertrude Stein*. His expressions and attributes, not theirs, are the ones that "harden," "become firmer," "more vigorous," although if we compare the two paintings, we see that these descriptions indeed apply to the stylistic changes between the *Young Girl* and *Gertrude Stein*. Still, Picasso is the one who morphs from youth to adult in this passage. His coming-of-age happens in place of – and as representation of – theirs. We might even say that the *Young Girl* and *Gertrude Stein* project *their* art

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<sup>92</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 8.

<sup>93</sup> For example, see James Johnson Sweeney, "Picasso and Iberian Sculpture," *Art Bulletin* 23:3 (1941): 191-198, and Vincent Giroud, *Picasso and Gertrude Stein* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art, 2006).

upon *him*. Stein revisions the life of the artist by placing him “in danger of pollution” – or, to put it more generously, positioning him as receptive to transformation. The collage of the sensual and the conceptual; the reactive constitution of identity through a multiplicity of citations, projections, mediations, negotiations – the male artist-genius must come to terms with, and incorporate, these collisions and contradictions too.

Today many of us recoil from using or hearing the term “genius” – alongside its association with Dead White Men and objective, universal standards of beauty, both of which we regard with great suspicion – but it is a designation much on Stein’s mind as she leaves behind the nineteenth century and moves forward into the twentieth. With Alice B. Toklas’ notorious declaration at the beginning of the *Autobiography* that Stein, Picasso and Alfred Whitehead are the only three geniuses she has ever encountered,<sup>94</sup> and Stein’s assertion in *Everybody’s Autobiography*, “Slowly and in a way it was not astonishing but slowly I was knowing that I was a genius and it was happening,”<sup>95</sup> anyone who writes on Stein must contend with the term’s importance for her and determine whether she toes a Kantian line, or whether she claims genius while inscribing into it her own suspicion of its conventional associations.

In Stein’s account of Picasso, she appears to refigure the artist-genius as reactive and responsive, rather than purely expressive and constructive. This redefinition of creative genius is part and parcel of the great shift between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, between Romanticism and Modernism, that Stein’s work enacts for many of her readers. As Juliana Spahr writes in *Everybody’s Autonomy*, in Stein’s seemingly self-assertive statements – such as “In the month of February were born Washington Lincoln and I” (from the *Geographical History of America*), which posits another trio of heroes to which Stein belongs – we might, in fact, read Stein proposing “an I that flexibly invokes and aligns itself with others. In essence, Stein’s comparisons echo Walt Whitman’s claim in ‘Song of Myself’ that he contains multitudes: ‘With the twirl of my tongue I encompass words and volumes of worlds.’”<sup>96</sup> Further, Spahr observes that Stein “tends to bury her grandiose comparisons in the works that most strongly deny the authority of her self, and even go so far as to question its existence,” which aligns with my sense that Stein suggests a dialogically composed form of genius both for herself and, even more radically, for the twentieth century’s classic artist-genius: Picasso.

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<sup>94</sup> Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, 6.

<sup>95</sup> Gertrude Stein, *Everybody’s Autobiography* (New York: Random House, 1937), 76.

<sup>96</sup> Juliana Spahr, *Everybody’s Autonomy: Connective Reading and Collective Identity* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001), 34.

*With the twirl of her tongue she encompasses words and volumes of worlds.* Certainly not enough scholarship on Stein's writing has considered her remarkable embrace and performance of a Nietzschean will to power (what the philosopher specifically calls a "transvaluation of values") particularly in regard to the notion of "genius" – how such grandiose statements by Stein regarding genius nonetheless have catalyzed a bibliography of scholarship aligning and re-defining "genius" to suit Stein's achievements. Who shall say here, after all, Stein is not the happy genius of her household? Thus, in *Gertrude Stein: Modernism, and the Problem of "Genius,"* Barbara Will delineates as Stein's contribution to the term: "While Stein throughout her life evinced great interest in the extraordinary or 'vitaly singular' individual producing masterpieces, she also suggested that 'genius' was a capacity anyone reading her texts could share: a decentered and dialogic, open-ended and collective mode of 'being.'" She elaborates:

"Genius," then, seems to name for Stein a contradictory or heterogeneous mode of "being:" at once the essential, autonomous authorial subject creating absolutely new and original works of art, and at the same time a way of existing and relating in language that is open-ended, processual, collaborative, and resistant to any final symbolic or authorial containments.<sup>97</sup>

Applying this conceptualization of a dialogic "genius" to Picasso, as well, certainly might be advantageous to Stein who, in that passage from *Picasso* dealing with the Young Girl and Stein's portrait, positions herself both as a subject for his work and as his reader and interpreter. This is not only an opportunistic move but a radical one: for a queer, Jewish, female poet to write herself, as well as an anonymous Young Girl, into the identity of a singular, European, male artist-genius is to point out identity's constructedness and its contingencies. Stein makes a similar argument while declaring herself a genius in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and *Everybody's Autobiography*: in the latter, through its title, the "I" that slowly recognizes its genius is deemed "Everybody" (by either encompassing or being proposed as a possibility for everybody, all of Stein's readers, as Will suggests). In the former, Stein vividly discloses how much of a genius's work depends on and assumes the reproductive labor of the genius's wife, with Toklas performing the essential tasks of cook, host, transcriber, muse and critic in order for Stein to do the comparably straightforward task of writing. As Toklas observes at the end of the *Autobiography*, "I am a pretty good housekeeper and a pretty good gardener and a pretty good needlewoman and a

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<sup>97</sup> Barbara Will, *Gertrude Stein: Modernism, and the Problem of "Genius"* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 1.

pretty good secretary and a pretty good editor and a pretty good vet for dogs and I have to do them all at once and I found it difficult to add being a pretty good author.”<sup>98</sup>

The artist’s capacity to do very little while appropriating the labor of others can be viewed as either a mode of revolutionary critique or a market-driven strategy. An artist might claim to incite “happenings” or participatory performances in order to de-center artistic production (Provo); or an artist might stamp their name onto a work that arises from their creative “vision,” even if technical production is outsourced (Jeff Koons, Damien Hirst). A century after Stein, the art world continues to play out both sides in the name of either “commoning” or “branding.” While it busies itself with that, we might consider a provocative claim made by one of Stein’s poetic heirs that her work *requires* an element of social engagement, in order to fulfill “genius’s” inherently social role, but that her primary mode for this becomes a kind of pleasurable passive receptiveness. Bob Perelman in *The Trouble With Genius* suggests that Stein’s genius is notably modern and “will not fit in the Romantic mold”<sup>99</sup> due to her aestheticization of the artist-as-consumer. This is her innovation as well as her limitation. He writes, “Stein, as genius, who never touches or is touched by history, who ‘sit[s] around so much doing nothing really doing nothing,’ and for whom the world is perpetually exciting, novel, countable, and abstract spectacle, is an ideal consumer as well as an ideal commodity, never sullied by anything resembling use value.”<sup>100</sup>

Perelman’s account is imbued with criticism, but decades later, observing how cleverly and quickly capitalist power structures have co-opted and found ways to profit from overt acts of protest (t-shirts that read “This is what a feminist looks like,” and pricey inflatable domes for Occupy campouts), I find myself turning back to the idea of ostensibly “doing nothing” and transforming that into a mode of opposition. Might it actually be possible to extract ourselves from the market by turning into both an “*ideal* consumer” and “*ideal* commodity?” Could we renew the world (or even a painter’s oeuvre) by re-writing it as “perpetually exciting, novel, countable, and abstract spectacle,” so that at least in this renewal we might find an opening for revolution?

Of course Stein is not able to write herself so that she is “never sullied by anything resembling use value.” We’re too far gone for such idealist illusions. I think that’s self-evident, and it would be to Stein. But in *Picasso*, Stein demonstrates that through – within – writing she can produce a closed, intimate system that isolates the interplay

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<sup>98</sup> Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, 309-310.

<sup>99</sup> Bob Perelman, *The Trouble With Genius* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 166.

<sup>100</sup> Perelman, *The Trouble With Genius*, 167.

between the artist and his or her object. She can frame their relationship in a way that evens their playing field, and asserts the object as not just instrumental to their produced work but as constitutive of the artist's identification as genius. This assertion establishes a form of agency in the object's perceived passivity and offers a different and dissenting mode of interpreting it. Here is how writing can give an object the possibility to *sully* or *pollute* the prohibitive and predetermined power structures around it. We might even call it a "transvaluation of values." The muse need not sit framed by the painting in silence. Our image of the Young Girl might be a product of bourgeois desire, but she might also display how it brings about its own transmutation. The object can become the artist.

If this sounds too farfetched, turn and look now to Picasso's various self-portraits from 1906: that is her face on him, the face *Gertrude Stein* receives and claims first.

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Throughout *Picasso*, as well as in various other writings emerging from their friendship, Stein frequently correlates his biography and artistic trajectory with hers – even with regard to their national origins, such as when she observes, "While other Europeans were still in the nineteenth century, Spain because of its lack of organization and America by its excess of organization were the natural founders of the twentieth century."<sup>101</sup> This positioning of Spain and North America as counterparts comes up again, when she describes their camaraderie in the years of the Young Girl, her portrait, and his self-portraits. She writes:

I was alone at this time in understanding him, perhaps because I was expressing the same thing in literature, perhaps because I was an American and, as I say, Spaniards and Americans have a kind of understanding of things which is the same.<sup>102</sup>

At that time, what Stein "was expressing in literature" was *Three Lives*, which she began writing in 1905, the same year she and her brother brought the Young Girl into their house. Stein initially began this project as an English translation of Gustave Flaubert's *Trois Contes* (1877),<sup>103</sup> and she has stated that she was inspired by Leo Stein's

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<sup>101</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 12.

<sup>102</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 16.

<sup>103</sup> Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, 41. See also Lyn Hejinian, *The Language of Inquiry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 282; Brenda Wineapple, *Sister Brother: Gertrude and Leo Stein*, New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1996 (221); Ulla Haselstein, "A New Kind of Realism: Flaubert's *Trois Contes* and Stein's *Three Lives*," *Comparative Literature*, vol. 61 no. 4, 2009 (388-399).

recent purchase of *Portrait of Madame Cézanne*, painted by Paul Cézanne in 1881. She tells Robert Hass in “A Transatlantic Interview, 1946:”

Cézanne conceived the idea that in composition one thing was as important as another thing. Each part is as important as the whole, and that impressed me enormously, and it impressed me so much that I began to write *Three Lives* under this influence and this idea of composition and I was more interested in composition at that moment, this background of word-system, which had come to me from this reading that I had done. I was obsessed by this idea of composition, and [“Melanctha” in *Three Lives*] was a quintessence of it.<sup>104</sup>

It’s worth repeating the lesson, even moral, that Stein brings into *Three Lives*: “In composition one thing was as important as another thing. Each part is as important as the whole.” In its published form, *Three Lives*, ostensibly inspired by the compositional rethinking by Cézanne and the critical realism of Flaubert,<sup>105</sup> becomes primarily an homage to female subjectivity in the margins. Stein’s writing displays an extraordinary foregrounding – through an innovative, experimental prose style that pre-dates anything by James Joyce or Virginia Woolf – of black women, German immigrant women, working class women, and midwives caring for “troubled” single mothers. In a 1906 letter to Mabel Weeks, quoted by Brenda Wineapple in *Sister Brother*, Stein writes “with mock regret:” “I am afraid that I can never write the great American novel. I don’t know how to sell on a margin or do anything with shorts and longs, so I have to content myself with [African-Americans] and servant girls and the foreign population generally.”<sup>106</sup> By doing so, however, Stein ultimately does write one of the

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<sup>104</sup> Robert Bartlett Hass, “A Transatlantic Interview, 1946,” in *A Primer for the Gradual Understanding of Stein* (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1971), 26-27.

<sup>105</sup> Tracking direct influence for Stein is not quite as easy as she would have it be. Catherine Bock-Weiss argues for the primacy of Matisse’s influence in *Three Lives*, citing a 1906 letter to Mabel Weeks in which Stein calls the work “a noble combination of Swift and Matisse.” Bock-Weiss states that Stein only begins alluding to Cézanne’s influence in the *Autobiography* and asks, a bit ridiculously, “Did Cézanne become for Stein, in fact, something of a ‘beard’ to divert attention from her real early relationship with Matisse?” Regardless, even Bock-Weiss eventually turns to Picasso in recounting Stein’s real-time writing process: “despite the legends to the contrary, the last-written and most original story, ‘Melanctha,’ had nothing directly to do with cubism. Stein completed *Three Lives* as Picasso temporarily abandoned his conventional portrait of her. In Picasso’s studio during her portrait sittings, she was surrounded by his symbolist, archaizing saltimbanque paintings. In fact, the Steins’ first Picasso purchases included his *The Acrobat’s Family With Monkey* and *Boy Leading a Horse*.” Bock-Weiss makes no note of the Young Girl but does reference two paintings also made during what Stein calls the “rose or harlequin” period. See Catherine Bock-Weiss, *Henri Matisse: Modernist Against the Grain* (University Park: Penn State Press, 2009), 56.

<sup>106</sup> Wineapple, *Sister Brother*, 250.

great American novels, which could only be realized once her readers rightly reconfigured what “American” means.<sup>107</sup>

Further, the characters circulating through *Three Lives* are depicted as performing the kind of “women’s work” in the household long left (and to be left) unrecognized, unseen, and taken for granted in writings addressing labor. This invisible labor takes its toll. In 1974’s “The Housewife and Her Labour under Capitalism,” Wally Seccombe observes, “Of course, bourgeois economists have always ignored the housewife as labourer. For those held spellbound by the fetishism of price theory, any operation not tagged with a price is *a priori* not economic.” But additionally, “It is particularly painful to note that Marxists have rarely attacked this reactionary perspective and demolished its underlying assumptions.”<sup>108</sup> For Seccombe, the housewife stands in for anyone forced into inadequately compensated domestic labor, and the consequences of the oversight of the housewife are pervasive: both the “general malaise of the family unit” and the stagnation of the domestic labor process while industrial labor constantly advances. This will eventually lead to crisis, she suggests, as ultimately domestic labor is what reproduces labor power, “the *capacity* for work.”<sup>109</sup>

In *Three Lives* – a literary work rather than a social treatise – such consequences are particularized, but made direct, overt, poignant. After Lena, in “The Gentle Lena,” becomes a housewife and begins bearing children, she approaches her work with fear rather than joy and grows progressively lifeless. “She always just kept going now with her working, and she was always careless, and dirty, and a little dazed, and lifeless. Lena never got any better in herself of this way of being that she had had since she had been married.”<sup>110</sup> In contrast, her reluctant husband Herman flourishes upon becoming a patriarch and turns into a super-producer, eventually combining the productive labor of tailoring with the reproductive labor of childrearing. Stein writes, “He spent all the time he was not working, with [his children]. By and by he began to work all day in his own home so that he could have his children always in the same room with him.”<sup>111</sup> Herman *leans in*, while Lena essentially *opts out* – of life. By the end of her fourth labor, both Lena and the baby she produces are literally lifeless.

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<sup>107</sup> We might recall that the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, which made women’s right to vote a national, Constitutional right, was ratified only in 1920. The imperative of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 speaks volumes on the widespread disenfranchisement of racial minorities, notably African-Americans, throughout Stein’s lifetime.

<sup>108</sup> Wally Seccombe, “The Housewife and her Labour under Capitalism,” in *Revolutionary Feminism*, Communist Interventions Series 3 (Communist Research Cluster, 2015), 330.

<sup>109</sup> Seccombe, “The Housewife and her Labour under Capitalism,” 338.

<sup>110</sup> Gertrude Stein, *Three Lives* (New York: Random House, 1990), 198.

<sup>111</sup> Stein, *Three Lives*, 199.

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Let me be clear: Stein was never a revolutionary feminist, nor did she participate in biological reproduction, but in *Three Lives*, as well as in the *Autobiography, Picasso*, and a number of other writings, Stein proves herself an astute early observer and proponent of reproductive labor – in both biological and social forms – as *labor* and therefore recognizes it as vital to both the networks we call “artistic genius” and “capitalist society.” What the women of *Three Lives* produce through their work, and what their work gains and costs them, is central to the composition of their tales, as well as their identities. But we must note that Stein also sketches a female subject that defers or resists the imperative to work, or provides a labor that might not yet be definable, compensable or co-optable by the structures of power around her. And in this figure we see the emergent spark of opposition.

The Young Girl lives amidst the *Three Lives* – or at least she lives for the time being. Her account begins in “The Good Anna,” in which Anna, as housekeeper, cares for the two young wards of her employer, Miss Mary. Stein writes, “[Anna] naturally preferred the boy, for boys love always better to be done for and made comfortable and full of eating, while in the little girl she had to meet *the feminine, the subtle opposition*, showing so early always in a young girl’s nature.”<sup>112</sup> Stein does not articulate what exactly the Young Girl opposes, only that she displays a drive toward a distinctively *feminine* and notably *subtle* opposition in general.

When Stein began writing *Three Lives* in 1905, she called it “The Progress of Jane Sands being the history of one woman and many others.” Wineapple writes on Jane Sands, who seems to disappear in the book’s final version:

Originally named George Sand(s), Jane Sands represented Gertrude Stein; the story of her “progress” was to be the story, noted Gertrude, of “The Making of the Author.” An early copybook contains the faded plans for this fictional autobiography as well as trail sentences and phrases, most of which were discarded, and faint suggestions as to how “The Making of an Author” would develop into “Three histories by Jane Sands.”<sup>113</sup>

Stein eventually dropped the conceit of a writer-persona and transformed this “history of one woman and many others” in the history of three women and many others.

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<sup>112</sup> Stein, *Three Lives*, 14.

<sup>113</sup> Wineapple, *Sister Brother*, 222.

Nonetheless Stein might have left a subtle trace of Jane Sands, embodied at a pivotal stage of her “progress,” “making,” or coming-of-age, in the Young Girl that appears in “The Good Anna.” This girl is also named Jane.

From the outset, Stein sets Jane’s “opposition” into direct conflict with Anna’s “goodness.” Anna is “good,” of course, because she carries out the labor required to organize, manage and maintain the bourgeois household. This includes acting as the primary caregiver of the household’s children, even though “Anna had no strong natural feeling to love children, as she had to love cats and dogs, and a large mistress.”<sup>114</sup> She struggles to manage what her “large, docile, helpless” mistress will not, namely “the gentle force and the sweet domination of the girl.” “The Good Anna” regards the Young Girl as both charming and insidious; to keep “the household altogether in her charge” means to protect it from yielding “docilely to the stronger power in the really pleasing little girl.” Anna, in other words, does not particularly want this Young Girl in the house.

Nonetheless, Anna keenly recognizes this quality of opposition in Jane – described as part of “a young girl’s nature,” in general – and this suggests that it’s a quality Anna once may have shared but eventually overcame to become “good.” After all, Anna figures herself as a “girl” as well – not with regard to age or development, but as constituted by class and labor. She is not a young girl but a house girl, and “Anna had always a firm old world sense of what was the right way for a girl to do... A girl was a girl and should act always like a girl, both as to giving all respect and as to what she had to eat.”<sup>115</sup>

The house girl’s confrontation with the Young Girl eventually produces the greatest disruption to the household. At a climactic moment in Anna and Jane’s magnificently passive-aggressive conflict, Anna finally declares to Miss Mary, “When you tell me anything to do, I do it. I do everything I can and you know I work myself sick for you... *Miss Jane don’t know what work is.* If you want to things like that I go away.”<sup>116</sup> This causes the large and docile Miss Mary, who neither produces nor reproduces but essentially *exists* as the head of the household and the representative of capital, to grow pale and faint. The crisis proves to be too much for the Young Girl; she falls in line with Anna’s orders, offers her “a green parrot to make peace,” and remains “careful and respectful” to her “to the end.” Although Anna appears to conquer here, we also can read this moment as the point at which Anna determines that she eventually will leave Miss Mary’s house.

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<sup>114</sup> Stein, *Three Lives*, 14.

<sup>115</sup> Stein, *Three Lives*, 13.

<sup>116</sup> Stein, *Three Lives*, 17. Emphasis mine.

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Jane appears briefly in “The Good Anna,” but a revision of the Young Girl appears in the figure of Melanctha Herbert. Stein’s characterization of Melanctha, in the eponymous story Stein would certainly deem the most realized of the *Three Lives* and which tellingly bears the subtitle “Each One As She May,” is contradictory, evasive, troubling and often inscrutable. Her prolonged and melancholic girlhood is best conveyed through this sentence: “She was still too complex with desire.”<sup>117</sup> Even Melanctha’s racial identity remains, to a degree, an open-ended question and casts ambivalence and reevaluation on the identifications of those who encounter her. Stein writes, “Melanctha Herbert was a graceful, pale yellow, intelligent, attractive negress. She had not been raised like Rose by white folks but then she had been half made with real white blood.”<sup>118</sup> Melanctha is “pale yellow,” “made with real white blood,” and designated as “black.” Harryette Mullen, in her preface to *Recyclopedia*, notes Melanctha’s remarkably unconventional characterization: “For years I had difficulty with Stein. After several unsuccessful attempts to read her, I found an entry into her work through her story ‘Melanchtha’ in *Three Lives*. I was startled by the liberties she took with the literary stereotype of the ‘tragic mulatto.’”<sup>119</sup>

As Melanctha stands on the cusp between girlhood and womanhood in *Three Lives*, we begin to recognize *the feminine, the subtle opposition* in her that also expresses itself in Jane. After a conflict with her father, “Melanctha began to know her power, the power she had so often felt stirring within her and which she now knew she could use to make her stronger.”<sup>120</sup> Melanctha’s restlessness, stirrings, and inconsistencies are precisely what make her and her story both fascinating and frustrating, what give her this power. Unlike “The Good Anna” and “The Gentle Lena,” “Melanctha” bears no determining adjective and will not be encapsulated by an epithet. She resists being known; *she was still too complex with desire*. “She was always full with mystery and subtle movements and denials and vague distrusts and complicated disillusion. Then Melanctha would be sudden and impulsive and unbounded in some faith, and then she would suffer and be strong in her repression.”<sup>121</sup>

Melanctha isn’t just the Young Girl we wouldn’t want in the house, she is the Young Girl that lets us know she doesn’t really want to be there either. Stein writes,

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<sup>117</sup> Stein, *Three Lives*, 61.

<sup>118</sup> Stein, *Three Lives*, 60.

<sup>119</sup> Harryette Mullen, *Recyclopedia: Trimmings, S\*PeRM\*\*K\*T, and Muse & Drudge* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2006), ix-x.

<sup>120</sup> Stein, *Three Lives*, 66.

<sup>121</sup> Stein, *Three Lives*, 62.

“Sometimes the thought of how all her world was made, filled the complex, desiring Melanctha with despair. She wondered, often, how she could go on living when she was so blue.”<sup>122</sup> Eventually, however, Melanctha does go on living, and as she matures, outgrowing her status as a Young Girl, she must adjust to the world that causes her despair. Numerous pages in her story are devoted to the emotional labor she offers to Jeff Campbell, the nursing and childcare she provides for Rose Johnson, and her ill-fated attempts to domesticate (by getting engaged to) Jem Richards. She mistakes working for living, and thus her labor is never enough and never adequately compensated. Melanctha explains to Jeff Campbell: “When do you that kind of seeing how much you can make a woman suffer, you ought to give her a little rest, once sometimes, Jeff. They can’t any of us stand it so for always, Jeff.”<sup>123</sup>

However, the conclusion of Melanctha’s story is not that her labor is endless, and then she dies; Melanctha is not “The Gentle Lena.” Her ending, we could argue, is even grimmer. Ultimately Melanctha is willing to work endlessly, but her world decides that her labor is no longer of any value or use. She is rendered obsolete; we see no other mode for her to participate in this world; her story comes to an end. “When Melanctha was well again, she took a place and began to work and to live regular. Then Melanctha got very sick again, she began to cough and sweat and be so weak *she could not stand to do her work...* They sent her where she would be taken care of a home for poor consumptives, and there Melanctha stayed until she died.”<sup>124</sup>

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“For we have worked enough,” Mariarosa Dalla Costa announces in 1972’s “Women and the Subversion of the Community,” on behalf of the Young Girls who have become Good Women and now are sick to death of it. In this essay, Dalla Costa proposes a more radical alternative to “Wages for Housework” in order to emancipate women from the home: to abolish both domestic labor, as is, and waged labor.

The role of the housewife, behind whose isolation is hidden social labor, must be destroyed. But our alternatives are strictly defined. Up to now, the myth of female incapacity, rooted in this isolated woman dependent on someone else’s wage and therefore shaped by someone else’s consciousness, has been broken by only one action: the woman getting her own wage, breaking the back of personal economic

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<sup>122</sup> Stein, *Three Lives*, 60.

<sup>123</sup> Stein, *Three Lives*, 99.

<sup>124</sup> Stein, *Three Lives*, 167. Emphasis mine.

dependence... *The advent of the women's movement is a rejection of this alternative.*<sup>125</sup>

She continues, "Every time they have 'let us in' to some traditionally male enclave," which includes the bourgeois household, as well as the factory or the office, "it was to find for us a new level of exploitation." Thus Dalla Costa's imperative is two-fold: "We must refuse the development they are offering us," and "Women must completely discover their own possibilities – which are neither mending socks nor becoming captains of ocean-going ships. Better still, we may wish to do these things, but these now cannot be located anywhere but in the history of capital."

This feels to me to be an impossible imperative, as much as I might want to embrace it. Still it leads me to those figures, such as the Young Girl, who may be born, reside, and be forced to work in those enclaves but resist in making it their homes. Dalla Costa concludes by picking up Stein's concern for "genius:" "It seems that there have been few women of genius. There could not be since, cut off from the social process, we cannot see on what matters they could exercise their genius."<sup>126</sup> Stein, in her writing, directs us to the social process that happens in the home, and perhaps in the Young Girl's appalling incoherence, the simultaneity of her attraction and repulsion, and the fluidity of her formation, we can see, at the seams, the stirrings of genius.

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If Manet's *Olympia* is a foremother of Picasso's *Young Girl With a Basket of Flowers*, Stein's "Melanctha" might be read as a foremother of Jamaica Kincaid's "Girl" (1978). Kincaid's story, first published in *The New Yorker*, is a long prose block that lists instructions given to a "Girl." The girl here is both a young girl and house girl, simultaneously defined by her phase in development and her labor. The text is written almost entirely in second person, so we don't see or hear the girl directly. She appears only as the amorphous object to whom the speaker directs her speech.

this is how to sew on a button; this is how to make a buttonhole for the button you have just sewed on; this is how to hem a dress when you see the hem coming down and so to prevent yourself from looking like the slut I know you are so bent on becoming; this is how you iron you father's khaki shirt so that they don't have a

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<sup>125</sup> Mariarosa Dalla Costa, "Women and The Subversion of the Community," in *Revolutionary Feminism*, Communist Interventions Series 3 (Communist Research Cluster, 2015), 316.

<sup>126</sup> Dalla Costa, "Women and The Subversion of the Community," 317.

crease; this is how you grow okra – far from the house, because okra tree harbors red ants;<sup>127</sup>

Two short phrases in the Kincaid's story appear in italics, with the possibility that they are interjections by the Young Girl, or that they are a (possibly preemptive) parroting of the Young Girl by the speaker. The story, for example, concludes, "this is how to make ends meet; always squeeze bread to make sure it's fresh; *but what if the baker won't let me feel the bread?*; you mean to say that after all you are really going to be the kind of woman who the baker won't let near the bread?" The ambivalence of the italics reflects the remarkable achievement of Kincaid's story: a play with speech that presents the same language as both externalized and internalized to the subject simultaneously. We can't definitively discern who the speaker is and what her relationship is to the Young Girl. For example, the speaker could be the mother (or another figure of authority) of the Young Girl, with interjections by the Young Girl in italics. Or the speaker could be the mother of the Young Girl, with the italicized statements predicting or repeating the Young Girl's responses. Or the speaker could be the Young Girl herself, repeating the instructions she know she must follow, with the italics expressing her skepticism, her dissent.

In these italics we meet "the feminine, the subtle opposition, showing so early always in a young girl's nature." This portrait of the Young Girl presents her identity as dialogic, indeterminate, a figure we try to shape as she seeks the space through which she can evade our grasp. This is the Young Girl before her lines fully harden, her color becomes more vigorous, her desires are delineated and constrained in order to display her as "what Woman looks like." This is the Young Girl while we are still not sure we want her in the house.

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Here, we might return to T. J. Clark. In *Picasso and Truth*, Clark describes the monstrosity of Picasso's figures from the 1920s-30s as "most deeply a device to make them nongeneralizable, nonrepresentative."<sup>128</sup> He observes, "They are us, but in our essential non-humanness." Clark posits that these figures reflect a shift in Picasso's understanding of how art reconstitutes our reality. "What is chilling in Picasso's later art... is the way it proposes that *worlds* – space, difference, identity, substance – *come out of figures, not the other way around.*"<sup>129</sup> The Young Girl, as Stein interprets her,

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<sup>127</sup> Jamaica Kincaid, "Girl," *The New Yorker*, June 26, 1978, accessed July 11, 2017, [www.newyorker.com/magazine/1978/06/26/girl](http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1978/06/26/girl).

<sup>128</sup> T. J. Clark, *Picasso and Truth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 229.

<sup>129</sup> Clark, *Picasso and Truth*, 228.

prefigures Picasso's monsters. She is also we, in our essential non-humanness, her monstrosity a product and reflection of ours. But what Clark calls the "chilling" proposition that worlds come out of figures might also be our only source of optimism.

Stein learned from Cézanne's *Portrait of Madame Cézanne* that "in composition one thing was as important as another thing" and directly nods to this as inspiration for "Melanctha," but she articulates a corollary in *Three Lives* that we also see in her account of Picasso's *Young Girl With a Basket of Flowers*. "In composition one thing was as important as another thing," but this does not mean that each thing is the same as or equivalent to all the other things. Rather, this comprehensive attunement to composition is what eventually allows us to see the true lines of conflict, the abrupt and deliberate shifts in registers, and the incoherencies we come to realize are opposition.

In the case of the Young Girl, we may be told her price, we may be presented with her spectacle and the various descriptions that try to determine her, but I want to imagine the Young Girl as that figure which pushes back against these systems of signification; the one whom we underestimate in order to avoid looking at directly; the one whom has gathered strength as a result of this evasion; the one whom refuses our offer of wages for housework, because she doesn't want wages or housework; and therefore, the one whom we must raise but don't want to bring in our houses. In the French collective Tiqqun's *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl* (1999), they write, "In reality, the Young-Girl is simply the model citizen as redefined by consumer society since World War I, in explicit response to the revolutionary menace."<sup>130</sup> I read this, and the Young Girl in me disagrees. I now want to read the Young Girl – as written by Stein, Picasso and others – not as the last century's model citizen but as its latent and fugitive dissident. I want to read her as that figure which is the quintessential product of our society precisely in order to *oppose* it.

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<sup>130</sup> Tiqqun, *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl*, translated by Ariana Reines (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2012), 15.

## BUTTONHOLES

One finds a hole here. And if not, one may make one.

On the occasion of the Museum of Modern Art's 1989-1990 blockbuster exhibition *Picasso and Braque: Pioneering Cubism*, the curators William Rubin and Kurt Varnedoe gathered what could be considered a dream team of modernist art historians to discuss the two artists' early achievements and lasting legacies. The proceedings of this gathering were transcribed and edited by Lynn Zelevansky as *Picasso and Braque: A Symposium*, which became the benchmark text exemplifying the debate between rigorously representational and radically semiologic interpretations of Cubism.<sup>131</sup> One 1913 collage by Picasso provoked an especially contentious and prolonged exchange between Edward F. Fry and Rosalind Krauss, with other participants chiming in with their own analyses of the work. This is a collage just slightly larger than a sheet of letter paper – fashioned out of a box lid, newsprint, paint, cut-out drawings and glue – called *Au Bon Marché*.

During one of the discussion sessions, Krauss proposes, “I would like to address the issue of whether there are limits to a correct reading. Are there readings which we would say are simply wrong?”<sup>132</sup> She then quotes from Fry's 1988 essay, “Picasso, Cubism and Reflexivity,” which contains a reading that she calls both “wrong” and “repellent.” Fry's analysis, which he revisits later in his own talk for *Picasso and Braque: A Symposium*, goes as follows:

*Au Bon Marché*, cited by Rosenblum for its sexual punning, bears more careful scrutiny. By contextual analysis and elimination of alternatives, the scene may be understood as a café with a bottle and glass on the table. Seated behind the table is a woman of apparently easy virtue, whose head is indicated by a newspaper advertisement, body (conflated with the table) by a clothing-store label, and legs beneath the table by clippings with the pun LUN B TROU ICI. The full pun thus reads AU BON MARCHÉ LUN B TROU ICI,

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<sup>131</sup> Papers at the symposium were presented by Fry, Krauss, Theodore Reff, David Cottington, Christine Poggi, Yve-Alain Bois and Mark Roskill. Pierre Daix, Pepe Karmel, Benjamin Buchloh, Patricia Leighten, John Richardson, and Leo Steinberg were among the discussants also present. See William Rubin, Kurt Varnedoe and Lynn Zelevansky, ed., *Picasso and Braque: A Symposium* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1992).

<sup>132</sup> Rubin et al, *Picasso and Braque: A Symposium*, 79.

which may be translated as “One may make a hole here inexpensively.” This sexual, verbal, and visual double entendre is also particularly notable for its nonillusionistic indication of pictorial depth and space relations.<sup>133</sup>

Krauss argues in response that she “can’t imagine that the clipping with the woman represents a real woman behind a table. Such an idea doesn’t relate to anything that happens in the rest of Picasso’s collages in 1912 through 1914 or 1915.”<sup>134</sup> She finds most appalling “the literalist level of the reading,” because it is “literal to construct the body of the woman in this naturalistic way.”

According to [Fry], we have a ‘picture’ of the top of her head and torso, we have the area of her ‘skirt,’ and then we have the area of what’s under her ‘skirt.’ That kind of visual unpacking of Cubist form is a ‘hunt for the referent’ that proceeds by removing the transformational aspects of Cubism to reconstruct a kind of realism, but at the level of nineteenth-century naturalist painting.<sup>135</sup>

This hole does not represent the genitalia of a woman behind a table, Krauss contends, but is emphatically a *trompe-l’oeil* of a hole, “a positive not a negative shape” created by the application of white paint *onto* the box lid. A reading of the Picasso’s hole must begin with this: the paradox of absence being signaled by a deliberate and explicit presence. Here, lack is an active element in the composition of an artwork; it demands to be seen and to be acknowledged as a construction. “Trou” means what it *is*: what we perceive as the pictorial and conceptual space created by contradiction or, better yet, opposition.

Of course we can recognize Fry’s reading and admire Krauss’s as well. Our “literal” associations as well as our formalist scrutiny seep into how we understand and experience the work. If we read it on this interpretative level, we see *this*. If we read it on that interpretative level, we see *that*. Why must these readings be mutually exclusive? The artwork’s embodiment of both, and absolute commitment to neither, is what fascinates. Those of us who study poetry hardly find such ambiguity and polysemy a source of contention. What does strike us, however, is how much language (as a communicative system of *verbal* signs), and its *poetic* capacities and plasticity, lies at the core of this debate on Cubism, the widely accepted great schism

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<sup>133</sup> Edward F. Fry, “Picasso, Cubism and Reflexivity,” *Art Journal* 47:4 (Winter 1988): 296-310.

<sup>134</sup> Rubin et al, *Picasso and Braque: A Symposium*, 81.

<sup>135</sup> Rubin et al, *Picasso and Braque: A Symposium*, 82.

that occurred in last century's visual art. This is acknowledged – albeit most likely unintentionally – by the art historians themselves. Yve-Alain Bois brings Stéphane Mallarmé into this discussion of *Au Bon Marché*, with the proposal that “part of the meaning of Cubism is found precisely in the impossibility of fixing meaning.” He continues:

To pinpoint one referential reading for this work would be to deny its essential meaning... one of the important aspects of Mallarmé's work concerns a dissemination of meanings in language, and the fact that the word is a multifaceted entity with an extraordinary array of ramifications that can never be controlled by the way we speak or write. To characterize this as aestheticism reduces extraordinarily the problematics of Mallarmé, which have to do with an almost scientific, materialistic explosion of the concept of language as a fixed code.<sup>136</sup>

Picasso and Braque's achievement with Cubism, then, is making explicit that the representational quality of painting depends on its adherence to a system of language. Language, here, refers to an abstract and conventionalized set of linguistic rules – or codes – agreed upon by a social group. Nonetheless, and notably, language allows for “a dissemination of meanings” and is not *fixed*. It can shift and evolve; it is comprised of words that are “multifaceted entit(ies) with an extraordinary array of ramifications.” Representation, or illusionism, in an artwork and its ability to convince are the consequence of these codes, rather than an inherent and static resemblance to an *a priori* referent. As Guillaume Apollinaire writes in *The Cubist Painters*, “The difference between Cubism and earlier painting is that it is not an imitative art, but *a conceptual art*, which reaches up the heights of creation.”<sup>137</sup> He also observes earlier, “The social role of great poets and artists is constantly to renew the way nature appears in the eyes of man... Poets and artists together determine the shape of their time and the future submissively falls into line.”<sup>138</sup> This is, however, what the *Cubist* artists, rather than the artists of “earlier painting,” actively have started to do, according to Apollinaire's account. Thus, the way the poet manipulates verbal language for recreation, and thus catalyzes its re-creation, is the implicit model for how the Cubist painters engage with visual language.

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<sup>136</sup> Rubin et al, *Picasso and Braque: A Symposium*, 86.

<sup>137</sup> Guillaume Apollinaire, *The Cubist Painters*, translated by Peter Read (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 25. Emphasis mine.

<sup>138</sup> Apollinaire, *The Cubist Painters*, 19.

During a later discussion in *Picasso and Braque: A Symposium*, Leo Steinberg points back to *Au Bon Marché* while observing, “One of the things I find most mysterious in Picasso’s work is what I would call the ‘unlocation of place.’” He then indicates the collage’s schematic drawing of a glass on white cutout paper, glued onto the box lid, and argues that this “object is postulated without indication of place. It has no specific location. This liberation of an object from a specificity of place is essential to the movement from *visual analogue* to *pure sign situation*.” Regarding this movement, Steinberg acknowledges that even at the time of the symposium (and certainly for us today), “That’s a cliché; we’ve said that kind of thing many times. But to conceive such liberation in 1913 or ’14 takes the kind of mind that only the ultimate poet, scientist or theoretician has. This is what makes Cubism – ...using Leonardo’s term – *a cosa mentale*.”<sup>139</sup>

Cubism, so often called the great revolution in modern art, was the moment painters rose to the linguistic thinking and experimentation of poets. Gertrude Stein slyly alludes to this when she writes in *Picasso*: “His friends in Paris were writers rather than painters, why have painters for friends when he could paint as he could paint... He needed *ideas*, anybody does, *but not ideas for painting*, no, he had to know those who were interested in ideas but as to knowing how to paint he was born knowing all of that.”<sup>140</sup> I don’t want to overstate this point, but given the long deference poetry has offered to, and been demanded from, the visual arts – a deference I can only attribute to the market’s and tourism’s preference for exchangeable and locatable objects – I can’t help but note this with some, even if minor, satisfaction.<sup>141</sup>

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In the mid-1930s, Picasso abandoned painting for poetry. And this has significant implications for, or at least has deep entanglements with, how we may situate and narrate his Cubist trajectory. Bois begins his own essay, “The Semiology of Cubism,” included in *Picasso and Braque: A Symposium*:

It is never easy to know where to start when one deals with Cubism, just as the beginning of Cubism itself has been a litigious topic for rather a long time... This lack of consensus is a blessing, for not only does it remind us of the difficulties

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<sup>139</sup> Rubin et al, *Picasso and Braque: A Symposium*, 117. Emphasis mine.

<sup>140</sup> Gertrude Stein, *Picasso* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1938), 3. Emphasis mine.

<sup>141</sup> Consider, for example, in terms of current poetry debates, that a chapter of Kenneth Goldsmith’s *Uncreative Writing* is titled “Infallible Processes: What Writing Can Learn from Visual Art,” and that conceptual writing is named *after* conceptual art, a visual art-centered movement that emerged half a century ago. See Kenneth Goldsmith, *Uncreative Writing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

of the issues at stake, but moreover, it underlines the polemical nature of interpretation: that there are as many possible points of origin of Cubism as there are interpretations of its enterprise.<sup>142</sup>

He then proposes what he finds to be the most convincing “beginning” of Cubism: “I will say that ‘my’ Cubism, that is to say, what I think of when I hear the term ‘Cubism,’ what I envision as the absolute specificity of Cubism, that which it does not share with previous artistic movements, begins much later than the Cubism of other scholars – as late, in fact, as the fall of 1912.”

Bois then cites two interviews conducted by Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler with Picasso – in 1933 and 1935, the latter being the year he turns to poetry completely – in which Picasso dismisses Analytic Cubism and recognizes Synthetic Cubism (or the inquiry led by the *papiers collés* of 1912) as the “more intellectual means of expression.” In Picasso’s critique of Analytic Cubism, he declares, “There is no Cubism in all that. Everything disgusts me, my own things first of all,” and he describes what we now consider Cubism’s defining superimposed planes and multiple viewpoints as “still a means of replacing” perspective; as still tied down to and simply offering another substitute for the traditional means of representation. As Bois explains, “under a veil of apparent modernity, the same old mimetic structure is at work.”<sup>143</sup> Surprisingly, Picasso disdainfully refers to this “same old mimetic structure,” in his interview with Kahnweiler, as “painting.”

Bois asks rhetorically, “Now, what is it that Picasso resents so much in ‘painting,’ an art to which he devoted his life and about which he later wrote, by way of Homeric personification, it ‘is stronger than I am; it makes me do whatever it wants?’” Then Bois offers this answer: “What he resents is not even illusionism as such, but the condition of possibility of illusionism; that is, the constitution of a code which does not take into consideration the material reality of signs but conceives them as transparent images referring to a reality taken for granted, taken as a given.”<sup>144</sup>

Synthetic Cubism, the *papiers collés*, brings “the material reality of signs” to the fore, undercutting “the possibility of illusionism” and competing against our fossilized, and possibly arbitrary, understanding of signs in order to produce a vision of reality ripped away from traditional realism. Kahnweiler records Picasso again, in 1948, looking

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<sup>142</sup> Yve-Alain Bois, “The Semiology of Cubism,” in *Picasso and Braque: A Symposium*, 169.

<sup>143</sup> Bois, “The Semiology of Cubism,” 170-171.

<sup>144</sup> Bois, “The Semiology of Cubism,” 172.

upon one of his early *papiers collés* and observing, “How crazy or cowardly we must have been to abandon this. We had *splendid* means.”<sup>145</sup>

In a revision of “The Semiology of Cubism,” now titled “Kahnweiler’s Lesson,” published in the 1990 book *Painting as Model*, Bois outlines how Picasso, through his early interest in Grebo masks, “became aware... of the differential nature of the sign, of its value: the value of the plastic sign/eye as a mark on an unmarked ground, within a system that regulates its use.”<sup>146</sup> As Bois points out, Ferdinand de Saussure’s *Course in General Linguistics* was given between 1907-1911 and published posthumously in 1916; Kahnweiler, in writing about Cubism in *The Rise of Cubism* (1920), describes Picasso’s engagement with signs as if he intuitively understood Saussure’s concept of the sign’s positive *value*, which is determined by “a dissimilar element that can be exchanged” and “by similar elements that are comparable.”<sup>147</sup>

Bois adds, “Value is an economic concept for Saussure; it permits the exchange of signs (in social communication or in translation), but it prevents, as well, a complete exchangeability.” This leads Bois to the following reading of Picasso and how the Grebo masks catalyzed his turn to *papiers collés* in 1912: “Picasso realized for the first time that a sign, because it has a value, can be entirely virtual, or nonsubstantial. Here we have returned to what Kahnweiler called ‘transparency,’ which is rather an acceptance of absence, of emptiness, as a positive term.”<sup>148</sup>

This term, “transparency,” is worth noting. “Transparency” for Kahnweiler is a conceptual force; it is the volume or space the viewer fills in, or composes and constructs, based on the schema the artist provides. Kahnweiler observes in *The Rise of Cubism*:

These painters turned away from imitation because they had discovered that the true character of painting and sculpture is that of a *script*. The products of these arts are signs, emblems, for the external world, not mirrors reflecting the external world in a more or less distorting manner... The [Grebo] masks bore testimony to the conception, in all its purity, that art aims at the creation of signs. The human face “seen,” or rather “read,” does not coincide at all with the details of the sign, which details, moreover, would have no significance if

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<sup>145</sup> Bois, “The Semiology of Cubism,” 171. Emphasis mine.

<sup>146</sup> Yve-Alain Bois, *Painting as Model* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 89.

<sup>147</sup> Bois, *Painting as Model*, 88.

<sup>148</sup> Bois, *Painting as Model*, 90.

isolated. The volume of the face that is “seen,” especially, is not to be found in the “true” mask, which presents only the contour of that face. This volume is seen somewhere before the real mark. The epidermis of the face that is seen exists only in the consciousness of the spectator, who “imagines,” who creates the volume of this face in front of the plane surface of the mask, at the ends of the eye-cylinders, which thus become eyes seen as hollows.<sup>149</sup>

“Transparency,” as Bois notes, is “this capacity to represent virtual volume in space.” It is the quality of how an artist’s compositions might “burst open ‘opaque’ – so to speak – volumes,” to use Kahnweiler’s own, evocative phrasing.<sup>150</sup> We might see in just a contour the articulation of a dimension. Bois offers, however, an important word of caution about the term “transparency,” calling it “ill chosen and confusing.” Transparency “seems to promise an immediate communicability; an idealist dream of an art without codes, without semantic opacity; a state of apprehension where art would speak directly to the mind of the spectator. This dream is not at all what Kahnweiler proposed.” This specific understanding of “transparency” is nearly in direct opposition to how we might understand the word in common contemporary phrases like “transparency of language.”<sup>151</sup>

Because of his linguistic conceptualization of the *papiers collés*, Kahnweiler is, for Bois, the premier writer of Cubism. Bois goes as far to say, “Kahnweiler was the only critic, until the appearance of Clement Greenberg’s text dedicated to the *papiers collés* in 1958, to understand what was crucial in the evolution of Cubism.”<sup>152</sup> But let me throw in the poet’s oppositional voice. I think this is true only if we take a very literal interpretation of what “critic” must mean. Another writer, in fact, certainly would have recognized and understood the linguistic operations of Picasso’s collages, but her first nod to this, we might say, took the form of a poetic work produced in tandem in 1912, which she initially labeled “Studies in Description.”<sup>153</sup> Her next nod occurred in 1938, in a biography of the artist that few art historians have bothered to read either *correctly* (in the way Krauss applies this to reading Picasso’s work) or *transparently*. And the writer’s reaction to Picasso’s interest in poetry has been reduced and misinterpreted in the popular imagination to a single anecdote, one she tells herself, of

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<sup>149</sup> Bois, *Painting as Model*, 74.

<sup>150</sup> *Painting as Model*, 75.

<sup>151</sup> This point about how Kahnweiler’s notion of “transparency” will become crucial to us later, in “A Vibrant Line,” while considering Francis Picabia’s *transparencies* from the 1930s.

<sup>152</sup> *Painting as Model*, 69.

<sup>153</sup> Joshua Schuster, “The Making of *Tender Buttons*,” *Jacket2*, April 21, 2011, accessed July 2, 2017, [jacket2.org/article/making-tender-buttons](http://jacket2.org/article/making-tender-buttons).

a fight in a gallery and her defensively telling him to back off from her *métier*. Who doesn't envision the scene? She grabs the great artist by the lapels, shakes him, and then declares: "you are extraordinary within your limits but your limits are extraordinarily there."<sup>154</sup>

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If 1912 was the year that gave rise to Picasso and Braque's spatial experimentations with pasted paper on the picture plane – the year that contends as the inauguration of "the absolute specificity of Cubism" – it was also the year that produced a series of radical verbal compositions by their supporter and friend Gertrude Stein, which she ultimately called *Tender Buttons*.

*Tender Buttons* now holds a firm place in the modernist literary canon, and its influence on the subsequent century of North American experimental writing almost goes without saying. The poets themselves have said it repeatedly. A notable example occurs in the 1984 anthology of Language writing edited by Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein, called *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book*. In it, all the selections in the "Readings" section are appreciations of *Tender Buttons* written by the movement's various (male) members.<sup>155</sup> More recently, in 2015, Bernstein elaborates on Stein's magnitude in the edited volume *A History of Modernist Poetry*; how he frames the revolution in *Tender Buttons* remarkably recalls how art historians such as Bois and Krauss posit the semiologic revolution in Cubist collage:

Although *Three Lives* and *The Making of Americans* were radical innovations, neither was as revolutionary as *Tender Buttons* (begun in 1912 and published in 1914). *Tender Buttons* is the touchstone work of radical modernist poetry, the fullest realization of the turn to language and the most perfect realization of wordness, where word and object merge. No work from Europe or the Americas had gone so far in creating a work of textual autonomy, where the words do not represent something outside of the context in which they are performed and where the meanings are made in and through composition and arrangement. The sections of the

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<sup>154</sup> Gertrude Stein, *Everybody's Autobiography* (New York: RandomHouse, 1937), 37.

<sup>155</sup> Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein, ed., *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984).

work are not “about” subjects that are discussed but are their own discrete word objects (verbal constellations).<sup>156</sup>

Bernstein’s emphasis on “textual autonomy” resembles Steinberg’s phrase “unlocation of place.” Stein pushes forward in her writing the movement from verbal analogue (representation) to verbal constellation (“pure sign situation”). But Bernstein seems to choose his words carefully here: *Tender Buttons* “goes far,” further than any other work from Europe or the Americas, in creating textual autonomy, but this doesn’t necessarily mean total autonomy is achieved or even possible. Rather, we can interpret Bernstein as arguing that Stein – akin to Picasso and contemporary to Saussure – realizes the “differential nature of the sign, of its value,” and that an attunement to the sign’s “material reality” allows it a positive value outside of representation and reference, if we now borrow Bois’ formulations. This produces the potential for an “entirely virtual, or nonsubstantial” recreation (re-creation) by its wielder – a recreation, importantly, that has the power to shift the distribution of values and meanings across a wider language system. “The more a reader can associate with the multiple vectors of each word or phrase meanings, the more fully they can feast on the unfolding semantic banquet of the work,” Bernstein continues. “The key is not to puzzle it out but to let the figurative plenitude of each word play out; for, indeed, this work is not invested in a predetermining structure or in precluding or abstracting meaning. *Tender Buttons* does not resist figuration but entices it.”<sup>157</sup>

This observation – that *Tender Buttons* not only deconstructs conventional use of language<sup>158</sup> but provides multiple and various modes for radically reconstructing it – aligns with a reading offered earlier by Lyn Hejinian in “Two Stein Talks,” where she writes, “In *Tender Buttons* Stein attempted to discover uses of language which could serve as a locus of meaning and even of primary being; to do so she had to disassemble conventional structures through which language in mediating between us (thought) and the world (things), becomes instead a barrier, blocking meaning, limiting knowledge, excluding experience.”<sup>159</sup> She also refers to Stein’s understanding of “the differential nature of the sign” when she observes, “It is precisely differences that are the foundation and point of devices such as rhyming, punning, pairing, parallelisms, and running strings of changes within either vowel or consonant frames.

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<sup>156</sup> Charles Bernstein, “Gertrude Stein,” in *A History of Modernist Poetry*, edited by Alex Davis and Lee M. Jenkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 259.

<sup>157</sup> Bernstein, “Gertrude Stein,” 259.

<sup>158</sup> Marianne DeKoven writes, “It seems to me pointless to suppose, for example, that the virtue of *Tender Buttons* is its clarification of our notions of roast beef or asparagus or purses or cushions, or even to suppose that the virtue of Stein’s portraits lies in any information they give us about Picasso or Matisse or Mabel Dodge.” For DeKoven, Stein’s linguistic play functions as a form of dissent from, rejection of, the patriarchy. See Marianne DeKoven, *A Different Language: Gertrude Stein’s Experimental Writing* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 11-12.

<sup>159</sup> Lyn Hejinian, “Two Stein Talks,” in *The Language of Inquiry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 97.

It is the difference between rod and red and rid that makes them mean. Wordplay, in this sense, foregrounds the relationship between words.”<sup>160</sup> To bring this back to our original object and the reconstructive work of poetic thinking, we might borrow Hejinian’s formulation, replace a rod with a hole, and see if we can switch our axis so that lateral is now longitudinal. Thus, the word “hole,” a visual representation of a hole, and the oppositional insistence on presence (via application of paint, paper, and so on), which ultimately produces a hole in the composition – the differences between these is what makes them all *mean* in this work of art.

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The correspondence of Stein’s experiments in language to Picasso’s experiments in pictures has been well trod by many readers.<sup>161</sup> The artists initiated it themselves, and we try our best to follow suit. The standard lecture on *Tender Buttons* in a typical “Introduction to Modern Poetry” course features a handful of slides of Cubist paintings, as well as emphasis on the correlation between Cubism’s presentation of multiple perspectives – as the most “realist” form of representation – and Stein’s famous statement in her 1934 lecture “Poetry and Grammar:” “Poetry is concerned with using with abusing, with losing with wanting, with denying with avoiding with adoring with replacing the noun. It is doing that always doing that, doing that and doing nothing but that. Poetry is doing nothing but using losing refusing and pleasing and betraying and caressing nouns.”<sup>162</sup> I’ve given this lecture; countless of us have given this lecture. But it’s not entirely fair, I think, to either artist’s account of their work and friendship.

The danger of such correspondence between Stein and Picasso is the implication that Stein’s writing was inspired by Picasso’s artwork; that modernist writing trailed behind and had to catch up to painting. Further, we generally take the “multiple viewpoints” interpretation of Analytic Cubism to *be* Picasso’s Cubism, rather than more closely considering the specific line of inquiry undertaken through Synthetic Cubism and its relationship to Stein’s poetry. Recall that Picasso, according to Kahnweiler, dismissed Analytic Cubism as just “painting.” *Papier collé*, on the other hand, is deemed “splendid means.” When we reconsider *Tender Buttons* as Cubist in the sense of the *papiers collés*, we see poetry aligning with painting – at the exact moment when painting was being

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<sup>160</sup> Hejinian, “Two Stein Talks,” 102.

<sup>161</sup> See Marianne DeKoven, “Gertrude Stein and Modern Painting: Beyond Literary Cubism,” *Contemporary Literature* 22:1 (Winter 1981), 81-95; Elizabeth A. Frost, “Replacing the Noun,” in *The Feminist Avant-Garde in American Poetry* (University of Iowa Press, 2003); and Wendy Steiner, *Exact Resemblance to Exact Resemblance: The Literary Portraiture of Gertrude Stein* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978); just to name a few notable examples.

<sup>162</sup> Gertrude Stein, “Poetry and Grammar,” in *Gertrude Stein: Writings 1932-1946*, edited by Catharine R. Stimpson and Harriet Chessman (New York: The Library of America, 1998), 327.

reconceived as a linguistic operation, when it was struggling to achieve the possibilities of poetry.

One of the most insistent proponents of collage as modern art's crucial intersection with modern poetry, and of Stein's central role in this, is David Antin. In his 1972 essay "Modernism and Postmodernism: Approaching the Present in Modern American Poetry," Antin writes, "For better or worse 'modern' poetry in English has been committed to the principle of collage from the outset," adding this jab to mid-century American poetry: "If there is any doubt that it is the 'sense of collage' that is the basic characteristic of Modernist poetry, it is mainly because of the reduced form in which the principle of collage has been understood by the Nashville critics and poets who followed them."<sup>163</sup> Antin subsequently underscores whom he sees as the modernist writer *non pareil*, contrasting the "purer Modernism" of Stein to the "hybrid Modernism" of Ezra Pound and the "anti-Modernist" tendencies of T.S. Eliot, John Crowe Ransom and Allen Tate.

In a follow-up interview with the U.C. Berkeley journal *Occident* in 1974, specifically regarding this essay, Antin more emphatically attributes "the collage principle" in English poetry to the influence of the Cubists, suggesting that Stein's "purer Modernism" arises from her exceptional capacity to understand and appropriate Picasso and Braque's innovations:

Those paintings draw most of their energy from the collision of conceptual and perceptual elements within what appears to be the fragile construct that we consider an image. These painters made a four-year career out of dramatic, comic, lyric and even expressive explorations of the syntactical and semantic constraints limiting pictorial recognizability... Of all the writers in English only Gertrude Stein seems to have had a thorough understanding of how profoundly Cubism opened up the possibilities of representation with this analysis. But then she was the writer in English with the deepest interest in language, the only one with an interest in language as language.<sup>164</sup>

It's peculiar, isn't it, how Antin frames Stein's lesson from modern painting in terms of her "interest in *language as language*?" Even as he offer a comprehensive and fairly

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<sup>163</sup> David Antin, "Modernism and Postmodernism: Approaching the Present in Modern American Poetry," in *Radical Coherency* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 170.

<sup>164</sup> David Antin, "Some Questions about Modernism," in *Radical Coherency*, 202.

convincing analysis of modernist poetry in English as operating through “the principle of collage,” and even as he accurately locates Stein’s innovation in writing as arising from “explorations of the syntactical and semantic constraints limiting recognizability,” Antin still gives precedence to the pictorial rather than the poetic. He even makes the strange diversionary move of claiming that “nobody began to see the full strength of collage modernism in poetry until [Charles] Olson. Gertrude Stein may have been richer, but the full range of her work was only beginning to appear with the publication of her works by Yale in the ‘50s. What’s more, her work came to be appreciated in the climate of the ‘60s, when many younger poets had arrived by different routes at similar concerns.”<sup>165</sup> But this shouldn’t mean we can’t appreciate the full richness of her radical compositions that were contemporary to Cubist collage. This shouldn’t mean we must relegate her own semiotic innovations to the domain of “influenced by” rather than “peer and rival to,” particularly if *Tender Buttons* already was published and could be read by 1914.

Even when acknowledging this, Antin seems committed to keeping painting and poetry in their respective and ranked corners:

Coming with this refined grasp of the language as medium – and of language as medium – [Stein] was well prepared to understand the work of Picasso and Braque, who were embarked on a similar project in another medium and had in some ways made more progress than she had. It didn’t take her long to close the gap, and she was the only writer who did. *Tender Buttons*, which was written by 1913, is not derivative from painting, but it is the only language work that lives in the same time as Picasso. But Stein’s work was never adequately understood until fairly recently.

What happens if we try to turn this around? What happens if we say, “Picasso was well prepared to understand the work of Stein, who was embarked on a similar project in another medium and in some ways made more progress than he had – in that the principles of her medium were what he wanted to apply to his?”

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In line with the hundredth anniversary of *Tender Buttons*’ composition, the UK-based small press Uniformbooks published a newly formatted edition of the text in 2012. In

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<sup>165</sup> Antin, “Some Questions about Modernism,” 224.

their press release, they state their aim as having Stein's writing "more sympathetically read as prose-poetry" and then go on to note "her plastic, *collagist* use of language." Thus far, I have tried to show how *Tender Buttons* aligns with Picasso's *papiers collés* according to how they have been read, by art critics and poetry critics alike, as radical demonstrations in semiology. Now I want to turn to what Stein herself writes about collage and *Tender Buttons* and address two fundamental questions around which I have been skirting: First, is *Tender Buttons*, in fact, a collage work in the sense of Picasso's *papier collés*? Second, with its blocks of non-lineated sentences, is it even poetry?

After all, within a publicity blurb, such as the one released by Uniformbooks, it's easy to read the characterization of *Tender Buttons* as both poetry and collage as being part of the spectacular presentation commonly spun around any ostensibly avant-garde work. Even for those of us who have spent some time with *Tender Buttons* and want to give this characterization a second look, neither claim is self-evident. What aspect of *Tender Buttons'* prose transforms it into poetry? And was Stein, with her repetitions and relentless blocks of rhyming present participles, truly a collagist? And while reading Antin's account of modern poetry's "principle of collage" or Steinberg's assessment of Picasso as having "the kind of mind that only the ultimate poet has," the same question probably lurks in the back of our heads: Isn't being either "poetic" or "collage-like" simply the last century's standard badge for entry into the avant-garde?

Before we reach poetry or collage, however, we need to make a stop at the department store. This is the place we go to see what we are willing to consume – in other words, to see the latest in what we might deem the *anti-avant-garde* – but still we need to pick up some spare buttons.

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Between 1911 and 1912, predating *Tender Buttons*, Stein wrote not just one but two portraits of one of Paris' greatest bourgeois attractions – a place that could be described as the bourgeoisie's manifest hymn to modernity: the Bon Marché department store, which was a short, ten-minute walk up the Boulevard Raspail from Stein's famous rue de Fleurus residence. Titled "Bon Marché Weather" and "Flirting at the Bon Marché," Stein's two portraits were first published in 1951, in the first volume of Yale's series of previously unpublished writings by Stein, referenced earlier by Antin.<sup>166</sup> These portraits have remained more or less neglected by literary critics for decades, aside from passing mention here and there, and the interest in them doesn't

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<sup>166</sup> Gertrude Stein, *Two: Gertrude Stein and Her Brother, and Other Early Portraits (1908-1912)*, edited by Carl van Vechten (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951), 351-355.

even compare to that of the aforementioned work in our constellation, Picasso's famous 1913 collage on the same theme, *Au Bon Marché*.

Both portraits recently have resurfaced through their publication in the University of California Press's 2008 volume *Gertrude Stein: Selections*, edited by Joan Retallack. In her introduction, Retallack briefly connects the portraits to Picasso's *papier collé* by observing,

Stein liked to say that she was “expressing the same thing in literature” as Picasso was in painting. They even have one title in common – his 1913 collage *Au Bon Marché* (which she included in her Picasso monograph) was preceded by her two 1911 “Bon Marché” pieces. (Bon Marché, an expression for “cheap,” was the name of a popular department store in Paris.) The two artists were so close during that period, it's not farfetched to think that the influences traveled in both directions.<sup>167</sup>

Framed in this manner, here is a direct instance of *collage* after *poetry*, although Retallack proceeds to describe what Stein witnessed of Picasso's artistic process while neglecting to elaborate on how exactly – aside from ostensible subject matter – influence traveled from Stein to Picasso. But for what it's worth, Stein probably would have been happy with the trajectory Retallack at least proposes. As she notes, Stein included *Au Bon Marché* as an illustration to her 1938 monograph on Picasso,<sup>168</sup> so it was clearly significant to her, and it's not hard to imagine that the shared theme with her own writing was part of its attraction. Interestingly, of the handful of *papiers collés* Stein includes in *Picasso*, the *Au Bon Marché* collage is placed first and bears the earliest date in its caption, despite the fact it was created in the spring of 1913, nearly a full year after Picasso's first Cubist collage, the *Still-life with Chair Caning*. The latent argument in the history presented here is that, for Stein, Cubist collage begins at the Bon Marché.

But what does *Tender Buttons* have to do with the Bon Marché collage and written portraits? Why do I place *Tender Buttons*, which Bernstein calls “revolutionary” and “the touchstone work of radical modernist poetry,” within the context of these other works and link it to the banal bourgeois department store? My reasoning is historical and even a bit *literal*, but it will have significant consequences for recognizing the

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<sup>167</sup> Joan Retallack, “Introduction,” in *Gertrude Stein: Selections*, by Gertrude Stein, edited by Joan Retallack (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 42-43.

<sup>168</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, illustration no. 30.

semiologic revolution of Stein's canonical work. The writing of *Tender Buttons* follows the Bon Marché portraits by, at most, a year, and I think we can view it as the dramatic new direction for an inquiry already evident in the portraits, a inquiry to realize and to achieve poetry *from* Stein's prose.<sup>169</sup>

The connection between these texts also lies in *Tender Buttons'* titular objects. The analysis of "buttons" here makes an interesting counterpoint to Picasso's "hole," and the proposed possibilities to their significance are equally proliferate. Bernstein offers an illuminating overview:

Consider the title, which has many associations that bear a direct relation to Stein's poetics. Buttons are used to fasten (attach or join) discrete pieces of fabric; this suggests a compositional practice akin to quilting and collage and situates the work not only as a form of practical art or craft, suggesting a connection to what has often been considered (and denigrated as) women's work (buttons are often ornamental or decorative). The sense of domestic space is also suggested by the section subtitles "Rooms" and "Food" – suggested only, because the association is loose. You press *buttons*: the operating system here is point and click in a touch-sensitive textual environment. A *button* is also a small protuberance: stud or knob or bud (its etymological root). *Tender Buttons* suggests nipples or clitorises: the poetics is decentered eroticism (meaning disseminated evenly over the body of the text not cathected onto nouns or plot); which is to say the work is aversive to phallic or climax-oriented satisfaction. *Tender Buttons*, while not a manifesto, advocates a poetics of acting "so that there is no use in a center," where "the difference is spreading."<sup>170</sup>

Bernstein then links "tender" to economic exchange, emphasizing the significance of this for semiotics in a way analogous to Bois' reading of value for Picasso and Saussure. He writes, "In the semiotic economy of the poem, words are tender and the poem is fundamentally involved with language as a system of exchange (rather than 'pointing,' word to object). Yet Stein's work is not random but intended – as she says, 'no mistake is intended,' even if she is a 'mischief *intender*.'"

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<sup>169</sup> *Gertrude Stein: Selections* dates the Bon Marché portraits as composed in 1911, whereas *Tender Buttons* was begun after Stein vacationed in Spain during the summer of 1912 (see Schuster, "The Making of *Tender Buttons*").

<sup>170</sup> Bernstein, "Gertrude Stein," 260.

According to Schuster, Stein only decided upon a title for the work in 1914 after prompting from her publisher, Donald Evans of Claire Marie Editions. Evans had been introduced to Stein's work through Mabel Dodge and Carl Van Vechten, and Schuster speculates that Evans' romantic interest in Van Vechten helped spur *Tender Buttons*' publication.<sup>171</sup> In a letter from Stein to Evans, dated April 15, 1914 (and now archived at Yale's Beinecke Library), she writes, "Tender Buttons will be the title of the book. On the title page after the general the three sub titles, Food, Rooms, Objects."<sup>172</sup> Then in a letter to Van Vechten, following the book's publication later that year, Stein explains her enigmatic title with surprising simplicity: "You see, I love buttons. I often go to the Bon Marché and buy strings of them, so symbolically they seemed to connect themselves with the three headings of these poems."<sup>173</sup> This may reflect Stein in a facetious mood, but she does, nonetheless, set the title's "buttons" as yet another reference to the Bon Marché, thus offering a thread between this work and her two earlier portraits.

If we read "Bon Marché Weather" and "Flirting at the Bon Marché" alongside *Tender Buttons*, we inevitably are struck by the dramatic shift that happens in the language, both in vocabulary and in syntactical structures, in such a short period across them. And if we read through the entire Yale volume of early portraits in which the Bon Marché portraits were published, called *Two: Gertrude Stein and Her Brother, and Other Early Portraits 1908-1912*, we must note how many years and pages – hundreds and hundreds of pages – Stein spent writing text that looks pretty similar overall. Consider this line from "Jenny, Helen, Hannah, Paul and Peter:" "There were five of them, all living. They all had been living. They all were living."<sup>174</sup> And then this one from "A Man:" "In the beginning he was remembering that he was one having been living with some one who had been one being living."<sup>175</sup> And then this one from "Julia Marlowe:" "Some are ones being very successful ones in being ones being living."<sup>176</sup> And here from "Bon Marché Weather:" "Very many are being living. A great very many are being living."<sup>177</sup> And lastly from "Flirting at the Bon Marché:" "Some are coming to know very well that they are living in a very dreary way of living."<sup>178</sup> Yes,

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<sup>171</sup> Schuster, "The Making of Tender Buttons."

<sup>172</sup> Schuster interestingly observes the different arrangement of the book's three sections listed here from how they ultimately were published, and he suggests that Evans created the order of "Objects," "Food," and then "Rooms," and Stein didn't care enough to correct him. See Schuster, "The Making of Tender Buttons."

<sup>173</sup> Bruce Kellner, "Baby Woojums in Iowa," *Books at Iowa* 26 (April 1977), accessed July 20, 2017, [www.lib.uiowa.edu/scua/bai/kellner.htm](http://www.lib.uiowa.edu/scua/bai/kellner.htm).

<sup>174</sup> Stein, *Two: Gertrude Stein and Her Brother*, 143.

<sup>175</sup> Stein, *Two: Gertrude Stein and Her Brother*, 242.

<sup>176</sup> Stein, *Two: Gertrude Stein and Her Brother*, 328.

<sup>177</sup> Stein, *Two: Gertrude Stein and Her Brother*, 352.

<sup>178</sup> Stein, *Two: Gertrude Stein and Her Brother*, 353.

we understand, there are a lot of people that are living. If Stein's persistence doesn't impress us here, we might turn our attention to *The Making of the Americans*, which also was written throughout the same years.

Whereas now take a look at the very first "object" that opens *Tender Buttons*, "A Carafe, that is a Blind Glass:"

A kind in glass and a cousin, a spectacle and nothing strange  
a single hurt color and an arrangement in a system to  
pointing. All this and not ordinary, not unordered in not  
resembling. The difference is spreading.<sup>179</sup>

In this series of still-lives, we will not find any of them described as "being living." The emphatic "-ing" of the portraits, which appear solely through the flourish and dominance of present participles, now has infiltrated all parts of speech in *Tender Buttons*, being in both the verb "spreading" and the noun "nothing," bursting through "single," sneaking in through "in glass," and thus finding echoes in "in," then "kind" and "cousin," then through "an," which swoops through "and," "strange," "arrange," or "un" in "unordered"... is there a single word here that we will not see, eventually, as a possible variation on the others? In his essay "Gertrude Stein," Bernstein uses the terms "investment" and "occupation" to describe what is essentially Stein's *avant la lettre* construction of Derridean *traces* and cites a line at the beginning of "Rooms:" "There was an occupation."<sup>180</sup> The employment of these two terms, "investment" and "occupation," is appealing, in how both indicate a process of addition and alteration – but with our contemporary usage of these words, we also can see one as the participation in and fostering of a certain economy and the other as a mode of opposition and reconstitution. In any case, as Stein takes pains to point out: "The difference is spreading."

I read this last sentence as both belabored and emphatic. It is the only one in this section that makes any sense in a conventionally syntactically way. It has a noun and then a verb. And here is our old friend, the present participle. Following the spiraling first sentence in "A Carafe, that is a Blind Glass," and then the zigzagging second, I can't help but read this final, linear sentence as the sentence of compromise. In *Tender Buttons*, we see periods, commas, capital letters, words we might identify as being a noun or a preposition or an adjective, but still we are hard-pressed to find any universal logic or set of rules for when, where, and how these are wielded.

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<sup>179</sup> Gertrude Stein, *Tender Buttons: The Corrected Centennial Edition* (San Francisco, City Lights Books, 2014), 11.

<sup>180</sup> Bernstein, "Gertrude Stein," 261.

This raises the other obvious difference between *Tender Buttons* and the portraits, which is that the sentences in the portraits could be read as “complete” and basically following standard grammatical rules. Would they still give William Strunk and E. B. White a heart attack? Probably, but still these are sentences we could diagram. Further, and perhaps more importantly, the basic content of these sentences – by which I mean their semantic information – can be determined. As demonstrated throughout this chapter, a common line is to read the semantic information of all Stein’s writing, her portraits included, as negligible or even as the thing that is deliberately upturned and annihilated. We have read again and again that the correlation between word and object must be severed. We’re supposed to listen for not *what* is said but *how* it is said – in other words, the rhythm of the repetition, or what Stein claims as “insistence,” is the essence of the portrait. I want to suggest here, however, that this isn’t true for all of Stein’s writing. Her portraits demand a different mode of reading than *Tender Buttons* does, just as the *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and *Stanzas in Meditation* solicit further modes.

But to return to “insistence:” Stein of course seems to encourage this type of reading for her portraits when she explains, in her 1934 lecture “Portraits and Repetition,” that once she “started expressing this thing, expressing any thing there can be no repetition because the essence of that expression is insistence,”<sup>181</sup> and then she later adds, “As I say I had the habit of conceiving myself as completely talking and listening, listening was talking and talking was listening and in so doing I conceived what I at that time called the rhythm of anybody’s personality.”<sup>182</sup> However, Stein never claims that insistence is the totality of content, just that it is a fundamental element of it. This may seem like an obvious point, but I think it is worth stating expressly: Stein does not divorce *what* is said from *how* it is said in her portraits. We can read these portraits *literally*, akin to how Krauss describes Fry’s reading.

When Stein writes that a person or persons are “being living” or “were having been living,” these sentences can appear to be elaborately elongated ways of saying nothing more than: “Here’s a person.” But in a portrait, by its generic definition, isn’t it *essential* to say, “Here is a person. This person is, this person has lived?” Similarly in the Bon Marché portraits, none of the statements are entirely arbitrary or illogical things to say about a department store and the people within it. In “Bon Marché Weather,” Stein’s repetitions circle around statements such as, “A very bad season everybody is having,” and “There are a great many things everybody is buying.”<sup>183</sup> Stein also includes topics such as the weather (obviously), eating, travelling, and

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<sup>181</sup> Stein, “Portraits and Repetition,” in *Gertrude Stein: Writings 1932-1946*, 288.

<sup>182</sup> Stein, “Portraits and Repetition,” 293.

<sup>183</sup> Stein, “Bon Marché Weather,” 351.

proportions, such as how tall or fat one is and will be. These are all things we can easily imagine to be matters of concern while shopping.

“Flirting at the Bon Marché” even offers something of a cultural critique, when Stein begins the portrait with “Some know very well that their way of living is a sad one. Some know that their way of living is a dreary thing. Some know very well that their way of being living is a tedious thing,”<sup>184</sup> which eventually transitions to “These go shopping. They go shopping and it always was a thing they were rightly doing. Now everything is changing.”<sup>185</sup> Stein concludes with this:

Some of such of them are changing, are shopping, some of such of them are shopping and shopping is something, they are shopping and shopping is something, they are shopping and shopping is something but changing is not in being one buying, changing is in being one having some one be one selling something and not selling that thing, changing is then existing, sometimes in some quite changing, in some quite completely changing, in some some changing, in some not very much changing.<sup>186</sup>

Let’s be honest: Stein is neither George Simmel nor Walter Benjamin here, nor does she try to be. Still, Stein makes the observation that department store shopping has become a leisure activity, one that is not about acquiring necessities but about counteracting boredom. Whether shopping relieves boredom or perpetuates it remains a question, but the key point here is that modern shopping is not about the goods purchased, “not in being one buying,” but about the fact that someone, a salesman, appears to sell you one thing, a good, but is actually selling you, seducing you into, something else – an alternative way of life, a new mode of existence. “Everything is changing,”<sup>187</sup> the text says, “Changing is then existing.”<sup>188</sup> We also might note, however, that the final phrases of “Flirting at the Bon Marché” offer the possibility that Stein parodies such cultural critique. She writes that “changing is then existing, sometimes in some quite changing, in some quite completely changing, in some some changing, in some not very much changing.” In other words, some change a lot, some change a little, and some don’t change at all. Is this an elaborate argument set up to say, ultimately, nothing substantial at all? Is the very point of the text, in fact, the presentation of a lot of language with little gain? Is Stein possibly

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<sup>184</sup> Stein, “Flirting at the Bon Marché,” 353.

<sup>185</sup> Stein, “Flirting at the Bon Marché,” 354.

<sup>186</sup> Stein, “Flirting at the Bon Marché,” 355.

<sup>187</sup> Stein, “Flirting at the Bon Marché,” 354.

<sup>188</sup> Stein, “Flirting at the Bon Marché,” 355.

channeling and upturning someone else's words here?

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Despite her claims of listening while talking and of conveying the rhythms of her portrait subjects' personalities, most of the statements in her early portraits are descriptions of her subjects and not phrases spoken by them. "Bon Marché Weather," however, features a clear exception. While it eventually does revert back to description, it begins with Stein parroting what we now would call "found" language: "Very pleasant weather we are having. Very pleasant weather I am having. Very pleasant weather everybody is having. Very nice weather you are having. // Very nice eating everybody is having. Very nice eating I am having. Very nice eating they are having. Very nice eating you are having." Here repetition is not the neutral ground from which we can decipher the subtle nuances of variation and movement that constitute a particular personality; here repetition manifests the pervasive banality and homogeneity of everyday conversation. We go around repeating the same things over and over again, whether they make any sense or not, until our words fill up the atmosphere and steer us in the same way either our very pleasant weather or our very bad season might. Weather is, after all, the perfect metaphor for domination, totality. Friedrich Nietzsche, for example, frequently correlated Richard Wagner's "total work of art" (or "total sickness," as he also calls it) to bad weather across his writings. He writes in *The Case of Wagner*, "Wagner's art has the pressure of a hundred atmospheres: stoop! what else can one do? // The actor Wagner is a tyrant; his pathos topples every taste, every resistance."<sup>189</sup>

For many twenty-first century readers, Stein's setting of such suffocating banalities in the Bon Marché probably makes perfect sense, perhaps even borders on cliché; but still, like Wagner to Nietzsche, the expanding department store clearly fascinated her. Frequently cited as one of the world's first department stores, the Bon Marché begun as a small shop in 1838 and quickly swelled into a multi-department *grand magasin* a couple decades later. The grand history of the Bon Marché's rise amidst the nineteenth-century department stores can be read in Michael B. Miller's *The Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store, 1869-1920*. Here we find out that by 1914, "there was little in the way of consumer goods that one could not buy at the Bon Marché."<sup>190</sup> And among these consumer goods, shoppers could even find works of art for sale and on display in a top-floor salon, as we read from the *Baedeker Guide to*

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<sup>189</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 172.

<sup>190</sup> Michael B. Miller, *The Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store, 1869-1920* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 52.

*Paris* dating 1900 – which could very well have been the guide that accompanied Stein when she dropped out of Johns Hopkins to travel to Paris in 1901.<sup>191</sup>

At the time Stein wrote her portraits and Picasso made his collage, the Bon Marché was the largest department store in the world. And the store's ever-expansiveness was certainly on Parisians' minds in 1912, when a major extension to the store was built across an intersection, joined to the original by an underground passage.<sup>192</sup> The Bon Marché massively asserted itself on the Parisian cityscape as its own world within the world, destroying the guild-run specialty shops of the past, prescribing and homogenizing bourgeois desire, and prompting consumers to say pleasantries such as "Very pleasant weather we are having" while they shopped for clothes, for toiletries, for food, for furniture, and for buttons. And these consumer goods only could be had at a fixed price, unlike the earlier specialty shops where negotiation and trade were the norms. As both Miller and Baedeker note, standardized, fixed monetary prices for commodities were introduced by and became a defining feature of the *grands magasins*. Even in 1900 Baedeker pointedly advises, "Le prix fixe est de règle dans les <grands magasins>, où ils sont marqués en chiffres connus... il vaut mieux tâcher de ne pas être reconnu comme étranger, de peur d'être exploité."<sup>193</sup> The Bon Marché claimed a monopoly on everyday life.

Its massiveness, its thoroughness, its endless provocations of desire – to the creative modernist mind, the Bon Marché easily could have been both a monstrosity and a model. We only need to read Emile Zola's *The Ladies' Paradise* to see how simultaneously oppressive and enchanting the great department store could be. Zola based the novel's hero, Mouret, on the Bon Marché's founder Aristide Boucicaut and describes him with the same term Stein privileges for herself and Picasso: "genius." Further he describes the fictional store's famous "White Sale" – orchestrated by Mouret and based on the actual *mois du Blanc* sales of the Bon Marché – as a remarkable work of constructivist art, calling it both a "hymn of praise to white" and "an immense, mounted exhibition." If I may step out of my scholarly shoes here and simply be a rapt reader, I will say that the White Sale inspires one of the most breathtaking passages in *The Ladies' Paradise*, truly a moment when prose takes flight into poetry, and we can see how for Zola even a monochrome can burst into a brilliantly textured collage:

Through the flow of all this white, and the apparent disorder  
of the materials, there ran a harmonic phrase, white

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<sup>191</sup> K. Baedeker, *Paris et ses environs: Manuel du voyageur*, 14th Edition (Leipzig: Karl Baedeker, 1900), 47.

<sup>192</sup> Miller, *The Bon Marché*, 46.

<sup>193</sup> Baedeker, *Paris et ses environs*, 47.

maintained and developed in all its tones, which were introduced and then grew and expanded with the complicated orchestration of some masterly fugue, the continued development of which carries the soul away in an ever-widening flight. There was nothing but white, yet it was never the same white, but all the different tones of white, competing together, contrasting with and complementing each other, achieving the brilliance of light itself. First came the matte whites of calico and linen, the dull whites of flannel and cloth; next came the velvets, the silks, the satins, a rising scale, the white gradually lighting up, finishing in little flames around the breaks of the folds; and in the transparency of the curtains the white took wing, in the muslins and laces it attained the freedom of light, and the tulle were so fine that they seemed to be the ultimate note, dying away into nothing; while at the back of the gigantic alcove the silver in the lengths of oriental silk sang out above everything else.<sup>194</sup>

The “white” takes wing in Picasso’s *papier collé* as well. We’ve been warned against such a reading, but once we know it, we can’t help but think it. The question is: what do we do with it? Do we note it, or do we pretend we don’t know? In *Picasso and Braque: A Symposium*, Lewis Kachur sketches out the context from which “LUN B TROU ICI” was ripped. “LUN” from *lundi*. “TROU” from *trousseaux*. And the “B” in the middle indicates *where* we might purchase such garments on Monday: the White Sale, *blanc*.<sup>195</sup>

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We can’t expect even our most revolutionary artists and writers, let alone Stein and Picasso, to be immune to the lure of spectacle. But what our reading of the Bon Marché doesn’t take in account thus far is, after all, we need not buy *everything* the salesman is selling. We can also take home the string of buttons and then choose either to sew them on a dress or to set them in a poem. In the 1990s, Harryette Mullen wrote two texts inspired by the “Objects” and “Food” sections of *Tender Buttons*, called *Trimmings* and *S\*PeRM\*\*K\*T*. In a preface to the texts, she explains that she was motivated to show how objects, when brought into the home and re-contextualized by female subjectivity, both are transformed by and have the power to

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<sup>194</sup> Emile Zola, *The Ladies’ Paradise*, translated by Brian Nelson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 398.

<sup>195</sup> Rubin et al, *Picasso and Braque: A Symposium*, 85.

transform domestic space. Mullen writes on Stein:

I was interested in her meditation on the interior lives of women and the material culture of domesticity, focusing on the inanimate objects that find their way into the home. Her idiosyncratic verbal “portraits” of hats, umbrellas, cups, and cushions illuminate, animate, and eroticize the domestic space to which women traditionally have been confined.<sup>196</sup>

The “hats, umbrellas, cups and cushions” are rendered into “idiosyncratic ‘portraits’” by the poet; subsequently, they gain the capacity to “illuminate, animate,” and even “eroticize the domestic space.” This, I would say, precisely describes the shift from the found language used for description in the Bon Marché portraits, to the language cut, pasted, and otherwise manipulated as composition in *Tender Buttons*.

Stein herself describes this shift in “Poetry and Grammar” as when her “real acquaintance with poetry was begun.”<sup>197</sup> She recounts: “I began to discover the names of things, that is not discover the names but discover the things the things to see the things to look at...having begun looking at them I called them by their names with passion and that made poetry, I did not mean it to make poetry but it did, *it made the Tender Buttons*.”<sup>198</sup> Note here Stein’s emphasis on seeing and looking (“to see the things to look at”), and then the correlation between looking and naming (“having begun looking at them I called them by their names”). While Stein says here and elsewhere that her previous mode of writing had focused on “talking and listening,” she now asserts that *Tender Buttons* began her concentration on “looking.”

That Stein’s acquaintance with poetry occurred the same year as Picasso’s formulation of Cubist collage gets harder to dismiss as coincidence, especially as we consider the parallels in how she defines them. In *Picasso*, Stein describes Cubist collage as operating through *opposition*. She writes:

And that was the reason for putting real objects in the pictures, the real newspaper, the real pipe. Little by little, after these cubist painters had used real objects, they wanted to see if by the force of the intensity with which they painted some of these objects, a pipe, a newspaper, in a picture, they

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<sup>196</sup> Harryette Mullen, “Recycle This Book,” in *Recyclopedia: Trimmings, S\*PeRM\*\*K\*T, and Muse & Drudge* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2006), x.

<sup>197</sup> Stein, “Poetry and Grammar,” 325.

<sup>198</sup> Stein, “Poetry and Grammar,” 330. Emphasis mine.

could not replace the real by the painted objects which would by their realism require the rest of the picture to *oppose* itself to them.<sup>199</sup>

Stein delineates the process of transforming images into signs and thus using a composition to produce a new differentially determined language. Stein sees in collage that *realism* is a means to *replacement*, rather than the other way around. She doesn't advocate an equivalent or parallel reality produced with signs, but rather for the production of signs to determine and shape what we conceive of as our reality. The question raised by the collages is: Can the Cubist painters get their visual articulations to *mean* through a "force of intensity" (the projection of meaningfulness) and through making explicit the cutting-and-pasting (the various fault lines of opposition) required to set up this particular system? Now compare this to Stein's definition of poetry, in which one either refuses nouns by using them or attempts to name things without using their names. Stein writes in "Poetry and Grammar," "So then in Tender Buttons I was making poetry but and it seriously troubled me, dimly I knew that nouns made poetry but... Was there not a way of naming things that would not invent names, but mean names without naming them."<sup>200</sup> What Stein calls the "real object" in Picasso's collages corresponds to the noun/name in her own poetry, and Stein's search for "a way of naming things that would not invent names, but mean names without naming them" appears closely aligned to what Krauss later calls "the circulation of the sign." In the chapter titled "The Circulation of the Sign" in *The Picasso Papers*, Krauss gives the following account of the artist:

Does he need to declare any more forcefully that here, in the fall of 1912, with his new medium of collage, he has entered a space in which the sign has slipped away from the fixity of what the semiologist would call an iconic condition – that of resemblance – to assume the ceaseless play of meaning open to the symbol, which is to say, language's unmotivated, conventional sign?<sup>201</sup>

What if I replace "he" with "she," and "collage" with "poetry?" Wouldn't this also be exactly what I mean? As Bernstein writes, "The tender of our language is change and exchange."<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> *Picasso*, 23. Emphasis mine.

<sup>200</sup> "Poetry and Grammar," 330.

<sup>201</sup> Rosalind E. Krauss. *The Picasso Papers*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998.

<sup>202</sup> Bernstein, "Gertrude Stein," 263.

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Stein's poetry and Picasso's collage declare that the work of the artist is both analytical and critical, in addition to being expressive. The artist is not the spontaneous originator of the artwork, nor is she merely the machine that collects and rearranges signs. The artist is situated within a pre-existing language system, in fact, within *several* language systems – this point is key – and only through a sensitive (tender) and incisive (cutting, tearing) reading of signs as they function in these systems can the artist re-circulate them, overlap them, transpose them, and by “force of intensity” *mean* through them; or, in other words, produce a new and expressive language system through them. This is how the artist, to return to Hejinian's conceptualization, “discovers uses of language which could serve as *a locus of meaning* and even *of primary being*.”

In 1912, Stein and Picasso stood at the intersection of phenomenology and semiotics. This is the remarkable insight Stein offers in her explication of collage above. If the artist is *original*, they are so in how they invest and occupy signs with meaning, how they mobilize an exacting observation of their world (realism) with the objective of producing new tools for acting upon it (replacement) and subsequently shaping it (recreation). Marjorie Perloff's recent book *Unoriginal Genius: Poetry by Other Means in the New Century* offers a lot both to admire and to disagree with, but at its core, its re-assessment of what the artist, by definition, *does* arises from the self-fashioning of modernists such as Stein: “Once we grant that current art practices have their own particular momentum and *inventio*, we can dissociate the word *original* from its partner genius. If the new ‘conceptual’ poetry makes no claim to originality – at least not originality in the usual sense – this is not to say that *genius* isn't in play. It just takes different forms.”<sup>203</sup>

Several conceptual poets, such as Kenneth Goldsmith and Craig Dworkin, have cited Stein as an important influence or forerunner,<sup>204</sup> but I see an important distinction between Stein's conceptualism and Goldsmith's evangelism of the “uncreative writer:” Stein's “conceptual” poetry is *necessarily* expressive and creative. It finds its motivation and definition in *opposition*. It is only worth making because of “the force of the intensity” the artist feels, and because the intellectual shift it proposes can affect an actual alteration, even if just a small tremor, of its readers' sensible worlds.

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<sup>203</sup> Marjorie Perloff, *Unoriginal Genius: Poetry by Other Means in the New Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 21.

<sup>204</sup> Goldsmith, *Uncreative Writing*, 161-163.

Stein writes about the composition of *Tender Buttons*, “I struggled I struggled desperately with the recreation and the avoidance of nouns as nouns and yet poetry being poetry nouns are nouns.”<sup>205</sup> This differs significantly from how Stein recounts the process behind *The Making of the Americans*, during which she was “completely obsessed by the inner life of everything.”<sup>206</sup> *The Making of the Americans*, like the Bon Marché portraits, is *prose*. So when Stein states, “I struggled I struggled desperately,” we recognize a pathos here, in the struggle and desperation, that even being “completely obsessed” doesn’t convey. To be obsessed is to be preoccupied, to be consumed by something else. The active capacity of “I” is diminished or restrained. Further, one might be obsessed with a lover or enemy, but also an experiment, a logic problem, or collecting carafes. Obsession is a surprisingly neutral affect, because it takes shape from – and therefore varies depending on – its object. But to say, “I struggled I struggled desperately,” is a resolute assertion (and *insistent* reassertion) of an active “I” and of active effort. It is this sense of struggle, rather than completion, that in its desperation feels both necessary — as if the very existence of “I” depends on this ongoing recreation — and filled with desire that reveals to me both the personal and social stakes of Stein’s poetry. The social, after all, might be conceived as the system of differential definitions around the “I.”

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Now we must look more closely at Stein’s desire to “mean names without naming them” and what this means for *Tender Buttons*, as well as what it might mean for collage. How does Stein attempt to achieve this apparent contradiction? Reading through the volume’s three sections, which are varyingly composed, we encounter two phrases periodically circulating throughout them as beginnings to sentences: “What is the use” and “Suppose.” I propose that we read “What is the use” and “Suppose” as the two primary operations, and imperatives, put forward by *Tender Buttons*.

“What is the use” appears in lines such as, “What is the use of a violent kind of delightfulness if there is no pleasure in not getting tired of it,”<sup>207</sup> and “What was the use of leaving it there where it would hang what was the use if there was no chance of ever seeing it come there and show that it was handsome.”<sup>208</sup> We are also asked, “anyway what is the use of a covering to a door,” and then told, “There is a use, they are double.”<sup>209</sup> I read “What is the use” as an insistent reminder for us to recall past

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<sup>205</sup> Stein, “Poetry and Grammar,” 331.

<sup>206</sup> Stein, “Poetry and Grammar,” 329.

<sup>207</sup> Stein, *Tender Buttons*, 12.

<sup>208</sup> Stein, *Tender Buttons*, 21.

<sup>209</sup> Stein, *Tender Buttons*, 63

uses of a word or phrase – literally asking what its grammatical usage is. But the phrase also extracts language from these uses. “What is the use?” also is asked rhetorically, thereby indicating *uselessness*. Under this dual-faced umbrella of use/uselessness, we encounter common phrases upturned (such as “a piece of coffee”), puns (such as “sam in” and “salmon”), transliterations (“land cost in” for langoustine), and a number of other plays on language. The used is rendered useless, the useless finds new use.

Ultimately, however, “What is the use” provides the foundation for the remarkable “force of the intensity” of the voice demanding, “Suppose.” “Supposing that the case contained rose-wood and a color,”<sup>210</sup> Stein suggests. Or she demands, “suppose no other extract is permitted and no more handling is needed,”<sup>211</sup> and “Suppose an Eyes.”<sup>212</sup> In “Rooms,” “Suppose” articulates what might happen if “they are put together,” what I am tempted to read as the proposition of collage:

Suppose they are put together, suppose that there is an interruption, supposing that beginning again they are changed as to position, suppose all this and suppose that any five are not consumed. Is there an exchange, is there a resemblance to the sky which is to be admitted to be there and the stars which can be seen. Is there. That was a question.<sup>213</sup>

*Is there a resemblance to the sky which is to be admitted to be there and the stars which can be seen. Is there.* This last sentence might be read as a question or a statement, and the attempt at clarification, the statement that “That was a question,” actually draws our attention to the potential ambivalence.

“Suppose” is, in *Tender Buttons*, a “locus of meaning and even of primary being.” Even at moments when we can’t identify, or have any hope of identifying, the variations of phrases used or the language games played, we hear such determination and desire in *Tender Buttons*’ voice – perhaps this could be posited as the essential definition of effective “voice” in poetry – that we find whatever it says possible, even plausible. In these moments, *Tender Buttons* is not about the inadequacies of language to convey reality, or even about the ambiguities already existing within language, but about a will

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<sup>210</sup> Stein, *Tender Buttons*, 14.

<sup>211</sup> Stein, *Tender Buttons*, 8.

<sup>212</sup> Stein, *Tender Buttons*, 29.

<sup>213</sup> Stein, *Tender Buttons*, 67.

learning and rehearsing to wield language however it wants, to wrench out new meaning from even the most unlikely and unyielding words.

Schuster describes *Tender Buttons* as demonstrating “an extraordinary new grammar,” and he follows a similar thread as he elaborates:

Stein writes without a predetermined theory of total comprehension or absolute knowledge. A minimal amount of illegibility remains unyielding in a writing that recognizes an inherent indeterminacy of cognition and experience. We will never know all of what can happen or how all writing can be written, we can only continue to compose. We can only wade through the continuous present, orienting ourselves by the material or symbolic aspects of words as they appear in a state of writerly concentration. In this manner of word-driven, concentrated indeterminacy, Stein’s writing performs immersion and emergence rather than thematizing these.<sup>214</sup>

This is not unlike the Cubist collagist who pulls out a receding table from a flat box label; or conjures up the vibrant specter of a guitar from a square of sheet music, a blue quadrangle, a piece of woodgrain, a schematic drawing of a wineglass, and a black boat, and then declares, “LA BATAILLE S’EST ENGAGÉ.” The point here is not representation, nor does it end at experimentation, but it is the artist’s intellectual and *emotional* drive to activate recreation through composition. It is why for Stein, as she writes in “Poetry and Grammar,” “the problem of poetry was and it began with *Tender Buttons* to constantly realize the thing anything so that I could recreate that thing.”<sup>215</sup> It is how recreation is neither leisure nor luxury, but it is necessary and brimming with desire. It is that *I struggled I struggled desperately*, and this is how I learn the stakes of being *I*.

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When I read the art historians debating the consequences of Cubist collage in *Picasso and Braque: A Symposium*, I admire their depth of contextual, historical knowledge; the fine discernment of philosophical concepts; and the formalist rigor they apply to the artworks. But Charles Altieri’s rejoinder in his 1984 essay “Picasso’s Collages and the Force of Cubism” whispers through their readings: “We have absorbed modernism as

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<sup>214</sup> Schuster, “The Making of *Tender Buttons*.”

<sup>215</sup> Stein, “Poetry and Grammar,” 331.

a stylistic revolution without recognizing the sense of mental and emotional powers it makes available to us.”<sup>216</sup> The semiologic revelations to be found in the *papiers collés* are nothing short of remarkable, but still we have to ask: why? What drove Picasso to transform *Au Bon Marche’s* “hole” into an articulation of *presence*, or to bestow upon a flat box lid the potential to express an additional dimension? We have to ask these questions in the same manner that we ask why Stein “struggled desperately” to draw poetry out of *Tender Buttons*; and the answer comes to us through language. This is what we miss when we assume poetry’s project is either secondary or tangential to visual art’s own struggles, when that struggle is precisely to follow poetry’s model.

Looking at Picasso’s *Guitar, Sheet Music and Wine Glass* (1912), Altieri affirms, “This is visual metaphysics, a world that suffices because its intricacy fascinated the secular intelligence and beguiles the eye free to revel in the music of its own, transpersonal and necessary makings.”<sup>217</sup> Is this a *correct* reading? Who can say? But it has a music of its own, and it reveals itself as necessary.

Suppose there is a hole here. Suppose there is.

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<sup>216</sup> Charles Altieri, “Picasso’s Collages and the Force of Cubism,” *The Kenyon Review* 6:2 (Spring, 1984): 8-9.

<sup>217</sup> Altieri, “Picasso’s Collages and the Force of Cubism,” 18.

## THE VIBRANT LINE

Gertrude Stein's monograph *Picasso* is composed through both sweepingly broad and torturously nuanced brushstrokes, with little occurring in between. Its beginning was applied with a paint roller: "Painting in the nineteenth century was only done in France and by Frenchman, apart from that, painting did not exist, in the twentieth century it was done in France but by Spaniards."<sup>218</sup>

Stein insists throughout *Picasso* on crediting the artist's "Spanishness" for his groundbreaking achievements. After describing the early influence, following Pablo Picasso's move to Paris, of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and various French poets on his work, Stein affirms that "he became once more completely Spanish. Very soon the Spanish temperament was again very real inside him."<sup>219</sup> Part of Stein's motivation for emphasizing Picasso's Spanish qualities is clearly to align it with her own American ones, particularly as a contrast to how she generalizes the French. She even recounts a scene where the collector Sergei Shchukin, after seeing the "awful" *Les Desmoiselles d'Avignon*, says "almost in tears, what a loss for French art."<sup>220</sup>

Stein's account of the affinities between Spanishness and Americanness hinge, once more, on the concept of *opposition*. She writes first of Spain, "The architecture of other countries always follows the line of the landscape, it is true of Italian architecture and of French architecture, but Spanish architecture always cuts the lines of the landscape and it is just that that is the basis of cubism."<sup>221</sup> Stein appears to suggest that Cubism, in the context of Spanish landscapes, is a realist mode of composition, but ultimately she suggests that Cubist paintings and Spanish landscapes analogously reflect a common *drive* in their makers, as opposed to the painting being an illusionistic version of the landscape.<sup>222</sup> She writes, "Nature and man are opposed in Spain, they agree in France and this is the difference between French cubism and Spanish cubism and it is a fundamental difference," and we have to wonder here if Stein is making the

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<sup>218</sup> Gertrude Stein, *Picasso* (London: B. T. Batsford, Ltd., 1938), 1.

<sup>219</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 5.

<sup>220</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 18.

<sup>221</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 23.

<sup>222</sup> Rosalind Krauss describes as "patently absurd" what she reads as Stein correlating the realism of photography to the ostensible realism of Picasso's paintings. See Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Picasso Papers* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1998), 121.

distinction between Analytic and Synthetic Cubism later articulated by Yve-Alain Bois, via Picasso's retrospective remarks to David-Henry Kahnweiler.<sup>223</sup>

Stein then turns her paint roller to the twentieth century, with the following analysis that is both remarkable and ridiculous, especially given that it was made in 1938. The United States was trying to climb out of the Great Depression, and Spain was in the midst of its civil war:

Spaniards know that there is no agreement, neither the landscape with the houses, neither the round with the cube, neither the great number with the small number, it was natural that a Spaniard should express this in the painting of the twentieth century, the century where nothing is in agreement, neither the round with the cube, neither the landscape with the houses, neither the large quantity with the small quantity. America and Spain have this thing in common, that is why Spain discovered America and America Spain, *in fact it is for this reason that both of them have found their moment in the twentieth century.*<sup>224</sup>

Stein doesn't clarify how exactly America *discovered* Spain, nor what it means for both countries to "have found their moment." Further, that the round and the cube, and the large and the small, are not in agreement seems self-evident to everyone, not just the Spanish and Americans. Aren't these, in fact, opposites? Stein's audacity is striking; if she were writing today, we might call this section of *Picasso* an overt exercise in "post-truth." Or we might consider it part of an implicit, personal jab at the artist, a deliberate signal that the identification of the artist as Spanish – which distinguishes him less as an individual and more as a representative – holds more than meets the eye. Stein, after all, is the only American overtly called so in the book. On the other hand, the book begins by declaring of painting, "in the twentieth century it was done in France but by *Spaniards*." Plural. Who were the other Spaniards painting in France?

Rosalind Krauss' chapter "Picasso/Pastiche" in *The Picasso Papers* focuses on Picasso's interactions with one of them. This is an artist that, in the last century of critical reception, very few would have called a true rival to Picasso; nonetheless he clearly caused anxiety for Picasso. Krauss narrates their history: "[Francis] Picabia, it must be

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<sup>223</sup> See Yve Alain-Bois, "The Semiology of Cubism," in *Picasso and Braque: A Symposium*, edited by William Rubin, Kurth Varnedoe and Lynn Zelevansky (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1992), 169-208.

<sup>224</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 18.

recalled, had been annoyingly in Picasso's sights for some time, ever since Apollinaire's enthusiasm over the two enormous abstract pictures Picabia showed at the Salon d'Automne in 1913... Always jealous of Apollinaire's attention, Picasso could not have been pleased by Picabia's reception."<sup>225</sup> Krauss sketches the public mockery and parody Francis Picabia hurled at Picasso across the following decade – which certainly come across as desperate attempts for attention – and then Picasso's possible response. She writes, "The hypothesis I would like to entertain... is that Picasso noticed Picabia's pastiche of his new stylistic departure, noticed it and confirmed it with his own version of the same pastiche, producing thereby a strange derivative of a derivative, in the form of a pastiche himself."<sup>226</sup> Whatever we might say about Picabia, if Krauss is correct, he astoundingly managed to drive Picasso to pastiche.

I don't doubt that the author of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* would have delighted in this history of antagonism, and that she would have found a way to write herself into it.

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In his introduction to the 1956 Yale University Press publication of *Stanzas in Meditation*, commonly known as the poem's first edition, Donald Sutherland makes the surprising remark that "Gertrude Stein meant these lines of verse to be as attenuated and disembodied as the drawing of Francis Picabia – with whom a few of the stanzas are concerned – and who, she observed in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, was in pursuit of the 'vibrant line.'"<sup>227</sup> Few commentators following Sutherland have pursued this association between Picabia and the *Stanzas*, and Sutherland himself appears ambivalent on the value of offering it. Despite Picabia's long and dramatically varying career, Sutherland does not elaborate on how exactly his drawings can be seen as attenuated or disembodied, nor give any indication of which drawings specifically he and Stein might mean; he also neglects to identify the particular stanzas that are concerned with the artist. Instead Sutherland proposes, "Whether Picabia often captured [the vibrant line] is a question, but a very good example of its capture would be the draughtsmanship of the Greek vase painter Exekias, if he were more familiar."<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> Krauss, *The Picasso Papers*, 126.

<sup>226</sup> Krauss, *The Picasso Papers*, 114.

<sup>227</sup> Donald Sutherland, "Preface: The Turning Point," in *Stanzas in Meditation and Other Poems, 1929-1933*, The Yale Edition of the Unpublished Writings of Gertrude Stein, edited by Carl Van Vechten (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956), xii.

<sup>228</sup> Sutherland, "Preface," xii.

We feel a small pang for Picabia – the leap to Exekias is fairly stunning – but we might also understand, even sympathize, with Sutherland’s impulse. If we ever discuss the influence of painting on Stein’s poetics, we usually turn to those ready-to-wear masterpieces: Cézanne, Matisse, Picasso, Cubism.<sup>229</sup> Such comparisons add an extra luster to Stein’s work, and they help to expand both the size and patience of her audience. But Picabia is an even more controversial and dubious figure of the modernist vanguard than Stein. Does Stein really benefit from their association? Even she, in *Everybody’s Autobiography*, concedes that she “had known him for many years and had not cared for him,” because “he was too brilliant and he talked too much and he was too fatiguing, besides that I had not cared for his painting.”<sup>230</sup> She is even less generous in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, declaring that when she initially met Picabia in the 1910s, he “annoyed her with his incessantness and what she called the vulgarity of his delayed adolescence.”<sup>231</sup> Even for Stein (who in the same book famously describes Matisse’s wife as looking like a horse) these comments seem harsh, but they serve, in part, to give greater credibility and poignancy to her eventual change of heart. This is the history she presents in *Everybody’s Autobiography*, when Stein asserts that by the early 1930s and the writing of *Stanzas in Meditation*, she and Picabia “have gotten to be very fond of each other. She is very much interested in his drawing and in his painting.” She even goes as far as saying, “I was not interested in anybody painting. Except Picabia.”<sup>232</sup>

Far stranger than Stein’s interest in Picabia is the particular *trajectory* of her interest. As mentioned earlier, Picabia is one of those problematic figures in twentieth-century art history – some dismiss his work as rubbish, and others elevate him as a radical genius. Only in the past year, with a large-scale exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art from November 2016–March 2017 (titled *Francis Picabia: Our Heads are So Round So They Can Change Direction*), has critical attention to and admiration of Picabia’s work been revived.<sup>233</sup> The impact of this show is still left to be seen, but previously only a handful of monographs on the artist existed, and even the most sympathetic of these seem to acknowledge that Picabia’s most important work comes from the 1910s and early 1920s, during the height of his collaborations with Marcel Duchamp and his engagement with the Dadaists.<sup>234</sup> This early Picabia, if you buy the line, is an

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<sup>229</sup> Cécile Debray’s essay, “Gertrude Stein and Painting: From Picasso to Picabia,” from the exhibition catalogue *The Steins Collect* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011) provides a welcome alternative trajectory to Stein’s engagement with modernist painting, with its concluding section offering an overview of Stein and Picabia’s friendship in the 1930s.

<sup>230</sup> Gertrude Stein, *Everybody’s Autobiography* (New York: Random House, 1937), 58.

<sup>231</sup> Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1933), 164.

<sup>232</sup> Stein, *Everybody’s Autobiography*, 100.

<sup>233</sup> The exhibition catalogue is edited by Anne Umland and Catherine Hug, *Francis Picabia: Our Heads Are Round So Our Thoughts Can Change Direction* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2016).

<sup>234</sup> George Baker’s *The Artwork Caught by the Tail: Francis Picabia and Dada in Paris* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007) provides an interesting study of Picabia’s work during this period, capturing both his brilliance and his fatiguing incessantness.

uncompromising destroyer of aesthetic expectations and conventions and a radical enemy to venerated art institutions – but by the 1930s, Picabia has transformed into something else. The later Picabia lived on a yacht along the southern coast of France, collected Rolls Royces, and made murals for wealthy women’s apartments.<sup>235</sup> The later Picabia made art suggesting a suspicious appreciation for the *aesthetic* and *figurative*. This is not the Picabia avant-garde adherents would want for Stein, yet this is the one she chose. She advocated his work until her death, even helping him get the institutional recognition he once ridiculed and rejected, such as supporting Picabia’s election into the *Legion d’honneur* in 1933. *Everybody’s Autobiography* concludes, in fact, with Stein’s struggle to get Picabia’s work included in Paris’ 1937 World Exposition – an episode that hints at her lingering ambivalence to the quality of the work itself, but nonetheless makes absolutely clear his importance as an artist to her. This, I would say, is also how we must read Picabia’s presence in *Stanzas in Meditation*.

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We should recall here that, running parallel to the increased intimacy between Stein and Picabia, was the growing distance between Stein and Picasso. In *Everybody’s Autobiography*, Stein attributes their falling out to Picasso’s flirtation with writing poetry in the mid-1930s and her refusal to appreciate it. Picasso tells her, “I will never paint again very likely not I like the life of a literary man, I go to cafes and I think and I make poetry and I like it.” Stein responds, “It is most interesting I said and then for a little time we did not see each other again.”<sup>236</sup> However, Vincent Giroud in *Picasso and Gertrude Stein* suggests that Picasso’s increasingly leftist politics (and Stein’s reactionary ones) and Stein’s possessiveness drove a wedge between them: “It seems that Picasso, apart from his bafflement at some of her more arcane pronouncements, wavered between loyalty and affection toward his first patron and impatience with the ‘ownership’ of him that he sensed in her writings.”<sup>237</sup>

Suffice it to say, circumstances put Stein on the lookout for a new creative conspirator, as well as a chance to reassert herself as an arbiter of modern art. For Stein in the 1930s, Picabia was the new Picasso. She unmistakably composes the two artists as doppelgangers in *Everybody’s Autobiography*,

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<sup>235</sup> In 1929, gallery owner Léonce Rosenberg commissioned Picabia to make a series of paintings, in the transparencies style, to decorate his wife’s apartments (Picabia, *Lettres à Léonce Rosenberg 1929-1940*, edited by Christian Derouet (Paris: Les Cahiers du Musée national d’art moderne, 2000), 17). Picabia clearly didn’t mind the work, nor the extra money, as he writes to Stein in 1934: “Have you not got any American friend who would be prepared to risk a few dollars on letting me decorate his studio? It would be a dream for me to be able to work in peace and do an important work” (quoted in Borràs, *Picabia*, 380).

<sup>236</sup> Stein, *Everybody’s Autobiography*, 18.

<sup>237</sup> Vincent Giroud, *Picasso and Gertrude Stein* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art, 2006), 45.

Picabia and Picasso are about the same height which is not a high one and they are about the same weight which is a fair one. And they would not be what they are as each one is never the other one. And yet sometimes they call Picasso a French painter and Picabia a Spanish one.<sup>238</sup> Well anyway it does happen, they do wear without knowing it the same tie and this time they had exactly the same shoes and everybody noticed.

The similarities Stein notes between them go beyond their build and their clothing; she even attempts to align their artistic practices. Compare, for instance, Picabia's portrait of Stein painted in the summer of 1933, just half a year after Stein wrote *Stanzas in Meditation*, to Picasso's famous portrait from 1906. Here is Stein voluminous against a bleak, mountainous backdrop, draped rather perplexingly in a revealing Roman tunic. This is a far cry from the compelling gravity and austerity of Picasso's Stein, yet we find the genesis of both portraits framed under the same terms. In a postcard sent to Carl Van Vechten, Stein writes of the 1933 painting: "This is a portrait Picabia just made of me *out of his head*. I hope you like it."<sup>239</sup> This immediately recalls Stein's now legendary account of modeling for Picasso. According to *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Stein posed for Picasso eighty to ninety times, until "[a]ll of a sudden one day Picasso painted out the whole head. I can't see you any longer when I look, he said irritably. And so the picture was left like that."<sup>240</sup> Months later, "[t]he day he returned from Spain Picasso sat down and *out of his head* painted the head in without having seen Gertrude Stein again."<sup>241</sup>

Stein uses the same phrase, "out of his head,"<sup>242</sup> to describe both Picasso's and Picabia's processes of creating her likeness, and interestingly both portraits mark

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<sup>238</sup> Calling Picabia a "Spaniard" is misleading, as he had a French mother and lived most of his life in France. His father, however, was Spanish-Cuban, and this was enough for Stein to consider him among the "Spanish" painters: "[Picabia] said that the show that I described where my brother first saw Picassos . . . where Picasso and another Spaniard showed together the other Spaniard whose name everybody has forgotten, Picabia says there were three Spaniards there not two and that he was the third one" (*Everybody's Autobiography*, 44).

<sup>239</sup> *The Letters of Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten: I, 1913-1935; II, 1935-1946*, edited by Edward Burns (New York: Columbia UP, 1986), 270. Emphasis mine. Debray, who outlines Stein's consideration of photography as an important influence on Picabia's work, writes that this portrait evokes "an old portrait of Gertrude in Italy sitting cross-legged on a stone table like a Buddha" ("Gertrude Stein and Painting: From Picasso to Picabia," *The Steins Collect*, 234). I think another likely inspiration would be George Platt Lynes' 1931 photograph of Stein at Bilignin (where Picabia and his wife occasionally visited her), sitting in profile with the French Alps as background.

<sup>240</sup> Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, 64-65.

<sup>241</sup> Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, 70. Emphasis mine.

<sup>242</sup> We should recall that the *Autobiography* was written in 1932, just a year before Picabia painted Stein's portrait and Stein sent her postcard to Van Vechten.

significant stylistic turning points for the artists. For Picasso, Stein's portrait is a harbinger of the primitivism of *Les Femmes d'Alger* and arguably helps set the artist on the road to Cubism. For a Stein scholar, it is hard not to see Picabia as eager to follow Picasso's lead, as he uses his own portrait of Stein as an opportunity, in the words of Maria Lluïsa Borràs, to declare his "search for simplicity and the utmost clarity" and his turn "in the direction of brutalism."<sup>243</sup> Borràs, in her comprehensive monograph on Picabia, calls the Stein portrait "the beginning of a new quest," and we can only surmise that Picabia hoped Stein would be as instrumental in the success of this quest as she had been for Picasso during the Cubist years.<sup>244</sup>

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We should not discount, however, that Stein and Picabia's intimacy marked the beginning of a new quest for *her* as well – one that leads to new theorization of what modern art must do and, more specifically, establishes a set of terms with which we can articulate the attenuated and disembodied history of *Stanzas in Meditation*. While Sutherland offers that "a few of these stanzas are concerned" with Picabia, one particular episode squarely situates Picabia and his drawings at the *Stanzas'* origin.

In December 1932, just half a year before he painted Stein's portrait, Picabia held an exposition of drawings at the Parisian gallery of Léonce Rosenberg. This marks another important reconciliation for Picabia: Rosenberg was an important supporter of Cubism whom, in previous decades, Picabia had relentlessly and jealously mocked.<sup>245</sup> Those who attended this exhibition would have been offered a small, pamphlet-sized catalogue listing the artworks on display. This catalogue also contains, as a textual "Preface" to the exhibition, 53 lines of verse by Stein accompanied by their French translation – executed by none other than Picabia's old partner-in-crime, Duchamp. Now, a century of art history later, it is Duchamp and not Picabia who appears as the more plausible alternative to Picasso as the great inventor of twentieth-century art.<sup>246</sup> That Duchamp undertook the task of translation is remarkable in and of itself, but even more remarkable is how loyal his translation appears to be. We see

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<sup>243</sup> Maria Lluïsa Borràs and Francis Picabia, *Picabia* (New York: Rizzoli, 1985), 378, 343.

<sup>244</sup> Borràs, *Picabia*, 343.

<sup>245</sup> Even as of 1924, Picabia published an essay entitled "L'Art moderne" skewering Rosenberg for his appreciation and promotion of Fernand Leger (*L'Ere Nouvelle*, 5 août 1924, p. 2; see also Picabia, *Ecrits: 1921-1953 et posthumes*, edited by Olivier Revault d'Allonnes and Dominique Bouissou (Paris: Pierre Belfond, 1978), 147-149). His sentiments toward Rosenberg shifted quickly once Rosenberg showed interest in his work, and in 1930 Picabia held an important exhibition of transparencies paintings in Rosenberg's gallery, preceding this exhibition of drawings.

<sup>246</sup> See *The Duchamp Effect*, edited by Martha Buskirk and Mignon Nixon (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996) for a series of essays examining Duchamp's lasting legacy on twentieth-century art. Additionally, Marjorie Perloff has written significantly on the parallels between Stein and Duchamp's experimental work. See especially "Of Objects and Readymades: Gertrude Stein and Marcel Duchamp" (*Forum for Modern Language Studies* 32.2 (1996): 137-154) and *21<sup>st</sup>-Century Modernism: The "New" Poetics* (Blackwell, 2002).

none of the irreverence and mischief we might expect from Rose Sélavy; instead we find a fairly traditional attempt to translate the text, maintaining its ostensible semantic content and even approximating its lineation and its punctuation. Perhaps this accounts for why the translation has received little scholarly attention and only rarely been reproduced, those reproductions limited to French publications entirely devoted to Picabia's work.<sup>247</sup> Despite the prominence of the translator, it is an extraordinarily difficult text to locate.<sup>248</sup>

As for the original verse itself, Stein's "Preface," as it is simply named, features lines such as "This is an introduction to Picabia," and "This is not a day to be away," which give every indication that the poem was written for the particular occasion of Picabia's exhibition. The "Preface" is even preceded by an epigraph by Picabia stating, "La vie n'aime pas les verres grossissants, c'est pour cela qu'elle m'a tendu la main" ("Life does not like magnifying glasses; it is for this that she gives me a hand").<sup>249</sup> By all appearances, Stein also lent a hand to Picabia; Picabia was the star of the show with Stein, Duchamp, and Rosenberg as his supporting players. But was Stein really willing to defer to Picabia, an artist for whom she had enormous affection but never included in her select list of geniuses?<sup>250</sup> Toward the middle of her "Preface," her "introduction to Picabia" suddenly slips into a persistent repetition of the word "I." The last direct reference to Picabia seems to occur in line 24 (when Stein uses the pronoun "him"), which is just before the poem's midpoint. From then onward Stein persistently describes what "I said," "I was," "I thought," "I wish," "I see," "I would have liked," "I am," and "I know." Even more ungenerously, Stein repeats three times, "I would have liked to be the only one," which she then satisfyingly resolves with, "Which I am." Whether or not Stein comments directly on the exhibition and her, or her poem's, status within it, the fact that her "Preface" veers away from the work of description (of saying something about Picabia and his art, which we would expect

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<sup>247</sup> Renée Riese Hubert's "Gertrude Stein and the Making of Frenchmen" (*SubStance* 18.2 (1989): 71-92) makes an exception, by devoting a paragraph to analyzing Duchamp's translation within her broader overview of how Stein has been translated into French. In her assessment, "Duchamp seemingly manifests his understanding of the text," but the "French gravitates toward a more intellectual statement than the original, losing along the way Stein's subtle search of self" (85).

<sup>248</sup> Beyond the 1932 exhibition catalogue, I have only come across Duchamp's translation printed in the almost equally rare Winter 1932-33 issue of *Orbes*. More recently, it has been printed in the exhibition catalogue for the Picabia retrospective held at the Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais (*Francis Picabia*, edited by Jean-Hubert Martin and Hélène Seckel (Paris: Centre National d'Art et de Culture/George Pompidou/Musée National d'Art Moderne, 1976)) and as an appendix to the selected correspondence between Picabia and Rosenberg (*Francis Picabia: Lettres à Léonce Rosenberg 1929-1940*, edited by Christian Derouet (Paris: Centre George Pompidou, 2000)). Both of the recent printings are French monographs on Picabia and therefore might easily be missed by Stein scholars.

<sup>249</sup> Gertrude Stein, "Preface," *Exposition de Dessins par Francis Picabia* (Paris: Léonce Rosenberg, 1932).

<sup>250</sup> In his biography of Stein, Mellow quotes a letter from Stein to Mabel Dodge recounting her initial impression of Picabia: "I like him. *He has no genius* but he has a genuinely constructive intelligence and solid harmony" (*Charmed Circle: Gertrude Stein & Company* (New York: Praeger, 1974), 191, emphasis mine).

from an exhibition preface) and turns toward to the act of self-assertion is certainly remarkable.

If we begin to research outside the exhibition catalogue in order to understand better the material within it, we discover that Stein's conclusion, that she is ultimately "the only one," bears surprising weight. Since we cannot experience the exhibition ourselves, the catalogue functions as the condensation of the occasion, the month-long event in the Parisian gallery, into a portable, printed souvenir. In its entirety, the catalogue consists of two cover pages, Stein's "Preface," its French translation, a list of the exhibited drawings' titles, and reproductions of only two of the drawings. Stein's verse and its translation by Duchamp claim a significant amount of space in the catalogue, and this observation becomes even more poignant with the realization that most of Picabia's titles – the bulk of what else remains in the catalogue – no longer correspond with any surviving works. According to Borràs, "This exhibition consisted of 99 drawings, most of which had capricious, complicated titles and almost all of which were to be sold by public auction two years later under other titles."<sup>251</sup> William Camfield in his biography, *Francis Picabia: His Art, Life and Times*, writes that the drawings "had distinctive titles, but few of them were printed on the drawings themselves, and in multiple changes of ownership most of those titles have been lost."<sup>252</sup> The list of titles has, in the end, become a collection of emptied signifiers. Is there any hope of reconstructing this exhibition if we can't even know which particular drawings were displayed? The two reproduced drawings underscore this point: they appear without titles, so they float disembodied from the printed list. We can only speculate which of the 99 titles they once claimed as their own. One of the drawings is now known as *Volupté*, but this name does not appear on the catalogue list at all.

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What the reproductions do indicate, however, is that the exhibited drawings come from Picabia's recent "transparencies" period, which Camfield dates from 1928-1932.<sup>253</sup> According to Camfield's rather succinct definition, the transparencies are "a style so named for its multiple layers of transparent images," and Picabia experimented with this style in both drawing and in painting.<sup>254</sup> These pictures involve various images superimposed upon each other; sometimes these images are disparate objects or motifs juxtaposed together, and sometimes they appear to be varying

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<sup>251</sup> Borràs, *Picabia*, 343.

<sup>252</sup> William A Camfield, *Francis Picabia: His Art, Life, and Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 234n46.

<sup>253</sup> Ironically, Picabia's 1933 portrait of Stein marks his move away from the transparencies.

<sup>254</sup> Camfield, *Francis Picabia*, 229.

aspects of the same object, such as in *Volupté*, where the superimposed head and hands appear to be from the same woman depicted from thighs up in the background. Or is the woman actually in the foreground, with the head and hands *behind* her? It is difficult to determine what is in front or in back. Furthermore, if the superimposed images come from the same woman, then they must have been captured at different moments in time, as she stands in differing poses. The drawings offer no evident visual clues nor indicate a clear, structured progression in viewing that can tell us what happens first or what happens later, nor how much time passes in between.

I am less inclined to agree with Camfield's interpretation of "transparencies," as centered on the "multiple layers of transparent images" literally visible in Picabia's work, than to recall Kahnweiler's definition of "transparency" (a striking coincidence in terms) with regard to Cubism and Picasso's lesson from Grebo masks. To repeat:

These painters turned away from imitation because they had discovered that the true character of painting and sculpture is that of a *script*... The volume of the face that is "seen," especially, is not to be found in the "true" mask, which presents only the contour of that face. This volume is seen somewhere before the real mark. The epidermis of the face that is seen exists only in the consciousness of the spectator, who "imagines," who creates the volume of this face in front of the plane surface of the mask.<sup>255</sup>

For Picabia's transparencies, this "volume" becomes a trajectory of movement. Duchamp lauded the transparencies for producing "a third dimension without resorting to perspective," and one could see how the transparencies are able to produce a sense of movement, which necessitates both space and time, without explicitly outlining or articulating that movement nor specifying how much or what kind of space and time are involved.<sup>256</sup> We can think of a transparency as that which arises from various, not necessarily consecutive, stills of a film flattened into one shot. A depiction of space and time lies here, as they must be what connects these images, but ambiguity about position and order is maintained and becomes essential. An explicit articulation of movement would effectively put an end to actual movement – to the constant, ongoing production of movement by the artwork – because then movement would be trapped within a prescribed shape. In other words, movement should not be *represented* but should instead *emerge*. Picabia explains in his own words: "My present feeling as regards aesthetics comes from the boredom produced by the

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<sup>255</sup> Yve-Alain Bois, *Painting as Model* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 74.

<sup>256</sup> Duchamp quoted in Borràs, *Picabia*, 337.

sight of pictures that seem to me to be congealed on their immobile surfaces, far removed from anything human.”<sup>257</sup> Using terms akin to those of Duchamp, he then continues: “This third dimension, which is not a product of chiaroscuro, these transparencies with their secret depth, enable me to express my inner intentions with a certain degree of verisimilitude. When I lay the foundation stone, I want it to remain under my picture and not on top of it.” In other words, Picabia wants to give his pictures room to move, but this room cannot be literalized through conventional formal strategies such as chiaroscuro and perspective. Instead, the room’s shape can be determined only through the various ways the picture itself seems to depart from or move against its two dimensional surface.

My point may be clearer if we contrast the transparencies to Duchamp’s *Nude Descending a Staircase*, created two decades earlier. I am not arguing that Picabia produces the superior or more successful artwork, but we might see how the motivation for the transparencies’ form derives from and attempts to resolve the problems articulated in Duchamp’s *Nude*. Stein herself makes this association when she writes in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, in the passage that Sutherland references, “All his life Picabia has struggled to dominate and achieve” what she terms “the vibrant line.” She then goes so far as to say that it was “this idea that conceived mathematically influenced Marcel Duchamp and produced his *The Nude Descending the Staircase*.”<sup>258</sup> According to Stein, this vibrant line “should be the result of conceiving the human form and the human face in so tenuous a fashion that it would induce such vibration in the line forming it.”<sup>259</sup> In the case of the transparencies, this vibration is whatever occurs between superimpositions – a sensed, yet nonetheless implicit and undefined, movement connecting the different layers. As Stein writes in her more conventional preface to Picabia’s 1934 exhibition catalogue at New York’s Valentine Gallery, the artist “has achieved a transparence which is peculiarly a thing which has nothing to do with the surface seen.”<sup>260</sup>

However, the transparencies were more than just one of Picabia’s conceptual experiments. They signaled for Picabia a significant reevaluation of what art could be. Borràs describes this shift: “for the first time since his Impressionist period Picabia seemed to be consciously seeking to produce works of beauty.”<sup>261</sup> It’s hard to imagine the bad boy of Dada getting swept up in the pursuit of beauty, but Camfield adds an even more surprising dimension to this period of work, observing that the transparencies are “characterized by pervasive moods of wistfulness and melancholy,

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<sup>257</sup> Picabia quoted in Borràs, *Picabia*, 340.

<sup>258</sup> Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, 258-259. Emphasis mine.

<sup>259</sup> Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, 259.

<sup>260</sup> Stein quoted in Sarah Wilson, *Francis Picabia: Accommodations of Desire* (New York: Kent, 1989), 13.

<sup>261</sup> Borràs, *Picabia*, 337.

and by extensive reference to art of the past.”<sup>262</sup> Often Picabia derives the superimposed images from earlier artworks, especially those from Renaissance painters, such as Piero della Francesca and Sandro Botticelli. In Picabia’s previous works, any reference to art of the past usually came accompanied by a relentless tirade against it, but now he seems to have developed an artistic method that not only retrieves an image from the past but attempts to *animate* it, so that its movement, its life, appears ongoing in the present moment of perception and claims the possibility of continuing into the future. We could even say that he creates artworks that deny that such sequential, differentiated categories exist — there are only various moments in time simultaneously presented within a picture frame, equally open to and capable of moving in between having been experienced, being experienced, and going to be experienced.

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This theorization of superimposition and simultaneity, as they are employed in Picabia’s transparencies, provides us with a heuristic framework with which we can save Picabia from progressive erasure in Stein’s verse. For those who think I make too much of the “Preface’s” claim that “I would have liked to be the only one,” as well as how Picabia’s artwork slips away from the catalogue and into forgotten history, consider the next manifestation of Stein’s “Preface” in print. The 53-line poem truly takes on a life of its own.<sup>263</sup> During the 1930s, Picabia had an especially close relationship to Jacques-Henri L vesque and Jean van Heeckeren and frequently contributed to their magazine *Orbes*. For this reason, L vesque and Van Heeckeren decided to feature Picabia’s exhibition in the Winter 1932-1933 issue of *Orbes* by printing Stein’s “Preface” alongside Duchamp’s translation.<sup>264</sup> Extracted from the exhibition catalogue and placed within the magazine, Stein’s verse suddenly appears accompanied by a whole new context: we discover that the verse is not merely an occasional poem, but in fact an excerpt of what is now considered Stein’s great achievement in poetic abstraction, what John Ashbery has called Stein’s “hymn to possibility” and Lyn Hejinian has described as “written in a language of ‘unlimited

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<sup>262</sup> Camfield, *Francis Picabia*, 229.

<sup>263</sup> Some of the publication history discussed here is also noted in Appendix A and B of the recently published *Stanzas in Meditation: The Corrected Edition*, edited by Susannah Hollister and Emily Setina (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2012). My research into the *Stanzas*’ publication history was conducted before the Yale volume was published, which is why I don’t attribute this research to the editors, and as I will demonstrate later in this chapter, I disagree that a singular “corrected edition” of the *Stanzas* exists.

<sup>264</sup> Gertrude Stein, “Stanza 69 from the Stanzas of Meditation,” *Orbes*. 4 (Winter 1932-1933): 64-66 and Gertrude Stein, “Stance 69 des Stances de Meditation,” translation by Marcel Duchamp *Orbes*. 4 (Winter 1932-1933): 65-67.

returns.”<sup>265</sup> Here in *Orbes*, Stein’s title, “Preface,” is now changed to “Stanza 69 from the Stanzas of Meditation [sic].”<sup>266</sup> For most readers today, Picabia’s catalogue probably would be less remarkable for being a souvenir of the exhibition than for being the first known appearance of *Stanzas in Meditation* in print – the *Stanzas* were written predominantly in the second half of 1932 and completed just a month before the exhibition opened.<sup>267</sup> Within the exhibition catalogue and with the generic title “Preface,” the text appears to have been written specifically for the purpose of introducing Picabia and giving its readers some sort of insight into Picabia’s work. Printed in *Orbes*, alongside other poems and other autonomous forms of writing, and with the title “Stanza 69 from the Stanzas of Meditation,” the text is situated within a larger *poetic* project that does not necessarily have much to do with Picabia or his exhibition at all. If this “introduction to Picabia” only occurs in Stanza 69, what happens in Stanzas 1-68? For how long do the *Stanzas* go on after this one? 69 stanzas also indicate a fairly long work; how deep within this work is the Picabia stanza buried?

Through its publication in *Orbes*, the poem unequivocally claims pride of place. Previously, it was the preface to the exhibition, but now the exhibition is literally a footnote to the poem.<sup>268</sup> Even Duchamp’s translation, which was undoubtedly greatly motivated by his longstanding friendship with Picabia, is claimed overtly by Stein’s verse. The translation also bears a new title, from “Préface” to “Stance 69 des Stances de Meditation,” and we have to wonder if Duchamp himself made the title’s translation, or if it was a decision made by either Stein or *Orbes*’ editorial board. Did Duchamp deliberately place this new title over his French lines? Did he directly participate in transforming his one translation into two different pieces of writing, each maneuvered to better serve the work of two different artists?

The *Orbes* printing of “Stanza 69” also includes Picabia’s epigraph, “La vie n’aime pas les verres grossissants, c’est pour cela qu’elle m’a tendu la main,” but unsurprisingly, it too is carefully positioned in service of Stein’s poem. In the exhibition catalogue, Picabia’s text appears above Stein’s verse, even above the title “Preface.” It could be read as an epigraph to the entire catalogue or even as an independent piece of writing. Clearly this is how the editors of Picabia’s collected writings read it, as they include

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<sup>265</sup> John Ashbery, “The Impossible,” in *Critical Essays on Gertrude Stein*, edited by Michael J. Hoffman, 104-07 (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1986), 105; Lyn Hejinian, “A Common Sense,” in *The Language of Inquiry*, 355-382 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 378.

<sup>266</sup> Stein, “Stanza 69 from the Stanzas of Meditation,” *Orbes*, 65.

<sup>267</sup> Ulla E. Dydo and William Rice, *Gertrude Stein: The Language that Rises, 1923-1934* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2003), 273.

<sup>268</sup> The footnote, located beneath the first page of Stein’s poem and printed in a smaller font, reads: “Ce texte constitue la préface du Catalogue de l’ <<Exposition de Dessins Francis Picabia, du 1er au 24 décembre 1932, chez Léone [sic] Rosenberg, 19, rue de la Baume, Paris>>.”

the single sentence entirely on its own, attributed to the exhibition catalogue but without any mention of Stein's poem, in *Francis Picabia: Ecrits, 1921-1953 et posthumes*.<sup>269</sup> The sentence even comes titled "(Sans titre)." We never think of epigraphs as having their own titles, but in this case, for whatever reason, the editors were impelled to explain that Picabia's text lacked one. In *Orbes*, on the other hand, Picabia's text appears entirely embedded within Stein's work. The epigraph – and it truly is an epigraph now – appears *under* the English title, "Stanza 69 from the Stanzas of Meditation." It does not recur again under the French title, in the context of Duchamp's translation. In the catalogue, the epigraph appears before both texts and therefore could be seen as pertinent to both. In *Orbes*, however, the epigraph is subsidiary only to Stein's writing, and the translation engages with only Stein's writing and not at all with Picabia's.

In this respect the epigraph is extraordinarily *à propos*. "La vie n'aime pas les verres grossissants, c'est pour cela qu'elle m'a tendu la main." "Life does not like magnifying glasses; it is for this that she gives me a hand." In French, the phrase 'tendre la main à quelqu'un' commonly means 'to lend someone a hand.' In other words, it is a figure of speech that refers to helping out or assisting another person. I think that in the context of an artist commenting on his own creative endeavor, however, the phrase could take on an entirely different meaning. If 'tendre la main' means 'to lend a hand' in the epigraph, the hand, 'la main,' belongs to life, 'la vie.' Life offers *her* hand to Picabia. But what if we read 'la main' as belonging to the artist himself, referring back to the age-old motif of 'the artist's hand?' In this instance, the epigraph would be saying that life *literally* gives Picabia a hand, a hand to draw or to paint. Life gives Picabia a hand so that, through his art, through what he makes with his hand, Picabia can address or even resolve life's grievance against magnifying glasses. And why does life dislike magnifying glasses? Here Picabia may revive his standard stance as an anti-representational, anti-naturalistic artist. In her essay "Some Memories of Pre-Dada: Picabia and Duchamp" Picabia's first wife, Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia, summarizes this stance as follows:

I was well prepared to hear Picabia speak of revolutionary transformations in pictorial vision, and to accept the hypothesis of a painting endowed with a life of its own, exploiting the visual field solely for the sake of an arbitrary and poetic organization of forms and colors, free from the

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<sup>269</sup> Francis Picabia, *Écrits: 1921-1953 et posthumes*, edited by Olivier Revault d'Allonnes and Dominique Bouissou (Paris: Pierre Belfond, 1978), 226.

contingent need to represent or transpose the forms of nature as we are accustomed to see them.<sup>270</sup>

In this light, I read Picabia's epigraph as a metaphorical manifesto: art should not be a closer or better look at reality, which is what magnifying glasses offer, but rather the creative and even arbitrary work of the artist's hand upon reality. Art should not show what already exists; it should assert instead the artist's defiantly generative will. This is what the artist can offer to life: to create form out of empty space, to animate the inanimate, to invent new life *out of his head*. Picabia's work need not provide a good or successful representation, because representation is not the point – the artwork does not represent something found in nature but attempts *to be alive like nature*. Despite their ostensibly realist rendering, the figures in Picabia's transparencies do not function as signifiers but themselves come to be living referents. Sutherland offers an account of the "vibrant line" that aligns with these terms: "in a stanza concerning Picabia [Stein] says she told him to forget men and women – meaning that the line should become so intensely its own entity and sustained by an energy or 'vibration' now intrinsic to it, that it could disengage itself from the character of the figures it began by bounding or delineating or expressing."<sup>271</sup> This theory of art arising from Picabia's work certainly found a believer in Stein, even if the work itself occasionally did not. Stein writes: "She is now convinced that although he has in a sense not a painter's gift he has an idea that has been and will be of immense value to all time. She calls him the Leonardo da Vinci of the movement. And it is true, he understands and invents everything."<sup>272</sup>

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What initially appears as life lending a hand to Picabia ultimately concludes with Picabia using his hands in service of life. This ambivalent interpretation of 'tendre la main' could also easily describe the peculiar dynamic between Picabia and Stein.<sup>273</sup> By the time *Stanzas in Meditation* was printed in its entirety by Yale University Press in 1956 (a decade after Stein's death), readers might have been hard pressed to remember how Stein lent a hand to Picabia two decades earlier. As previously discussed, Sutherland prefaces these stanzas by acknowledging that a few of them "are

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<sup>270</sup> Quoted in *The Dada Painters and Poets*, edited by Robert Motherwell (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1981), 256.

<sup>271</sup> Sutherland, "Preface," xii.

<sup>272</sup> Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, 165.

<sup>273</sup> We might recall that just a couple years earlier, Stein fell out with Georges Hugnet over her "adaptation" of his *Enfances*. Stein wanted her work printed alongside Hugnet's as a poem in its own right, whereas Hugnet wanted to clarify that it was a translation. Stein was not willing to defer, and when the poems were printed together in 1931 in *Pagany*, Stein mockingly titled hers "Poem Pritten on Pfances of George Hugnet." Eventually she affirmed the poem's independence by changing its name to *Before the Flowers of Friendship Faded Friendship Faded* and printing it on its own through Plain Edition.

concerned with” Picabia’s drawings, but he nonetheless neglects to mention how deeply entwined the *Stanzas* were with Picabia’s work at their very first appearance in print. Picabia’s exhibition has faded from the margins of the immense, 164 stanza-long text: both the epigraph and Duchamp’s translation are gone, as is any note indicating that the Picabia stanza once served as the preface to an exhibition catalogue. Further, we find that even the *Orbes*’ title, “Stanza 69 from the Stanzas of Meditation,” has been rendered obsolete in the Yale edition, which is based on manuscripts and typescripts given by Stein to the Yale Library. *Stanzas of Meditation* is of course *Stanzas in Meditation*, and Stanza 69 is in fact Stanza LXXI within Part V, the final part of the five-part poem. If we count from the very beginning of the *Stanzas*, the Picabia stanza is actually Stanza 152; it is even deeper within the long poem than we initially thought.<sup>274</sup>

I want to clarify here that I am not arguing that the Picabia stanza was written separately and specifically for the exhibition, as a conventional occasional poem, and only later placed within *Stanzas in Meditation*.<sup>275</sup> Part of this particular stanza’s interest, given its print history, is precisely that it can function simultaneously as an independent occasional poem and as part of Stein’s longer poetic project. What is generally assumed as the great “abstract achievement” of the *Stanzas* should not keep us from accounting for why Picabia is one of the rare proper nouns identifiable as an actual person in the *Stanzas*, and why Stein might include lines such as, “This is an introduction to Picabia,” and “This is not a day to be away.” Part of Stein’s achievement with the Picabia stanza is its sly play on the occasional poem; we see that, depending on its context, the stanza can speak to a particular day or to the everyday. This is verse created to be both *for an occasion* and *occasional* — it dances between situation and abstraction; between a stanza, in the sense of a room, and a meditation. In “A Common Sense,” her essay on the *Stanzas*, Hejinian writes: “What we call the present is the point of emergence of each thing into everything, the terrain where the constant passage into relations, the coming of things to life, is occurring. This is the point at which Stein situated her task of ‘beginning again and again.’”<sup>276</sup> Between the exhibition catalogue, *Orbes*, and its subsequent publications as part of the longer

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<sup>274</sup> In Appendix C of *Stanzas in Meditation: The Corrected Edition*, Hollister and Setina meticulously outline the numerical discrepancies within the manuscript and typescripts at Yale and note that in Part V, the manuscript actually falls two behind at Stanza LVI due to repeated numbers (SM 267). This might account for why Stanza 69 later becomes Stanza LXXI, although it still remains unclear why Stein chose not to give any indication of the previous four parts of her long poem while printing the stanza as “Stanza 69 from the Stanzas of Meditation.”

<sup>275</sup> In particular, the thorough investigation of the Yale manuscript and typescripts by the editors of the new *Stanzas in Meditation: The Corrected Edition*, as well as Ulla Dydo’s meticulously researched timeline for the poem’s composition (see “How to Read Gertrude Stein: The Manuscript of ‘Stanzas in Meditation,’” *TEXT* 1 (1981): 271-30, and *Gertrude Stein: The Language that Rises, 1923-1934*), offers no indication that this particular stanza was written separately from the other stanzas nor that it was ever considered *not* part of what became *Stanzas in Meditation*.

<sup>276</sup> Hejinian, “A Common Sense,” 373.

*Stanzas in Meditation*, the Picabia stanza *begins again and again*. The stanza actually begins with the line “There was once upon a time a place where they went from time to time.”<sup>277</sup> The stanza itself is the place that joins together a specific “once upon a time” and the general “from time to time.”

We generally think of *Stanzas in Meditation* as deliberately anti-referential, and the mention of Picabia in Part V, Stanza LXXI appears as an obvious example of a name extricated from its reference, of a signifier severed from its signified. However, the varying appearances of this stanza in print offer a differing conception of how Stein’s abstraction works. Within the 164-stanza poem, as it was printed by Yale in 1956 and as it has been printed thereafter, the name “Picabia” now functions as a marker of the various forms in which this stanza has appeared, including those embodying an entrenched engagement with a particular artist and his work. We saw how elements from the catalogue have been subsumed into the body of Stein’s verse in *Orbes*, and we could say that, subsequently, the same happens to *Orbes*’ epigraph, footnote, and translation – they have receded behind the complete *Stanzas in Meditation* and been reduced down to just the name “Picabia.” Rather than describing this process as a progressive eradication of Picabia’s presence in the poem, however, I would say that the name “Picabia” is, as Stein herself writes in the stanza: “This is whatever is that they could not be there.”<sup>278</sup> The name “Picabia,” this exceptional instance of an identifiable proper noun, connects the stanza’s various manifestations and sends its readers back to them. It is the point in common for a series of superimpositions, and drawn through these points is Stein’s own “vibrant line” – not an apparent line of text spread across the page, but an abstract line formed from the movement between pages, between various manifestations. Both Stein and Sutherland speak of the “disembodied,” and I would argue that the Picabia stanza is “disembodied” not because it negates any exterior reference, but because it refuses to be trapped within a single, stagnant form. It is “disembodied” because its true life occurs between its various embodiments, how it *moves* between these embodiments.

Stein’s vibrant line, as in Picabia’s transparencies, pushes the poem off the two-dimensional page as it is constituted by the straight black lines running across it. We can see the vibrant line at work not just through the stanza’s print history but even within the stanza itself. Stein writes into the stanza the possibility of movement – of a constantly unfolding and reorienting poetic form not bound by its visible horizontal lines. At first glance, Stein’s lineation is far from revelatory; line breaks consistently coincide with what clearly appears to be the end of a phrase, almost always marked by a period. “There was once upon a time a place where they went from time to time.”

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<sup>277</sup> Gertrude Stein, *Stanzas in Meditation* (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1994), 241.

<sup>278</sup> Stein, *Stanzas in Meditation*, 241.

Break. “I think better of this than that.” Break. In the rare exceptions to this rule, the line break nonetheless occurs at an obvious syntactical pause: “When I first knew him I said” break “Which was it that I did not say I said<sup>279</sup>” These appear to be standard end-stopped lines, and in viewing them as such, we might expect to move across Stein’s poem in the direction that standard verse lines tend to push us: left to right, down to the next line, and again left to right. In the process of reading the stanza, however, we encounter a different kind of transitional device than the line break, a device that connects lines and produces a movement between them but that doesn’t dictate the direction in which they, and their readers, must move. Consider Lines 29-30: “Of course nor why I thought. / That is enough not to have given.” We could try to comprehend how “That is enough not to have given” logically follows “Of course nor why I thought,” but more compelling, I think, is to see the constellation of resemblances entwining the lines together. The diphthong “ou” travels between “course,” “thought,” and “enough,” connecting the words together. Similarly we have “nor” and “not,” but then these graphic resemblances turn toward an auditory one, with “not” linking to “thought.” The movement between these words need not go left to right and top to bottom, but can jump over a line, turn back within the line, and even race up the page across several lines. In fact, these resemblances are only seen retroactively, and so we continuously find ourselves turning away from the “natural” flow of the line as we come to realize what we could call the poem’s various *motifs*. These motifs emerge from the “arbitrary and poetic organization” of language’s *plastic* elements, giving the text a life of its own. This is how Stein, to appropriate her own description of Picabia, induces a vibration in the lines forming her stanza.

As in Picabia’s transparencies, the disembodiment of Stein’s stanza circumvents the conception of time as a linear progression. The status of Duchamp’s translation in relation to the *Stanzas* is another case in point. We generally think of a translation as coming *after* the original poem, but the first readers of Stein’s stanza encountered it simultaneously with its translation. In fact, through the exhibition catalogue, Duchamp’s translation appears even before anything labeled as *Stanzas in Meditation* appears in print. We could also argue, however, that the poem does not progress toward, or ever end up with, a definitive and final form at all. We think of the posthumously published, 164-stanza version of *Stanzas in Meditation* as the final and complete poem, but this version is based on the manuscripts and typescripts Stein deposited at Yale for safekeeping. Couldn’t we also consider the manuscripts and typescripts as, in fact, the preliminary versions of the poem, with the subsequent printings (such as in Picabia’s catalogue or in *Orbes*) during Stein’s lifetime to be representative of the *various* final forms Stein thought possible for the poem?

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<sup>279</sup> Stein, *Stanzas in Meditation*, 241, lines 18-19.

Susannah Hollister and Emily Setina, in their preface to the recent *Stanzas in Meditation: The Corrected Edition*, also proffer this vision of the poem, stating that their edition presents a “versioning” rather than “editing” of the *Stanzas*’ variant texts.<sup>280</sup> Additionally, they underscore that the poem, on many levels, “refuses powerfully the ideal of a singular, certain choice.”<sup>281</sup> Nonetheless, and understandably for practical purposes, their edition grants primary authority to the 164-stanza Yale manuscript and then focuses on charting the textual variations *within* its lines. I want to argue even more emphatically that no single “corrected” edition of the *Stanzas* can exist, as each previous manifestation of the stanzas in print – including the particular context of their presentation and the particular arrangement and ordering of the stanzas – offers a necessary vision of the poem. And these multiple visions and revisions taken collectively reveal that Stein’s own process of editing – or, perhaps better, the possibilities of editing she inscribed into both the verse and its history – is instrumental to the general conceptual and poetic project of *Stanzas in Meditation* and demands further examination.

Take, for example, the publication of six stanzas in the February 1940 issue of *Poetry*.<sup>282</sup> The magazine calls them “Stanzas in Meditation I-VI,” and they are indeed labeled in order, from I to II to III and so on. However, these stanzas carry completely different numbers in Yale’s *Stanzas in Meditation* manuscript.<sup>283</sup> They do not even follow the order in which they appear through the Yale manuscript; regardless, Stein, when arranging for these stanzas’ publication, must have felt they could be rearranged and renumbered and, further, that they could stand as a cohesive unit apart from the other stanzas.<sup>284</sup> A precedent for *Poetry*’s rearrangement of stanzas occurred two years earlier, when Stein published three *other* stanzas in the 1938 edition of *Muse Anthology of Modern Poetry*.<sup>285</sup> These are also numbered from I to III here but actually are at different points in the Yale *Stanzas*.<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> Susannah Hollister and Emily Setina, “Preface,” in *Stanzas in Meditation: The Corrected Edition*, viii.

<sup>281</sup> Hollister and Setina, “Preface,” xi.

<sup>282</sup> Gertrude Stein, “Stanzas in Meditation I-VI,” *Poetry* LV. V (February 1940): 229-235.

<sup>283</sup> *Poetry*’s Stanza I is actually the Yale manuscript’s Stanza I of Part II; Stanza II is Part IV, Stanza IV; Stanza III is Part II, Stanza II; Stanza IV is Part V, Stanza LXXXI; Stanza V is Part V, Stanza LXXXII; and Stanza VI is Part V, Stanza LXXXIII. The manuscript’s numbering is consistent with that of the 1956 edition of *Stanzas in Meditation*.

<sup>284</sup> In his preface, Sutherland says of the *Stanzas* that “only the most intrepid reader should try to read them at the beginning and read through consecutively. If read at random, as one may read the Old Testament or *In Memoriam*, they yield more readily, or so they have to me...they are better read at random, because one of the delights of rambling about in them is encountering very fine aphorisms” (Sutherland, “Preface,” xix-xx).

<sup>285</sup> Gertrude Stein, “Stanzas in Meditation I-III,” *Muse: Anthology of Modern Poetry* (New York: Carlyle Straub, 1938): 839.

<sup>286</sup> In *Muse*, “Stanza I” is the Yale manuscript’s Part III, Stanza XIII; “Stanza II” is Part II, Stanza XIII; and “Stanza III” is Part III, Stanza XV. Here the manuscript’s numbering differs slightly from the 1956 *Stanzas in Meditation*, where the three stanzas are Part III, Stanza XII; Part II, Stanza XIII; and Part III, Stanza XIV. Incidentally, the edition of *Muse Anthology* referenced here, published by Carlyle Straub in New York, is the Edgar Allan Poe Memorial Edition, “presented in honor of the literary achievements of the foremost poet, author, and critic this country has the honor to acclaim.” One of the more notable exchanges in *The Duchamp Effect*, between Benjamin Buchloh and T. J. Clark, arises

We also find at the very end of *Poetry*, under its “Notes on Contributors,” that the “poems in this issue are from a sequence of *Two Hundred Stanzas in Meditation* which will be deposited in a special collection at the Yale University Library.”<sup>287</sup> Stein herself mentions the same number in *Everybody’s Autobiography*, when she says of Bertie Abdy, a friend and potential publisher, that “he is very fond of me and he is going to print for me the *two hundred Stanzas of Meditation* [sic] I have written and he has tried four different printers already but printing like everything is something of which there is more bad than good of that is he perfectly certain.”<sup>288</sup> This insistence on the number 200 is peculiar, as only 164 stanzas appear to exist. Is 200 merely a number of approximation? Or was it Stein’s original plan to compile a full 200, which she never completed? This would contradict the seemingly definitive claim of the poem’s final line, “These stanzas are done,”<sup>289</sup> but we might consider the circumstances under which the number 200 appears. In Stein’s account, Abdy wants to print all 200 stanzas but keeps having trouble with printers. Meanwhile, *Poetry*’s notes curiously describe the 200 stanzas as soon to be “*deposited* in a special collection at the Yale University Library,” rather than published. In both cases, the full 200 stanzas don’t seem very likely to appear in print anytime soon, and now history tells us that Abdy’s endeavor does ultimately fall through.<sup>290</sup> Perhaps we can read the number 200 as, in fact, a strategic abstraction. Perhaps Stein uses the number 200 to signal the impossibility of *Stanzas in Meditation* ever being set permanently and finally in print. Perhaps the promise of 200 stanzas gives the existing 164 stanzas just enough space to stretch – so that, even altogether, they constitute *one* form of the poem but not the *ultimate* form. We can read the last line, “These stanzas are done,” in a strictly literal sense: these stanzas are done, they have been *made*, but *Stanzas in Meditation* is not concluded. The poem is completed incomplete, which sets it free to be continually reshaped and constantly in movement.

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With Steinian “revisioning turning to revisionism, “[t]he history of painting is this,” she declares in *Everybody’s Autobiography*,

Ever since Cezanne everybody who has painted has wanted  
to have a feeling of movement inside the painting not a

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from the suggestion that Duchamp “was the Edgar Allan Poe of the twentieth century” (Buskirk and Nixon, *The Duchamp Effect*, 3, 225).

<sup>287</sup> Stein, *Poetry* LV. V (February 1940): 286.

<sup>288</sup> Stein, *Everybody’s Autobiography*, 309. Emphasis mine.

<sup>289</sup> Stein, *Stanzas in Meditation*, 249.

<sup>290</sup> Hollister and Setina, “Appendix A: Publication History,” 259.

painting of a thing moving but the thing painted having inside it the existence of moving...I am always hoping to have it happen the picture to be alive inside in it, in that sense not to live in its frame.<sup>291</sup>

Stein then concludes, “Picabia I think will do it, I do think he will do it.”<sup>292</sup> In other words: not Cézanne, not Matisse, not even Picasso, but *Picabia*. Stein’s creative engagement with Picabia in the 1930s leads her to articulate a very particular theory of modern art, and, because this is Stein, part of this theory’s appeal is that she sees its possible realization in her own work. In *Stanzas in Meditation*, the thing *written* has inside it the existence of moving, and we have seen how the Picabia stanza, in particular, refuses to live in a single frame, instead finding life between various ones. “Naturally I have been mixed up a lot with pictures,”<sup>293</sup> Stein adds to the end of her history of painting, but she might as well say: what Picabia has tried to do and perhaps will do, these *Stanzas* have done.

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But this story has a postscript. Another superimposition, another movement, another *transparency*.

Steven Meyer begins his conclusion to *Irresistible Dictation: Gertrude Stein and the Correlations of Writing and Science* with a reproduction of Gjon Mili’s 1950 photograph of Picasso. The artist, with light as his medium, produces a line drawing of a figure hovering in mid-air. Picasso had produced similar drawings, but on paper, approximately three decades earlier, which Stein describes in *Picasso*:

So in all this period of 1913-1917 one sees that he took great pleasure in decorating his pictures, always with a rather calligraphic tendency than a sculptural one, and during the naturalist period, which followed Parade and the voyage to Italy, the consolation offered to the side of him that was Spanish was calligraphy. I remember very well in 1923 he did two women completely in this spirit, a very little picture but all the reality of calligraphy was in it, everything that he could

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<sup>291</sup> Stein, *Everybody’s Autobiography*, 321.

<sup>292</sup> Stein, *Everybody’s Autobiography*, 322.

<sup>293</sup> Stein, *Everybody’s Autobiography*, 322.

not put into his realistic pictures was there in the two calligraphic women and they had an extraordinary vitality.<sup>294</sup>

Stein associates Picasso's line drawings with both writing and Cubism, being everything he "could not put into his realistic pictures," and then she describes "a series of drawings, also purely calligraphic, the lines were extraordinarily lines, there were also stars that were stars which moved, they existed, they were really cubism."<sup>295</sup>

What Stein calls "lines that were extraordinarily lines" become a "passionate line," according to J. Allan Hobson, a neurophysiologist writing on the 1950 photograph of Picasso. Meyer elaborates that a *passionate line* "has ceased to function geometrically – and, in failing to delineate the requisite borders, can no longer be classed as an exclusively abstract phenomenon."

The question that then presents itself is whether a line that possesses 'the vibration of a musical sound,' as Stein characterized the equivalent 'problem' confronted by Picabia, is exclusively a function of physical vibrations or whether it out to be construed as inherently physiological matter, and more radically as an emotional experience, so that one can't be accused of speaking metaphorically in calling it "passionate."<sup>296</sup>

The *vibrant line* morphs into the *passionate line* in the hands of Picasso. Stein herself, of course, notably stresses the significant role of passion in composition, when she recounts in "Poetry and Grammar," "I began to discover the names of things, that is not discover the names but discover the things the things to see the things to look at...having begun looking at them I called them by their names with *passion* and that made poetry."<sup>297</sup>

This leads me to wonder, and it might not seem *too* farfetched if we recall Krauss's earlier description of Picasso responding to Picabia through "the derivative of a derivative:" Can we read this Mili photograph alongside Meyer's analysis – for "the spectator, who 'imagines,' who creates the volume" – as Picasso's claim on the last word?

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<sup>294</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 37.

<sup>295</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 38.

<sup>296</sup> Steven Meyer, *Irresistible Dictation: Gertrude Stein and the Correlations of Writing and Science* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 293.

<sup>297</sup> Gertrude Stein, "Poetry and Grammar," *Gertrude Stein: Writings 1932-1946*, ed. Catharine R. Stimpson and Harriet Chessman (New York: The Library of America, 1998), 330.

## A LARGE PICTURE ABOUT SPAIN

*Guernica* is grey. It is both persistently and fluidly grey, which is never quite properly captured, neither in color nor black-and-white reproductions. Most color reproductions render the painting as a mélange of blue and brown or align themselves with just one of the two hues, thus being tinted universally blue or universally brown. Others reduce both of the common hues, such that the painting is essentially a flattened and achromatic black, white and grey.<sup>298</sup> In one notable example, Rudolf Arnheim simply forgoes any possibility of chromatic variation through a purely black-and-white, xeroxed reproduction in *Picasso's Guernica: The Genesis of a Painting*.<sup>299</sup>

*Guernica* is perhaps just too *overtly* grey. Until very recently, surprisingly few commentators, as well, have made any real reference to its peculiar, idiosyncratic color, most reducing it to a simple monochromatic, or rather achromatic, painting. One of the most astonishing dismissals of *Guernica's* color comes from Clement Greenberg, in his 1956 review "Picasso at 75:"

The composition studies in particular (and most particularly two done in pencil on gesso, dated May 1 and 2, respectively) are far more convincing simply as compositions, for all their naturalism, than the final version with *its welter of flat blacks, grays and whites*. And the exclusively linear first state of even the final version is much more successful, *so far as one can tell from photographs*, than any of the later stages it went through.<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> As rendered in Elizabeth Cowling's *Picasso: Style and Meaning* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2002), the painting is a mélange of brown and blue, both of which can bear strong resemblances to grey in particular moments of restrained chroma but nonetheless resist a sense of chromatic cohesion across the painting. This *Guernica* is decisively not a monochrome. Cowling's reproduction is, however, one of the most faithful and precise in color print, and its conveyance of both brown and blue at least indicates the fluidity of *Guernica's* grey. Most color reproductions align themselves with just one of the two hues, thus being tinted universally blue or universally brown, such those in *Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War*, edited by Robin Greeley (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006) and *Picasso and the War Years*, edited by Steven Nash (New York: New Line Books, 2005). Herschel Chipp's seminal *Picasso's Guernica: History, Transformations, Meaning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) reduces both of the common hues, such that the painting is essentially achromatic black, white and grey, but this has the consequence of flattening the many subtle and sometimes unsettling variations of grey actually present in *Guernica*.

<sup>299</sup> Rudolf Arnheim, *Picasso's Guernica: The Genesis of a Painting* (London: Faber and Faber, 1962).

<sup>300</sup> Clement Greenberg, "Picasso at 75," *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 65. Emphasis mine.

Greenberg's preference for the composition studies and the painting's first state, which he would only have seen through Dora Maar's photographs, suggest that, for him, the life of the painting in black-and-white reproductions is far more successful than the final painting directly seen; he might even have preferred Arnheim's reproduction to the actual "welter of flat blacks, grays and whites." Arnheim, despite having a higher opinion of the monochrome, nonetheless implicitly justifies his book's reductive variation on the painting through a reductive reading of its chromatic effect: "In relation to the colorful world of everyday experience and the equally colorful look of much painting, monochrome gives a picture the character of reduction... monochrome creates a uniformity which reduces all events to a dramatic contrast of light and darkness."<sup>301</sup>

Over the last few years, however, we've seen a resurgence of color studies within art history.<sup>302</sup> With the zeitgeist come two new studies of last century's most famous painting, both pointing out that its color very literally goes beyond black and white, but even here essentially as side remarks or marginalia. The 2012 exhibition catalogue *Picasso: Black and White* includes a brief essay dealing with *Guernica* and Ludwig Wittgenstein's "logic of color" by Olivier Berggruen, which mentions, parenthetically, "it was by no means the first time [Picasso] had confined himself to a start combination of blacks, whites and ash grays. (In reality, the grays in *Guernica* are not just the result of mixing black and white paint, but are tinged with blue and perhaps some red as well.) Picasso's restricted palette was already in evidence during the heyday of Cubism."<sup>303</sup> Berggruen strikingly begins his essay with poetry – but with a quotation from Stephen Spender that refers to the "flickering black, white and grey lights of Picasso's picture," suggesting black-and-white film. The year following *Picasso: Black and White* brought T. J. Clark's *Picasso and Truth*, and in his chapter on *Guernica*, Clark writes, "It is mostly in gray, and the grays have been marked and modulated at every point, sometimes with almost florid drips and flourishes, so that they carry the reminder of flesh and horsehair and flimsy material and *touch*."<sup>304</sup>

A direct viewing of the painting immediately reveals the implausibility of its greyness as a reduction of "all events to a dramatic contrast of light and darkness," as Arnheim reads it. Even if each reproduction of *Guernica*, in one way or another, fictionalizes the painting's color, their cumulative variety attests to the immense difficulty of its color's

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<sup>301</sup> Arnheim, *Picasso's Guernica: The Genesis of a Painting*, 25.

<sup>302</sup> We've also been forced to witness the immense popularity of an intriguingly named – but aesthetically and erotically disappointing – book that suggests *50 Shades of Gray*.

<sup>303</sup> Olivier Berggruen, "Picasso Monochrome," in *Picasso: Black and White*, edited by Carmen Giménez (Munich: Solomon Guggenheim Foundation and Prestel Verlag, 2012), 67.

<sup>304</sup> T. J. Clark, *Picasso and Truth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 274. For full disclosure, I should note that Clark footnotes me for bringing *Guernica*'s striking color to his attention in this passage.

conveyance. Clearly something about Guernica's grey does not give the picture "the character of reduction." Before Clark and Berggruen, however, and before Arnheim and Greenberg, there was one Picasso commentator and contemporary who exceptionally and immediately saw Guernica's grey as not a *reduction* of color but as a virtuosic *expansion* of color's possibilities. Near the conclusion to her 1938 booklet on Picasso, Gertrude Stein writes:

So in 1937 he commenced to be himself again.

He painted a large picture about Spain and it was written in a calligraphy continuously developed and which was the continuation of the great advancement made by him in 1922, now he was in complete effervescence, and at the same time he found his color. The color of the pictures he paints now in 1937 are bright colors, light colors but which have the qualities of the colors which until now only existed in his greys, the colors can oppose the drawing, they can go together with the drawing, they can do what they want, it is not that they can agree or not with the drawing but that they are there, they are there only to exist, certainly Picasso has now found his color, his real color in 1937.<sup>305</sup>

Encountering this passage in the midst of the English-language edition of Stein's text, we might miss that it pertains to *Guernica* at all. Yes, she describes "a large picture about Spain" made in 1937, but she makes no other gesture toward to the painting elsewhere in the booklet – the booklet contains no reproductions of it – and even in this passage Stein doesn't mention the painting by name. Yet the original French version of this text makes the reference to *Guernica* unequivocal. In French, Stein specifies: "Il exécute un grand tableau sur l'Espagne: *Guernica*. Il l'écrit dans une calligraphie continuellement développée."<sup>306</sup> And therefore, indeed, it is the grey monochrome *Guernica* that leads Picasso to find his color, his real color.

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When we more closely examine *Guernica's* grey, we discover that the painting is virtually awash in color. Consider, for example, how obviously its grey differs from 1926's more achromatic *The Milliner's Workshop*. *Guernica* is persistently grey, but it is

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<sup>305</sup> Gertrude Stein, *Picasso* (London: B. T. Batsford, Ltd., 1938), 48.

<sup>306</sup> Gertrude Stein, *Picasso* (Paris: Librairie Floury, 1938), 160. Unless specified, all subsequent references to "Stein, *Picasso*" refer to the English-language version, rather than this French one.

also *fluidly* grey. The painting markedly incorporates numerous tones of grey, even those that cannot be defined according to an achromatic, white-to-black spectrum. The problem of reproducing *Guernica*'s grey is not necessarily due to the reproduction's failure in fidelity; rather, it is partly an effect of the original's own elusiveness, a demonstration of how the painter manipulates *grey*'s elusiveness.

Today we commonly think of the distinction between “grey” and “gray” as simply being that of English or American spelling, but the two words also have been used to underscore a *qualitative* distinction in types of grey. In 1930, just seven years before *Guernica* and eight years before Stein's *Picasso*, two leading researchers on color, A. Maerz and M. Rea Paul,<sup>307</sup> compiled the groundbreaking *A Dictionary of Color* – an immense, systematic classification of colors alongside their commonly known names. In this publication, Maerz and Paul offer the following distinction between “gray” and “grey”:

[I]t may still be recognized that a distinction, if uniformly and widely used, might have some value for exact reference... Therefore this Dictionary uses the form *Grey* where the color has hue (whether cool or warm), following what seems in some degree a majority usage. It uses the form *Gray* where the color has no hue, but is a mixture of white and black only.<sup>308</sup>

Distinguishing between *greys* and *grays* with just the naked eye, against the artificial light and unruly chroma-scape of any enclosed and crowded museum space, is a near-impossible task. But consider how much of this painting's color *isn't seen at all* when we depend solely on photographs and written accounts. Maerz and Paul rightly have suggested that we cannot empirically posit (and perceive) the existence of a truly achromatic *gray*, but standing immediately in front of *Guernica*, seeing the painting's color directly and without the mediation of reproduction, we can observe that it employs an immense, even staggering, variety of greys, ranging from *approximately* achromatic *grays* to *distinctively* hued *greys*.<sup>309</sup> One might place, for instance, the *gray* of the bird's head, uplifted wing and tail as an intermediary shade between the stark white and black juxtaposed on its body. Directly next to the bird is the turned-back head of the horse, the positioning of which is echoed adjacently by the extended arm

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<sup>307</sup> At the time of their publication, A. Maerz was director of the American Color Research Laboratory, and M. Rea Paul was a consulting colorist and the National Lead Company's research laboratories.

<sup>308</sup> A. Maerz and M. Rea Paul, *A Dictionary of Color* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1930), 11.

<sup>309</sup> Henceforth, in relation to *Guernica*, when I refer to “grey” (lower-case, no italics), I refer to a broader category of the color incorporating both *Grey* and *Gray*. However, if I want to specify a grey with hue or a grey without, I will employ Maerz and Paul's italicized formatting.

of the lamp-bearing woman. Contrasted along this horizontal line, the *grey* of the horse's head and of the drapery (or shadow) dressing the extended arm gesture toward distinctive hues not perceivable in the bird and, further, these hues appear to *clash* with each other. The horse's head and the arm's drapery are certainly both grey (and not the respective blue and brown of Cowling's reproduction), but they are also certainly dissimilar *greys* – the horse's head bears a cooler hue, and the arm's drapery a warmer one. A similar clashing between cool and warm *greys* occurs along the extended back leg of what is commonly called the “fugitive” or “fleeing” woman. From knee to ankle, her leg is awash in a bluish hue, whereas at the top of her knee and on the wall next to it, the *grey* is tinted with yellow or brown.

This distinction between *gray* and *grey* illustrates why painting in grey, rather than blue or rose or any other color, reveals Picasso as, in Stein's words, “a great colorist.”<sup>310</sup> Not only can there be a range of hued greys, but there is also a vast range of hue-less greys. Further, grey can function as the neutral constant through which we really can perceive how chromatic difference emerges. If we see brown against blue, for instance, we take their difference at face value. If we see a brownish grey against a bluish grey or even a completely achromatic gray, however, we only become aware of their relative difference against their general sameness. It is, in fact, the pervasive, insistent greyness of the canvas that impels us even to look for these differences. If we are allowed to borrow an analogy from our earlier discussions of semiology, we might say that particular greys arise through their *differential nature*.

The painting's two points of greatest contrast in hue are the horse's head and this tinted segment of wall and knee, and these two points bookend an implicit diagonal line of light falling from either of the two lamps. This perhaps references the notion that, as documented by Maerz and Paul,

Color has no objective existence. It is solely a psychological phenomenon, in which certain functions of light are affected by inherent plus momentary conditions of the retina of the eye for interpretation by the brain. The colors of objects may be completely altered by a variation of the light in which they are observed, and in the absence of light, all colors disappear.<sup>311</sup>

The painting's contrast also implies a possibly ironic, or at least deliberately counterintuitive, rendering of light's effect on color, as the object closest to the light

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<sup>310</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 45.

<sup>311</sup> Maerz and Paul, *A Dictionary of Color*, 143.

source and in its direct glare, the horse's head, has the painting's coolest hue, and the object much further away, and conceivably residing beneath a cast shadow, has the warmest. Thus *Guernica* refuses a deeply established metaphorical perception of color, in which a particular visual cognition (i.e., blue) is correlated with a particular tactile sensation (coldness) and manifested in a synesthetic nominative ("cool hue"). As Wittgenstein asks in *Remarks on Color*, "Where do we draw the line here between logic and experience?"<sup>312</sup> The painting suggests that neither bluish nor yellowish tones unfailingly correspond to degrees of coldness or warmth, disputes that heat must gradually dissipate away from light sources, and questions the conventionalized perception and representation of light as a color, yellow. M. Luckiesh, a physicist of light and color, observes in his 1918 tract *The Language of Color*,

Yellow or orange is often significant of light and warmth due to the association of this color with the sun or with sunlight. Again, analysis proves that sunlight is far from this color except when altered at sunrise or sunset by the absorption of smoke, dust, etc., in excessive thickness of atmosphere through which the light must penetrate when the sun is at low altitudes... Direct sunlight during a great portion of the day apparently has a just claim to being white in color although there is no general agreement as to a standard white. Physicists, at least, do not generally consider noon sunlight on a clear day of a yellow tint and some physiologists and psychologists consider it to be bluish in color as compared with a true "physiological" white.<sup>313</sup>

By "physiological white," Luckiesh refers to the negative physiological effects people have attributed to white light, which is now perceived as more unnatural than yellow artificial light, despite actually being more similar to sunlight. As he extrapolates, "The habit is so firmly established that usually it is not recognized as habit."<sup>314</sup> Sunlight only appears yellow in contrast to darker hues and at certain moments of the day; other combinations of contrasts and time can even render the light white or blue – which are notably the respective colors of the lamps and the horse's head in *Guernica*. Nonetheless, this association of sunlight with yellow led to a secondary association of yellow and warmth now naturalized in common perception.

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<sup>312</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Colour*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe, trans. Linda L. McAlister and Margarete Schättle (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 17e.

<sup>313</sup> M. Luckiesh, *The Language of Color* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1918), 23.

<sup>314</sup> Luckiesh, *The Language of Color*, 22.

The counterintuitive employment of hues in *Guernica* does not suggest that the painting simply (or naively) negates the conventions of perception; rather, it affirms that *Guernica* demands from its viewer an active and assiduous recognition of perception. Unlike Picasso's predominantly grey studio paintings from the mid-1920s, such as the aforementioned *The Milliner's Studio* or *The Painter and His Model* (both 1926), which are overtly abstracted and insistently point to themselves as paintings – the sections of these canvases left unpainted, deliberately revealing their pencil sketches, speak to this point – *Guernica* presents an essentially monochrome world in which we see a horse's head with a bluish tone and a shadowy wall with a yellowish one simply because *that is how they are*. This initially may seem elliptical or dissatisfying as an interpretation, but I do think this is what we must gain from the painting. The first impulse may be to note the disruption of expectations in the painting and then to attempt to make sense of these disruptions according to our own predetermined logic, but this line of rationalization turns too quickly away from the painting and overlooks the obstinacy and insistence of its formal qualities. Stein argues, in fact, that rationalization's, or, in her phrasing, "interpretation's," overtaking of vision is precisely what caused Picasso to quit painting in the mid-1930s. Emphasizing Picasso's interest in materiality over metaphysics, she writes that "the soul of people does not interest him, why interest one's self in the souls of people when the face, the head, the body can tell everything, why use words, when one can express everything by drawings and colors."<sup>315</sup> She then adds,

During this last period, from 1927 to 1935, the souls of people commenced to dominate him and his vision, a vision which was as old as the creation of people, lost itself in interpretation. He who could see did not need interpretation and in these years, 1927 to 1935, for the first time, the interpretations destroyed his own vision so that he made forms not seen but conceived. All this is difficult to put into words but the distinction is plain and clear, it is why he stopped working. The only way to purge himself of a vision which was not his was to cease to express it.<sup>316</sup>

"Vision" here does not necessarily refer to a great artistic objective or the creative drive (i.e., Olivier Rousteing's "vision" for Balmain), but rather the literal ability to

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<sup>315</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 530-531. I think Stein would agree that this does not mean everyone *can* express everything by drawings and colors.

<sup>316</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 531.

“see people as they have existed since they were created,” to see people as they *are*. Later, as we will discuss further, Stein specifies that Picasso’s vision “is a *direct* vision,” and he only retrieves this vision in his “drawings and colors” after war breaks out in Spain: “So in 1937 he commenced to be himself again... now he was in complete effervescence, and at the same time *he found his color*.”<sup>317</sup>

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Earlier I referred to *Guernica* as incorporating “numerous tones of grey,” and “tone” here derives from Maerz and Paul’s definition: “The term *tone* is used to describe any slight modification in some recognized color, as a green of yellowish tone, a greenish tone of blue, a lighter or duller tone of brown.”<sup>318</sup> Thus, *Guernica* is recognizably and entirely grey (with white and black as variations of grey, which will be argued further later), but its grey contains various modifications, some of which we recognize, some of which we do not, and many of which we do not know how to articulate. The problem of describing color is the standard example for demonstrating language’s limitations.<sup>319</sup> As Wittgenstein observes,

When we’re asked “What do the words ‘red’, ‘blue’, ‘black’, ‘white’ mean?” we can, of course, immediately point to things which have these colors, – but our ability to explain the meanings of these words goes no further! For the rest, we have either no idea at all of their use, or a very rough and to some extent false one.<sup>320</sup>

In the case of grey, this limitation is compounded with the “striking fact that we have few names for the achromatic sensations and a great many for the chromatic sensations. The relative number of names in the two cases are not in the least proportional to the relative number of the two different kinds of sensations which we actually experience.”<sup>321</sup> Therefore “grey” refers to a basic commonality shared by a vast number of varying greys, and even the cool grey of the horse’s head differs slightly from the cool grey of the fleeing woman’s extended leg. Like “grey,” the more specified term “cool grey” also indicates a *fundamental* sameness, with leeway for

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<sup>317</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 531. Emphasis mine.

<sup>318</sup> Maerz and Paul, *A Dictionary of Color*, 11.

<sup>319</sup> In a moment of exceptional resignation amidst their relentlessly systematic compilation of colors, Maerz and Paul remark that “no one in the world can explain what color is to those who are color blind” (143). For further explorations of this question in verse, it is worth reading Robert Hass’s poem “The Problem of Describing Color,” *Time and Materials* (New York: Ecco, 2007).

<sup>320</sup> Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Colour*, 11e.

<sup>321</sup> Luckiesh, *The Language of Color*, 98.

variance, rather than a *total* one. Here I want to shift this analysis of *Guernica's* aesthetics into an analysis of its possible ethical imperative. This imperative is one that I would argue Stein, with her emphasis on Picasso's "direct vision" while writing in 1938, guides us toward. The preceding formulation of color and tone is analogous to how we might understand *Guernica* in relation to our world. We recognize the figures, the animals, the structures, the light effects and the grey of *Guernica*, and yet the painting has its own particular tone. *Guernica* resembles our world up to a point, and when it does not, *it simply does not*, which calls upon the viewer to perceive the object, and thus difference, *as is*. In its expectation-disrupting moments, the painting demands perception of form and material over logical interpretation.

The question then becomes not *why* objects are represented differently but *how* they are represented differently – how do we articulate the particular tone that individuates *Guernican* grey from our general pre-conception grey? Articulation necessarily implies the transition from sensation to cognition; only after cognition can an appropriate language for describing the sensations be formed. Thus perceiving the object *as is* is neither a passive nor indifferent activity. Rather, becoming aware of how the object surprises expectations involves the incorporation of this difference into one's own realm of possibilities – *Guernica's* uncanny monochrome world now, in part, shapes our world.

Articulation, then, is both the product of this incorporation and confirmation that it has happened. It is the ultimate manifestation of the dialectical process producing *Guernican* grey: color, as established earlier, has no objective existence, so our recognition of the painting as grey is also our designation of it as grey. *Guernica* is only grey because it looks like grey we have seen before. Yet we also can perceive that this grey is different from how we have seen grey before, and thus *Guernican* grey reconstitutes our previous conception of grey – henceforth when we speak of "grey," *Guernican* grey will always be one of its possibilities. Again, "The tender of our language is change and exchange."<sup>322</sup> This dialectical production of grey is formally analogous to grey's most basic definition: it is a mixture of black and white. Yet both black and white are achromatic and therefore, technically, have the *same* chroma and hue. Thus grey, which bridges black and white along the achromatic scale, is simultaneously a mixture of the two and an articulation of their underlying commonality – it both unifies black and white and reveals that they have always been unified.

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<sup>322</sup> Charles Bernstein, "Gertrude Stein," *A History of Modernist Poetry*, ed. Alex Davis and Lee M. Jenkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 263.

Arnheim alludes to the simultaneous uniformity and opposition that characterize black and white when he observes that “monochrome creates a uniformity which reduces all events to the dramatic contrast of light and darkness.”<sup>323</sup> Another way to articulate this “dramatic contrast” might be to observe that the crucial difference between black and white is, of course, that pure black absorbs all light whereas pure white reflects all light back to the viewer’s eyes. Thus the vast range in between, the different shades of grey, denote different negotiations between absorption and reflection, and I am convinced that this negotiation must, at least partly, inform Picasso’s employment of a grey monochrome to depict the shattering bombing of Guernica.<sup>324</sup> Differing reactions to the painting from the 1937 International Exposition in Paris convey an initial ambivalence regarding the appropriateness of *Guernica* to its subject matter. Michel Leiris’ article, “Faire-part” from *Cahiers d’Art*, enthusiastically announces: “Picasso sends us our letter of doom: all that we love is going to die, and that is why it is necessary that we gather up all that we love, like the emotion of great farewells, in something of unforgettable beauty.”<sup>325</sup> Anthony Blunt, in his review of the International Exposition for the *Spectator*,<sup>326</sup> offers a radically different evaluation of the painting:

The gesture is fine, and even useful, in that it shows the adherence of a distinguished Spanish intellectual to the cause of his government. But the painting is disillusioning. Fundamentally it is the same as Picasso’s bull-fight scenes. It is not an act of public mourning, but the expression of a private brain-storm which gives no evidence that Picasso has realized the political significance of Guernica. The Spanish people will be grateful for the support of Picasso, but not consoled by the painting.<sup>327</sup>

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<sup>323</sup> Arnheim, *Picasso’s Guernica: The Genesis of a Painting*, 25.

<sup>324</sup> Greenberg observes that Picasso “is a very great draftsman, and he thinks instinctively in terms of dark and light” (“Review of an Exhibition of Picasso,” *Art and Culture*, 297). But even if Picasso were entirely uninterested in theories of light absorption, he would have known through his painter’s palette that a combination of various colors could produce the semblance of black, while no mixture could ever produce anything close to white.

<sup>325</sup> Michel Leiris, “Faire-part,” *Cahiers d’Art* 12:4-5 (1937): 152-153.

<sup>326</sup> This review is cited by Carlo Ginzburg in his article “The Sword and the Lightbulb,” and the following quote is reproduced from there. See “The Sword and the Lightbulb: A Reading of *Guernica*,” M. Ruthand and C. Salas, eds., *Disturbing Remains: Memory, History and Crisis in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001).

<sup>327</sup> Ginzburg, “The Sword and the Lightbulb,” 116. Ginzburg is quick to note, “Later Blunt changed his mind completely about the mural’s political and artistic value.” Nonetheless, Blunt’s initial reaction to the painting has certainly been echoed by various critics and does offer insights into *Guernica*’s peculiarity—the issue of Picasso’s possible solipsism in his employment of a “personal mythology,” as well as the obscure pathos of the painting will be addressed later in this paper.

Leiris and Blunt offer two opposing accounts of the potential sympathy *Guernica* evokes. For Leiris, the effect of sympathy is so complete, the painting becomes “our letter of doom,” a warning that “all that *we* love is going to die.” The great suffering of the devastated Basque town has been absorbed into the dark tones of the painting; we even find ourselves mixed into deepening black paint on Picasso’s palette, such that the April 26, 1937 bombing becomes abstracted into doom in general – a *universal* propensity for loss. Blunt, on the other hand, describes *Guernica* as dispassionate and obtuse. It reveals its maker as an “intellectual” engaged only with his own “private brainstorm,” deflecting possibilities for “public mourning” or, in other words, a communal experience of emotion. This solipsistic *Guernica* seals itself off from sympathy.

Neither end of this black and white spectrum of sympathy seems quite right. Despite his resistance to conventionalized significations of colors, Picasso must have acknowledged that if a painting is pervasively grey, of an enormous size (3.49 by 7.76 meters), and named after an infamous civilian bombing, its grey will inevitably be perceived as inflected with the somberness of mourning. *Guernica* wants its grey to be noticed, to be understood as significant. The upturned head of a mourning mother; the broken sword of a fallen soldier; the twisted, agonizingly wrought body of a wounded horse; the rigid, extended arms of a woman falling through a fiery building – when awash in grey, caught in a melancholic moment of stillness, they demand more from the viewer than a simple appreciation of the artist’s “private brainstorm.” They do, to some degree as Leiris suggests, confront the viewer with the immensity and unavoidability of death, the ultimate moment of recognizing the body’s absolute materiality. In its demise, the body prevails over the will. The moment just before inevitable loss is, of course, the moment of the most poignant appreciation. Kathleen Brunner, in *Picasso Rewriting Picasso*, describes the painting’s figures as “frozen, *as though at a moment of impact*, a split second before obliteration.”<sup>328</sup> While we may debate how much consolation *Guernica* offers to the Spanish people, we should agree that it is certainly more than a self-interested, intellectual exercise of the artist.

This is not to say, however, that the pathos described above does not subtly clash with a more restrained and inscrutable tone also present in the painting, like the clashing of warm greys with cool greys. The bull, fleeing woman, and lamp-bearing woman function as counterpoints to the mourning mother, fallen soldier, wounded horse and falling woman. Their faces are not quite expressionless, but they are also not quite readable – do they express acceptance, curiosity, or denial? Beyond the inscrutability they share, is their expression really the same, or do each of them also

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<sup>328</sup> Kathleen Brunner, *Picasso Rewriting Picasso* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2004), 58. Emphasis mine.

have their own particular tone? These figures inevitably recall the bull and lamp-bearing woman in Picasso's two pencil-on-gesso studies for *Guernica*, dating between May 1-2, 1937, which are strikingly more cartoon-like than the final painting, even including a small, fantastical winged horse in one composition. The emotional content of these is utterly flat, and the woman and bull appear as incidental bystanders or spectators to the scene; in both, the woman even has a hint of a smile on her face as she gazes down upon the wounded horse and dead soldier.

Throughout his numerous sketches and studies for *Guernica*, Picasso vigorously experiments with conveying different emotional tones and engagements between the figures, in what appears to be a struggle to identify the perfect affective pitch. In an undated pencil sketch that Arnheim attributes to early May, the bull suddenly appears as anguished and tortuously rendered as the horse alongside him. Arnheim comments, "The artist is in an expressionist mood. All shapes are stretched, bent, inflated into bulges, so that they may yield the highest tension."<sup>329</sup> Subsequently, in a composition study dated May 8, 1937, the bull returns to the background as a placid bystander to the fallen horse and soldier, but now the lamp-bearing woman has been replaced by a mother carrying a dead child in her arms. Collapsing to the ground, with her head upturned and mouth gaping open, this figure is certainly *amidst* the suffering in the scene and brings an aspect of abjectness to the composition that the lamp-bearing woman would not. This mother has already received her "letter of doom;" the lamp-bearing woman observes the scene dispassionately.

Picasso ultimately includes both versions in his final painting, just as we can argue that he incorporates both the inscrutable and the tortured bull into one, given its odd posture and the highly visible *pentimenti* on its face. Thus Picasso indicates that our sympathetic reactions to events or images such as *Guernica*/*Guernica* are never as black and white as Leiris or Blunt might suggest. Sympathy, like grey, is a varying negotiation between absorption and reflection.<sup>330</sup> A large-scale history painting like Théodore Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa* (1818-1819) might call for viewers to lose themselves to the "unforgettable beauty" of the suffering it depicts, and abstract expressionist paintings, on the rise in the decades following *Guernica*, can be viewed more arguably as hermetic intellectual exercises, but for Picasso at this particular juncture, neither nihilistic nor solipsistic responses to the object were apropos. *Guernica* decidedly resides in the grey area between.

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<sup>329</sup> Arnheim, *Picasso's Guernica: The Genesis of a Painting*, 48.

<sup>330</sup> Luckiesh remarks, "From a series of neutral grays extending from white to black an individual will usually choose certain grays that are agreeable to him. These are usually near the middle of the series. In other words, neither white nor black would be chosen as the most agreeable generally" (195-196). The use of the word "agreeable," rather than a word like "pleasurable" or "pleasing," is notable in this discussion of sympathy, as it more overtly suggests some sort of consensus or commonality between the subject and object.

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This protracted troping of sympathy into grey serves to illustrate that the physicality conveyed by the painting is fundamental to establishing its engagement with the viewer. In her discussion of *Guernica*, Brunner underscores that formal components, such as the painting's color, its play on glares and shadows, the shapes of its structures, are foremost what involve the viewer with its content:

The strong contrasts of the architecture and the ash-like *grisaille* of the figures remain in tension, the effect of the extraordinary lighting that creates areas of blinding glare and deep shadows. The lighting gives *Guernica* a sense of immediacy, of a sudden flash that implicates the viewer in a liminal experience at the moment of impact before death.<sup>331</sup>

The phrase “ash-like *grisaille*” is particularly dense with both literal and figurative possibilities and is an exceptionally apt articulation of the *Guernican* grey. *Grisaille* is not quite a color but rather *painting* in a single color (predominantly, as in this case, grey); however, taking “ash-like *grisaille*” as a synonym for *Guernican* grey enables the actual *paintedness* of the pigment to be considered part of the color's composition. Here grey is not just a specific combination of absorbed and reflected light sensed by our eyes, but also a material form and its mode of production. Simultaneously, the descriptive “ash-like” opens itself to multiple interpretations and puts further pressure on a conventional sense of color. First the phrase operates associatively, indicating that the color of the *grisaille* is similar to the color of ash. Then it can be read more literally, that painting *Guernica* in *grisaille* resembles covering Guernica in ash – the town itself became a gray monochrome buried under the dust and debris of the bombing's aftermath. A final reading of “ash-like” requires a return to the paint on the artist's palette. Dark, achromatic pigments are naturally associated with ash, given that the pigments are traditionally produced through burnings. The main ingredient of Indian ink, a common medium for Picasso,<sup>332</sup> is soot, often generated from burned pine logs, oil, resin or bones. According to Victoria Finlay in *Color: A Natural History of the Palette*, similarly black paint

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<sup>331</sup> Brunner, *Picasso Rewriting Picasso*, 76.

<sup>332</sup> In a poem dating January 19, 1936, Picasso refers to “the Indian ink of the infinite which comical as it is may be the accuracy of what was said it shows its bit of irony and smiles at the written page...its time to come out now for the first tough surly black bull wild-haired muddy dapple gray cowardly.” The “dapple-gray,” black bull recalls the strange coloring of the *Guernica* bull's legs, which I will discuss shortly. See Pablo Picasso, *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz and Other Poems*, ed. Pierre Joris and Jerome Rothenberg (Cambridge: Exact Change, 2004), 85.

can be made of soot and galls, peach stones and wine twigs or even ivory – which was Auguste Renoir’s favorite, when he used black at all. But one of the most notorious ingredients in the seventeenth century was bone black, which was said by some to be made from human corpses... In truth, bone black – a rich deep blue-black pigment – was usually derived from the thighs of cattle or the limbs of lambs.<sup>333</sup>

Regardless of the possibly macabre details of what composed Picasso’s black paint, that he used a pigment conventionally made of ash to depict a chaotic clutter of people and animals in the midst of a burning city is noteworthy. On a massively grey canvas where almost every inch is touched by a dark, achromatic paint (even beneath those sections ultimately painted white or over them in dark, subtle drips invisible at a normal viewing range but nonetheless ever-present), ash functions as both a synecdoche for the original subject matter and a shaper of the painting’s form. In other words, the material of representation manifests the content represented.

In his poetry from the couple years preceding *Guernica*, Picasso himself occasionally employs the word “ash” to convey a particular color; for instance, he begins a poem, dated December 24, 1935, with a monochromatic scene consisting of “the palette of the painter *ashen faced* and dressed in colors of a hard boiled egg.”<sup>334</sup> The following year, in a poem particularly prescient of the right half of *Guernica*, Picasso describes how the ash produced from a fire can become a scene’s dominant color. The poem, written October 11, 1936, begins, “flails crazy her bedsheets in flames hips flapping wings,” which recalls the falling woman at the painting’s far right, with her arms thrown up into the air and the structures around her in flames. Midway through the poem, Picasso writes, “musical notes attached to curtains hung green and mauve against red brick submerged in the ash that coats the rest of the scene.”<sup>335</sup> Ash coats the scene like a coat of paint, concealing the green, mauve and red of the curtains and brick and temporarily transforming the poem’s landscape into ashen monochrome, at least until the mention of “fig half raisin” and “green dragons” at the very end.

The concealment of green, mauve and red does not occur simply because the fire’s ash *covers* the colors. Picasso specifies that the colors are “*submerged* in the ash,” which suggests that the three colors might actually be mixed into, and therefore constitute part of, the ash coating the scene. This reiterates a previously established point on

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<sup>333</sup> Victoria Finlay. *Color: A Natural History of the Palette* (New York: Random House, 2004), 102.

<sup>334</sup> Picasso, *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz and Other Poems*, 68. Emphasis mine.

<sup>335</sup> Picasso, *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz and Other Poems*, 123.

how a seemingly achromatic color like black, and subsequently grey, can actually derive from a combination of various colors. However, these colors can be mixed a number of ways, the method selected undoubtedly affects the quality of the final color. The linear nature of Picasso's poem, of written language in general, proposes a diachronic method of color-mixing that *Guernica* appears to employ as well. In painting, an artist can blend various pigments on a palette before applying the determined color onto the canvas, and the viewer will understand that the sensible colors have been fashioned specifically for the particular painting. In writing, however, no such specialized palette exists, so words for colors make their appearance like acrylic paints transferred directly from their tubes to the canvas – as prepackaged concepts.

Here I recall Thierry de Duve's description of how Marcel Duchamp conceptualizes paint (tube paint) as "ready-made." De Duve argues that this responds to, and reacts against, the ways in which for "Mondrian and virtually every founder of abstract art, primary colors, or color itself, in the singular – 'pure color,' as it were called – became the basic signifier of a new language, the 'essential,' 'natural' metonym for pure painting, life, with all its emotion, ideological, and even political aspects."<sup>336</sup> I am tempted to see Picasso's manipulations of grey in *Guernica* as a corruption of the "pure color" argument of abstract art – or at least an adamant argument against it – and to read his use of color in his poetry as a signal that life rendered in *language* need not be composed of and be in the service of maintaining *pure* concepts either. Thus to create new mixtures, Picasso's poem functions, itself, as a palette, with each color applied one at a time, different layer after different layer; the combined stack of these layers is ultimately what we take to be the synthetic color. In the case of Picasso's poem, green is overlaid with mauve, the mauve with red, and ultimately what we imagine to be "ash" is laid on top. Even in their articulated concealment, we still maintain the *idea* of the colors being behind the ash. "Ash," then, might function analogously to how Wittgenstein describes an alternative conceptualization of green being "bluish-yellow." He writes, "[C]ouldn't there be people for whom there is bluish-yellow, reddish-green? I.e. people whose colour concepts deviate from ours – because, after all, the colour concepts of colour-blind people too deviate from those of normal people, and not every deviation from the norm must be a blindness, a defect."<sup>337</sup> It could also be poetry.

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<sup>336</sup> Thierry de Duve, "The Readymade and the Tube of Paint," *Artforum* 24:9 (May 1986): 113.

<sup>337</sup> Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Colour*, 3e.

Grey lends itself to all these readings, as the color of mourning, burnt material, and death, but when we trace the actual movement of grey across the canvas, it startles us, confounds us, provokes us in a way none of these previous readings alone could. The way that grey structures the picture – and participates in the emergence of forms we actually recognize – while simultaneously disrupting any comprehensive and settled understanding of these forms, is, I think, part of what Stein means when she claims that “the colors can *oppose* the drawing, they can go together with the drawing, they can do what they want, it is not that they can agree or not with the drawing that they are there, they are there only to exist.” Here again is that keyword, “oppose,” articulated as an essential quality for Stein’s vision of “vitalism,” a word she uses herself. According to Stein, in *Guernica*, grey *does* and then *undoes* it all. *It is there only to exist*. In her account of Picasso’s painting, Stein gives agency and animation to color – she gives it life. Color opposes or agrees; it wants; it exists.

In *Picasso*, Stein concludes her account of the artist’s break from painting in the 1930s with the following: “To see people as they have existed since they were created is not strange, it is *direct*, and Picasso’s *vision*, his own *vision*, is a *direct vision*.”<sup>338</sup> Here is insistent repetition with seemingly minimal difference: in how many ways can Stein say that Picasso has a “direct vision?” But this account of Picasso’s vision is also structured as a chiasmus, moving from a “direct” seeing to “Picasso’s vision” to “his own vision” to, again, a “direct” vision. When this direct vision re-emerges at the sentence’s end – and, analogously, when it re-emerges in the history of Picasso’s artistic career – it comes immediately accompanied by this: “Finally war broke out in Spain.” The Spanish Civil War is the impetus that both restores a “direct vision” to Picasso and restores him to painting. At this point in the text, Stein’s repetition of “vision” ushers in a new parade of repetition, this time of the word she uses to describe what Picasso’s colors do in *Guernica* and after: *existing*. Stein writes,

It was not the events themselves that they were happening in Spain which awoke Picasso but the fact that were happening in Spain, he had lost Spain and here was Spain not lost, she existed, the existence of Spain awakened Picasso, he too existed, everything that had been imposed upon him no longer existed, he and Spain, both of them existed, of course they exist, they exist, they are alive, Picasso commenced to work, he commenced to speak as he has spoken all his life, speaking with drawings and color, speaking with writing, the writing of Picasso.<sup>339</sup>

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<sup>338</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 47. Emphasis mine.

<sup>339</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 47-48.

The war may have reactivated Picasso's drive for painting, but with this sentence, Stein also extracts Picasso's subsequent work – *Guernica* included – from being only *about* the war, and located only within events of the war, and instead posits it as what follows from a series of renewed *existences*. The sentence spins, almost breathlessly, on the word “to exist,” in order to rise from the war into a crescendo concluding with Picasso's work. Thus when Stein states later on that same page that Picasso's colors “are there only to *exist*,” we realize that *Guernica*'s grey is intricately linked to the war not just through how it represents the actual bombing but through having its own place in this series of realized existences, as part of a struggle to renew vitality.

I want to be clear: yes, with this painting, it is impossible to look upon its vastness of grey and not think of the color as a stark expression of mourning. In *Picasso*, however, Stein, willfully posits grey as an animated, dynamic, evolving color. *Guernica*'s grey is what comes alive – what exists – on the canvas, as a corollary of Picasso existing, Spain existing, people existing as they have since they were created. Grey may be the somber consequence of wartime destruction, but through Steinian vision, it is also an artist's, and specifically a painter's, insistent affirmation of life, of *being* that arises in *opposition*.

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Stein writes that “the color of the pictures he paints now in 1937,” after *Guernica*, “are bright colors, light colors but which have the qualities of the colors which until now only existed in his greys.”<sup>340</sup> The illustrations included in the original booklet offer Picasso's *Weeping Woman*, from 1938, as one example of Picasso's effervescent emergence from grey, as one dramatic product of him finding “his real color.” Stein's account of Picasso finding his “real color” through *Guernica*'s grey mirrors her account of an earlier moment in his career, the moment he realizes that grey can “really become a color.” This moment is the beginning of Cubism. Stein describes his early Cubist still-lives as part of his “grey period,” following from his Blue and Rose Periods, and writes,

It was during this grey period that Picasso really for the first time showed himself to be a great colorist. There is an infinite variety of grey in these pictures and by the vitality of painting the greys really become a color. After that as Picasso

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<sup>340</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 48.

had then really become a colorist his periods were not named after their colors.<sup>341</sup>

The coincidence is striking: this “grey period” occurs on the verge of World War I, just as Picasso paints *Guernica* on the verge of World War II. Alongside her emphasis on Picasso’s direct vision, Stein articulates the artist’s *visionary* power. This visionary status is accorded from how the artist’s creative work realizes in advance what war, specifically, will only publicize later. She writes in *Picasso*, “It is an extraordinary thing but it is true, wars are only a means of publicizing the things already accomplished, a change, a complete change, has come about, people no longer think as they were thinking but no one knows it, no one recognizes it, no one really knows it except the creators.”<sup>342</sup> The artist is visionary because he has the greatest capacity to see the *contemporary*: “A creator is not in advance of his generation but he is the first of his contemporaries to be conscious of what is happening to his generation... the only thing that is creative in a creator is the contemporary thing. Of course.”<sup>343</sup>

Stein’s conflation of vision with creation is striking, particularly with regard to Cubism, and I wonder if we can read this, again, as Stein reframing Cubist painting as an experiment with signs, as a linguistic project. In other words, is Stein opening the possibility of reading Cubist painting semiologically, as equivalent in objective as the *papiers collés*, by focusing on grey – and the articulation of its “infinite variety in these pictures” – rather than what (arrangements on tables, people playing guitars) the paintings may ostensibly be representing? David Antin, in describing how collage produces signification in “Some Questions about Modernism,” turns to Roman Jakobson, in contrast to Yve-Alain Bois’ focus on Ferdinand de Saussure. Employing Jakobson’s definition of “metonymy,” Antin argues that the “metonymic function is characteristic of the elements of collage, which are normally presented in such a way as to free at least some of these possible contexts that would generate representative association trains.” He elaborates that “the strategy of collage involves suppression of the ordering signs that would specify the ‘stronger logical relations’ among the presented elements,” therefore allowing “weaker logical relations” to the foreground, which “allow a greater degree of uncertainty of interpretation or, more specifically, more degrees of freedom in the reading of the sign-objects and their ensemble relations.”<sup>344</sup> Despite this final positive spin (“more degrees of freedom”), for Antin, collage deals with *weakening* the logic of conventionalized significations for a sign, rather than the “exchange and change” of value amidst a network of signs.

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<sup>341</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 44-45.

<sup>342</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 29-30.

<sup>343</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 30-31.

<sup>344</sup> David Antin, “Some Questions About Modernism,” in *Radical Coherency: Selected Essays on Art and Literature 1966-2005* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 209-210.

Thus, in Antin's account, representation in a collage composition is still possible, even inevitable, but its structure is different from what we would expect. It occurs metonymically rather than illusionistically. In discussing a 1920s collage by Kurt Schwitters, Antin writes, "Two kinds of 'representation' have crept back into the collage: a literary-poetic one... and a visual one," and then gives one example:

[The collage] makes use of a range of contrasts of "color type" that has both a compositional (arrangement or design) significance and semantic significant – "painted color" – "printed color" – "inherent color" (the color of materials like wood, wire) and "physical transformation of color (resulting from aging, wear, soiling). Each of these color types can evoke at least one metonymic context, and these contexts interact with each other and with the verbal literary material, which also evokes several contexts.<sup>345</sup>

With this in mind, I want to ask what happens if we follow Stein's lead and read Cubist paintings, which are remarkably monochromatic, as not only "a new mode of representing of a girl playing the guitar" (which enough critics have done) but as a collage of all the varying greys the artist sees and extracts from the scene in front of him? This grey comes from a girl's shoulder; this grey comes from the shadow on the wall; this grey comes from the shine on the top of a guitar. The color connects the composition, and it refuses to be secondary to a prescribed image.

Stein, through her discussion of color, inextricably links *Guernica* to Cubism. T. J. Clark makes a similar chronological bridge, when he recounts how Picasso temporarily stuck two pieces of patterned paper onto *Guernica*, which would have turned the painting into a collage. He writes that "partly this moment of collage here – understood now as an impulse, a compulsion to which Picasso was drawn without any full sense of what he was doing – is nostalgic, reparative, and fated not to last: it is the great backward dream of early twentieth-century modernism putting in a last appearance." He then adds,

But this on its own, in my view, would not explain the persistence of the collage idea, however muted, in the final painting – the paper horse, the striped dresses left and right. For the problem at this point was technical, and collage did

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<sup>345</sup> Antin, "Some Questions About Modernism," 212.

address it... It is *the* problem of modern painting as Picasso conceived it, only now to be given a special ethical and political dimension. The light must be abstract, mechanical; the space must be something the mind can touch.<sup>346</sup>

Metonymy, here, is what gives us this sense of space, what explicitly extends the implications of the artwork into our own mode of living.

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In addition to the surprising attribution of Picasso's grey pictures as revealing him to be a great colorist, we should consider Stein's curious and seemingly paradoxical description of Picasso's great painted mural as "written in a calligraphy continuously developed." The period just preceding *Guernica* – during which Picasso's vision is destroyed by interpretation, he refuses to paint, and Spain is lost to him – is precisely the period that Picasso tries to live the life of a poet. Stein makes no attempt to hide her disparagement of his written work; without minced words or sidestepping, she belittles it here akin to how she belittles war. She writes, "So Picasso ceased to work. It was very curious. He commenced to write poems but this writing was never his writing. After all the egoism of a painter is not at all the egoism of a writer."<sup>347</sup> She then goes as far as to add, "In a way Picasso liked it, it was one responsibility the less, it is nice not having responsibilities, it is like the soldiers during a war, a war is terrible, they said, but during a war one has no responsibility, neither for death, nor for life."

While Stein may not care much for Picasso's poetry, I do think she tries to position his foray into writing as instrumental in furthering his later achievement in painting. Stein sees in Picasso's "genius" his capacity to bring principles of writing into his painting. Throughout *Picasso*, Stein repeatedly describes painting as Picasso's mode of writing. Near the booklet's beginning, Stein writes, "Picasso wrote painting as other children wrote their a b c. He was born making drawings, not the drawing of a child but the drawings of a painter... drawing always was his only way of talking and he talks a great deal."<sup>348</sup> And when she ends the booklet with Picasso's return to painting and his creation of *Guernica*, she describes his work, as mentioned earlier, as "speaking with drawings and color, speaking with writing, the writing of Picasso." On one hand, this constant pairing of painting with writing seems to underscore Stein's infamous distinction between the two: writing is her thing, while painting is his *equivalent* to her thing. On the other hand, Stein's use of writing as a metaphor for Picasso's painting

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<sup>346</sup> Clark, *Picasso and Truth*, 275-276.

<sup>347</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 46.

<sup>348</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 2.

also indicates how Picasso, at his best, is able to incorporate or to assimilate writerly gestures into his painting. Stein specifically uses the word “calligraphy” in reference to *Guernica*, and calligraphy is, after all, writing with emphasis on its *writtenness*, on its visual form. Calligraphy oscillates between lines that are written and lines that are drawn.

Picasso himself writes in a poem composed on January 20, 1936, just a year before *Guernica*: “that each little curl on the nape of the neck taking the shape of a letter combined in a certain way here is the hard part would form the complete page of truth of the story passed through the sieve of mathematics of the exact poetry of its eye.”<sup>349</sup> Here, foreshadowing Stein in the 1938 monograph, Picasso valorizes vision over interpretation, putting emphasis on “the shape of a letter.” He declares that only through an “exact poetry” of the eye, which sees the “shape of the letter,” can “the complete page of truth” be formed.

The “little curl on the nape of the neck” described in this poem actually makes its way into *Guernica*, in the form of a small, light grey curve on the top of the fleeing women’s left arm. This curve appears on the darker grey (possibly a shadow) lining the topside of her arm. This light grey line initially appears to be an accidental mark made on the canvas or even, a bit grotesquely, a single hair poking out of the woman’s neck. On closer viewing, however, the curve connects to a larger semi-circle now lying beneath a coat of white paint and only faintly visible through it. An examination of Maar’s photographs discloses that this semi-circle was originally the woman’s left breast in the first and second states. The breasts that, in the final state, seem to sag and have a triangular shape were once nearly perfectly round circles, and interestingly, their transformation makes the woman seem progressively more prostrate, even if the incline of her shoulders and back remains the same. It is tempting to read the progression of the painting’s states as analogous to the progression of life – that the woman actually ages between the states – but perhaps this interpretation is far too *literal*. Instead we should note that the breast’s underpainting curiously lies in part both below and above the painting’s top layer, and its peculiarity directs us to look at the photographs and to revisit the painting’s previous states.

In this sense, the small curve of light grey becomes the locus of several monochrome sign systems; in addition to, and because of, the black-and-white photographs, our imaginings of the painting’s previous states are enduringly grey. We even see the states with the temporary collages only in grayscale. *Guernica* sits at the center of a network of monochromes, and perhaps the grey produced by black ink on white paper affords

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<sup>349</sup> Picasso, *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz and Other Poems*, 88.

*writing* a place in this network. Stein, in her description of Picasso's return to painting, argues that he generates a form of writing (we might even call this a "poetry of the eye") in *Guernica*. Let's return to how she presents the painting: "So in 1937 he commenced to be himself again. // He painted a large picture about Spain and *it was written in a calligraphy continuously developed.*" Stein's account of *Guernica* is especially striking in how it foreshadows an observation offered by several *Guernica* scholars that some form of script seems present at the painting's very center. Eugene B. Cantalupe, in his article "Picasso's *Guernica*" for *Art Journal* (1971), observes that "many critics have noticed that the horse's hide resembles newsprint"<sup>350</sup> and adds that the "stylized hairs" look like "trays of letters awaiting the typesetter."<sup>351</sup> The idea of a single line in the hatching as both a horsehair, perhaps the material of the paintbrush, and "the shape of a letter" is compelling and would be analogous to the multi-level representational scheme offered by "ash-like *grisaille*." It also demonstrates the inextricable link between painting and writing for Picasso, who both mixes his colors in a writerly mode and shapes his letters in a painterly one. Grey offers him the common, material base from which he can establish these different tones: the writerly and the painterly.

But to go back to what we see on *Guernica*'s canvas: The round line of this earlier breast curiously lies in part both below and above the painting's top layer – which technically means that it is rendered in two different kinds of grey. It goes from being a directly applied, light grey line to being a dark line seen through a lighter layer painted above and therefore *after* it. In other words, the first is a grey that was mixed on the painter's palette; the latter is a grey mixed in our own perception of superimposed layers. This is the grey of *pentimenti*, of the painting's accumulated history, and we can see it all over the painting's canvas.

I want to propose that we think of *Guernica*'s color as a *diachronic process producing grey*, rather than any conventional shade of grey. Consider this process itself is the grey's *tone*, in the same manner that we have "bluish" or "yellowish" grey. Those moments in *Guernica* that reveal its evolution, that show traces of its previous states, and that somehow gesture toward the Maar photographs, the composition studies, and the poetry leading up to the painting – this is the pile of *ash* collected from the painting's history, which gives the painting its particular color.

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<sup>350</sup> Incidentally, both gray cards, flat objects of neutral gray colors, and newsprint are used as references for color balance in photography. Perhaps the elusive, chaotic grey of the horse was an ironic gesture to Dora Maar as she was trying to capture the painting on film.

<sup>351</sup> Eugene B. Cantalupe. "Picasso's *Guernica*." *Art Journal* 31:1 (Autumn, 1971): 19-20.

The most prominent example of this formulation is the bull's head. While Picasso paints the head ostensibly white, he nonetheless keeps the topcoat thin enough that a section of dark paint shows through from underneath, at the backside of the head and neck. This is clearly a moment when the viewer simultaneously perceives two different layers of paint, which were applied at two different moments in time; labeling it "white" simply because of the top coat would be overly dismissive, particularly when considered in contrast to the adjacent mourning mother's more evenly white face and chest. This section of the bull's head is grey, not a blended grey like his torso, but grey nonetheless. Similarly Picasso leaves visible the *pentimenti* on the bull's face, gesturing toward the much different appearance of the bull in the first through third states of the Maar photographs from that in the final painting. The *pentimenti* unavoidably adds a distinct quality of color to the bull's face, corrupting and darkening its pretense at whiteness, and perhaps the only way to describe this permeable and history-revealing color is to call the bull "ashen faced."

The ash of the bull's face seeps down into deep black of its legs, reminiscent of the "bone black" paint produced from the thighs of cattle mentioned by Finlay, and, incidentally, the legs are one of the most overtly self-gesturing moments of blackness in the painting. Of the three legs visible, two are fairly black, while one is the same neutral grey of the space between the bull's legs and behind its tail. At the bottom of the grey leg is a small, thinly applied splotch of black, which is echoed at the top of the neighboring black leg by a rubbed-in stain of grey, darker than the leg's grey but similar to the grey of the bull's body. The colors here do not seem arbitrary, nor is there a clear logic or a symbolic system explaining why they are the way they are. They do demand, however, that the viewer ponder which layer of color is on top and which layers are below. At a distance, the stain of grey on the black leg appears like it could either have been rubbed *onto* the leg or rubbed *off* from the leg. In other words, this grey, which so closely resembles the neighboring grey of the bull's torso, might either be applied over the black or revealed from under the black. In reverse, the black splotch on the lighter grey leg motions at a similar eye trick but then reveals itself as painted *on top of* the grey. A rectangular corner, in a shade of grey somewhat darker than that of the leg's, peers out from beneath the black paint and above the lighter grey one – it mediates between the leg and splotch as both a color tone and a layer of paint.

A close, formalist viewing of *Guernica* shows us that Stein's description of Picasso's "large painting about Spain" is far from facetious or paradoxical simply for the sake of paradox. To be "written in a calligraphy *continuously developed*" is for composition to be given *time*, to be given duration. Like an expression that moves visibly behind the outer mask of a bull's face, or the dark underpainting of a breast and the light grey "curl on the nape of the neck" on the painting's surface, or the *pentimenti* that

demands to be seen and part of the composition, *Guernica*'s grey shows us that it is constantly *under process*. This projection of transformation – and thus of movement – is a defining characteristic of how the color *exists*.

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In *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (2015), Caroline Levine describes how the study of form in literary criticism frequently is relegated to the concerns of genre studies, or to “the exclusive domain of aesthetics.” She argues, however, that even politics is “a matter of imposing order on the world” and thus, ultimately, a matter a *form*: “I, who have always been drawn to patterns and structures in and across texts, immediately grasped social experience in the same terms, using what seemed to me the same habits of thought, the same methods.”<sup>352</sup>

This proposition – that aesthetics and politics follow similar principles of organization, and that both can be read *formally* – is latent in Stein's account of *Guernica* as a study in color. We may balk initially at Stein's emphasis on the mural's greyness, rather than its representation of the bombing's victims, but eventually we might recognize Stein's imperative to see *directly* and rid ourselves of preconceived interpretations as a move to translate aesthetic experience into a meaningful social one. As discussed earlier, through Stein's viewing of the painting, we find that the colors come to life, they are allowed to oppose, to want, to agree or to disagree, they force us to recognize that “they are there only to exist.” This confrontational, and framed as irrefutable, recognition of existence must be the starting point for any ethical engagement between a subject and her object. Begin by looking closely at something you're not used to reading, that you are not committed to interpreting ideologically, Stein tells us. Begin with grey to learn to see directly.

A remarkably similar imperative reaches us through Friedrich Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morality*. While describing his difficulty in determining the origin and motivations of morality and, more importantly, understanding why we *value* it, Nietzsche describes the necessity of “traveling the vast, distant, and so concealed land of morality – or the morality which has really existed, really been lived – with a completely new set of questions and as it were *with new eyes*.”<sup>353</sup> Further, in relating how his book responds to Paul Ree's *The Origin of Moral Sensations*, Nietzsche writes,

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<sup>352</sup> Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), x.

<sup>353</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, translated by Maudemarie Clark and Alan J. Swensen (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1998), 5. Emphasis mine.

My wish, in any case, was to turn so sharp and disinterested an eye in a better direction, the direction of the real *history of morality* and to warn him while there was still time against such English hypothesizing *into the blue*. It is of course obvious which color must be a hundred times more important to a genealogist of morality than blue: namely *gray*, which is to say, that which can be documented, which can really be ascertained, which has really existed, in short, the very long, difficult-to-decipher hieroglyphic writing of the human moral past!<sup>354</sup>

Nietzsche suggests that we must learn “to practice reading as an *art*”<sup>355</sup> before we can hope to comprehend or reconstruct a genealogy of morality. This is how Stein turns her eye to *Guernica*. I propose that the lesson we gain from Stein’s reading is well articulated through this particular insight from Levine: “The past shows us what is possible – and we return, again and again, to its arrangements: the ordering of bodies and spaces, hierarchies and narratives, containments and exclusions. All of these have mattered to us because they configurations are the stuff of injustice, and also because structures like these travel and persist, continuing to organize our lives.”<sup>356</sup> In order to see what has existed, we must recognize how it travels and how it persists.

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<sup>354</sup> Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 6.

<sup>355</sup> Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 7.

<sup>356</sup> Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*, xii.

*Postscript*

ON SPLENDOR

“Now this is the end of this story, not the end of his story, but the end of this story of his story,”<sup>357</sup> writes Gertrude Stein, as she appears to conclude *Picasso* with the artist finding his color, “his real color, in 1937,” through *Guernica*. But, of course, that would be too simple. Stein follows this conclusion with an “Epilogue,” showing that “the end of this story of his story” continues – or, rather, commences again. Seemingly compelled to offer yet another anecdote asserting Picasso’s visionary power, or what she calls the artist’s “direct vision,” Stein recounts:

It is very interesting knowing that Picasso has never seen the earth from an airplane, that being of the twentieth century he inevitably knew that the earth is not the same as in the nineteenth century, he knew it, he made it, inevitably he made it different and what he made is a thing that now all the world can see. When I was in America I for the first time travelled pretty much all the time in an airplane and when I looked at the earth I saw all the lines of cubism made at a time when not any painter had ever gone up in an airplane. I saw there on the earth the mingling lines of Picasso, coming and going, developing and destroying themselves, I saw the simple solutions of Braque, I saw the wandering lines of Masson, yes I saw and once more I knew that a creator is contemporary, he understands what is contemporary when the contemporaries do not yet know it.<sup>358</sup>

The booklet, through a surface reading, appears to be an explication of Picasso’s singular capacities as an artist. “He was born making drawings, not the drawings of a child but the drawings of a painter.”<sup>359</sup> “His friends in Paris were writers rather than painters, why have painters for friends when he could paint as he could paint.”<sup>360</sup> And he is the creator who “is so completely contemporary that he has the appearance of being ahead of his generation.”<sup>361</sup> Suddenly, however, in *Picasso*’s epilogue, the artist is found amidst several contemporaries; the “simple solutions of Braque” and “the

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<sup>357</sup> Gertrude Stein, *Picasso* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1938), 48.

<sup>358</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 50.

<sup>359</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 2.

<sup>360</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 3.

<sup>361</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 31.

wandering lines of Masson” are there on earth too, alongside “the mingling lines of Picasso.” Further, the perspective in this passage subtly and surprisingly shifts: at first, Stein seems to describe how Picasso “made” the twentieth century primarily by locating the act of *seeing* with him; he has seen the earth already, even without being in an airplane, just as “now all the world can see.” But gradually we realize that Stein, in fact, is the one doing all the *seeing* here: “I saw, “ then “I saw,” then “I saw” again, and then “once more I *knew*.” Picasso is no longer the one who sees, with his direct vision, the earth as no one else has seen it. He is now one of several contemporaries who are *seen*; he *is* the earth, he *is* the twentieth century. Stein finally concludes the book, “the twentieth century has a splendor which is its own and Picasso is of this century, he has that strange quality of an earth that one has never seen of things destroyed as they have never been destroyed. So Picasso has his splendor. // Yes. Thank you.”

Doesn’t Stein assert, with these final three words, that she – the one who *sees* and *knows* in this passage – is in fact the creator who has composed this story, who “understands what is contemporary when the contemporaries do not yet know it?” Is the final interjection her way of saying that Picasso “is of this century,” and of this earth, but here she is, in the plane, sharing *her* vision with us?

We can acknowledge that Stein offers remarkable insight into the influence and the determining power of writing on the last century of art, or we can call her relentlessly opportunistic and self-promoting. We can argue about whether Stein’s emphasis on “direct vision” and formalism in *Picasso* reflects a brutal, indifferent adherence to aesthetics, or a rigorous and radical re-conception of both empathy and identity. We can debate what it means – and how ethical it is in the wake of both *Guernica* and *Guernica* – for Stein to equate destruction with splendor. Picasso himself oscillated between his admiration for her and his disdain for some of her pronouncements. He told Françoise Gilot in 1944, “I have a lot of confidence in [Stein’s] judgment. If she approves of you, that will reinforce whatever good opinion I might have of you.”<sup>362</sup> Then, a year later, Picasso declared to a young writer, James Lord, that Stein is “a real Fascist. She always had a weakness for Franco. Imagine! For Pétain, too. You know she wrote speeches for Pétain. Can you imagine it? An American. A Jewess, what’s more.”<sup>363</sup>

We must keep the contradictions of their friendship, and of her evolving opinions, in mind while we read what she writes about him. “So the twentieth century is that,” Stein observes, “it is a time when everything cracks, where everything is destroyed, everything isolates itself, it is more splendid than a period where everything follows

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<sup>362</sup> Françoise Gilot and Carlton Lake, *Life with Picasso* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964), 68.

<sup>363</sup> James R. Mellow, *Charmed Circle: Gertrude Stein and Company* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974), 466.

itself.”<sup>364</sup> I wouldn’t be the first to read a revolutionary potential in Stein’s writing that might not be recognized in her (or even Picasso’s) biography. This is because, through *Picasso* and other texts, Stein teaches us again and again *how to read*, as both a mode of recreation and an act of re-creation, and as we struggle, struggle desperately, to try to see what she means, we find that we have created enough possible meanings for now that might suffice, that might be what *we* need. As I read Stein, I recall Friedrich Nietzsche’s account of his inquiry into the genealogy of morality. He begins by asking: “under what conditions did man invent those value judgments good and evil? *and what value do they themselves have?*” But his inquiry leads not to a direct answer but to one of the most moving passages of his writing:

In response I found and ventured a number of answers; I distinguished ages, peoples, degrees of rank among individuals; I divided up my problem; out of the answers came new questions, investigations, conjectures, probabilities; until I finally had a land of my own, a ground of my own, an entire unspoken growing blossoming world, secret gardens as it were, of which no one was permitted even an inkling... O how we are happy, we knowers, provided we simply know how to be silent long enough!...<sup>365</sup>

Nietzsche indicates here that his genealogy of good and evil ostensibly should provide an organized and universalized schema of civilization’s history; paradoxically, however, it generates an erratic and enigmatic personal fantasy land, “an entire unspoken growing blossoming world.” The shift in this quote from straightforward prose to apparent metaphor, from short independent clauses to an unraveling series of incomplete phrases, from a regular repetition of semicolons and then commas, to the breaking off into ellipses and an exclamation mark – these shifts mark the broader transition from a methodical to, what Stein would call, a “passionate” tone. Consider how aptly Stein might be summarizing Nietzsche when she states: “I began to discover the names of things, that is not discover the names but discover the things the things to see the things to look at...having begun looking at them I called them by their names with passion and that made poetry.”<sup>366</sup> Sometimes we read not to be *correct*, but because we are called to do so by passion. We read enough to compose a land of our own, a ground of own, and we might be happier if we could keep it to ourselves – if we could know it without writing it or turning it into publicity, if we

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<sup>364</sup> Stein, *Picasso*, 49.

<sup>365</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, translated by Maudemarie Clark and Alan J. Swensen (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1998), 3.

<sup>366</sup> Gertrude Stein, “Poetry and Grammar,” in *Gertrude Stein: Writings 1932-1946*, edited by Catharine R. Stimpson and Harriet Chessman (New York: The Library of America, 1998), 330.

could keep it protected from either being negated or rendered into doctrine – but clearly neither Nietzsche nor Stein nor many of us, their readers, can or will be silent long enough.

Thus, if we commence again with the last sentences of *Picasso*:

... the twentieth century is a century which sees the earth as no one has ever seen it, the earth has a splendor that I never had had, and as everything destroys itself in the twentieth century and nothing continues, so then the twentieth century has a splendor which is its own and Picasso is of this century, he has a strange quality of an earth that one has never seen and of things destroyed as they have never been destroyed. So then Picasso has his splendor.

Yes. Thank you.

Stein's sentence unravels and implodes onto itself. It loops out, and then it loops in, and then it loops back out again. It insistently enacts its own destruction as a way of prolonging its presence. It also makes us this promise, "nothing continues," even as it appears to have no intention of stopping its own continuation. But then it does stop, and the book ends with a line that declares itself as deliberate and directed toward us, the readers. This is also when Stein declares *our* presence.

The book supposes its own opposition. I see splendor in that assertion.

*Yes. Thank you.*

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