



Kahnweiler's Lesson

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Kahnweiler's Lesson

In memory of Jean Laude

If we find fault with hypotheses, just let us try to undertake history without them. We cannot say that something exists, though, without saying what it is. No matter how we may consider facts, we have already related them to concepts whose selection is far from indifferent. If we realize this, we can decide and choose among possible concepts those which are necessary to connect the facts. If we do not wish to recognize this, we abandon choice to instinct, accident, or the arbitrary; we flatter ourselves that we possess a pure empiricism that is completely a posteriori, while we have, in fact, an a priori vision that is perfectly partial, dogmatic, and transcendent.

—Fragment 226 of the *Athenaeum*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1798);
in Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy,
L'Absolu littéraire (Paris, 1978), 130.

WHEN DANIEL-HENRY KAHNWEILER DECLARED to Francis Crémieux, “I think my case is quite unusual and won’t repeat itself very often,”¹ he was well aware of his unique experience in the history of modern culture. Not only was he a great art dealer; not only was he a courageous and pioneering editor (the first of Apollinaire, Artaud, Leiris, Max Jacob, and many others); not only did he have a fantastic “eye” during the heroic years of cubism; but beyond that he was from early on a champion of the painting that he both loved and sold, a passionate critic whose breadth we have only begun to appreciate.

Although Kahnweiler did not write his defense of cubism until the outbreak of World War I, he had always understood his role of art dealer as a partisan and propaedeutic one. A 1912 interview shows him to be accessible, generous with explanations, and responsive to his visitor’s questions.² We know, furthermore, that his role as interpreter of cubism went much farther, and that he assigned the titles, based on descriptions provided by the painters, to the majority of Braque’s and Picasso’s cubist paintings. He provided these titles to help the public “read” the pictures—“to facilitate assimilation” and “to impress its urgency upon the spectator”—that is, to prevent their erroneous interpretation as pure abstraction.³ I will return to this metaphor of reading, which induced in Kahnweiler a real and increasingly dogmatic blindness toward abstract art;⁴ what is important here is his absolute certainty from the very start of his career as a dealer: “I did not have the slightest doubt as to either the aesthetic value of these [cubist] pictures or their importance in the history of painting.”⁵ Kahnweiler mistakenly likened his confidence to that of the artists he defended, as for instance when he

explained their decision not to exhibit in public (“They knew what they were doing, and they only wanted to do their work”).⁶ We have, of course, Picasso’s famous “I don’t seek, I find,” but this is more a habitual boast than an exact description of his work process. Kahnweiler’s conviction was steadfast (which the artists who sought comfort from him knew well), and his theory of art scarcely evolved from his first to his last texts. As an adolescent, he had wanted to be an orchestra conductor—an intermediary, but an organizer—the same desire, he said, drove him to become an art dealer.⁷

In a letter dated 13 June 1924, Kahnweiler wrote to his friend Carl Einstein, “I no longer wish to publish because I am an art dealer again; it no longer seems appropriate. As for my own conscience, I could publish because I buy only things that I love, but the public would see commercialism in it. Therefore, I am silent.”⁸ This remarkable scrupulousness explains why Kahnweiler did not devote himself to writing before the outbreak of the First World War. It accounts, as well, for the division of his theoretical work into three sections: the texts of 1915–20; the monograph on Gris written during World War II; and the abundance of articles published after the war, when he was no longer officially the dealer of the artists he was defending. This compunction further explains the minimal evolution of his theory, and its consequent blindness to new developments; one cannot abstain from writing for more than twenty years without suffering from rigidity of thought. Kahnweiler’s scrupulousness, however, proved to be his good fortune, as well as ours. Because he waited until his 1915–20 exile to write, he was able to give cubism its first theoretical account of some interest, one that remains in many respects unequalled today. Kahnweiler’s analysis is often so apt precisely because it was not hurried.

Kahnweiler’s exile, for him a tragedy, gave him the opportunity to develop as a critic, aesthete, and art historian.⁹ At Berne, he became acquainted with various currents of neo-Kantian philosophy (Georg Simmel’s sociology, for example, from which Kahnweiler quoted the extraordinary article on the problem of historical time).¹⁰ His simultaneous discovery of the entire German aesthetic tradition after Kant, and of new developments in art history and criticism infused by this tradition, was of crucial importance. He encountered the writings of the formalist critic Konrad Fiedler, so close to Kahnweiler in many respects, as well as those of Fiedler’s friend Adolf von Hildebrand, whom Kahnweiler attacked.¹¹ Through Wilhelm Worringer, he became familiar with the work of Alois Riegl and Heinrich Wölfflin, who offered him concepts that enabled him to theorize the historicity of all artistic production. With Carl Einstein’s work as mediation, he could analyze his interest in “Negro” art, and thus elaborate a general theory of sculpture. In brief, he familiarized himself with critical tools unknown in France, and these helped him to crystallize what he had not precisely formulated during the long hours spent in his gallery at rue de Vignon.

Overall, this temporary displacement allowed Kahnweiler to become the only critic to give an intelligent account of cubism, after he had been a privileged witness to its beginnings. If we compare him to the contemporary French critics, we must ask whether any of them possessed the means to go beyond the brawling, congenial journalism of an Apollinaire (a journalism that Kahnweiler did not esteem very highly).¹² Art history was moribund in Paris (or rather, it was vitally concerned only with the Middle Ages, and not at all with the theoretical-historiographical and perceptual problems that preoccupied Kahnweiler in Switzerland). The aesthetic was the province of specialists who repeated their investigations of the beautiful or of “the harmony of the arts.” None of the events in art for half a century seemed to have affected the theorists in France, while a Wölfflin or a Fiedler, for example, were influenced in their theoretical work by the emergence of impressionism, even if they did not refer to it explicitly. Even so, there was Bergson, and on the basis of several of Jean Metzinger’s remarks on duration, Alexandre Mercereau and André Salmon attempted briefly to make this national glory a comrade on cubism’s path (although his vitalism was a much more direct influence on Italian futurism).¹³ Certainly, just like Kahnweiler, critics such as Maurice Raynal or Olivier Hourcade referred to Kant, but in such a way that Raynal, for example, found it possible to invoke him simultaneously with Berkeley, while Kant’s refutation of Berkeley’s “dogmatic idealism” stands as one of the most famous passages of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.¹⁴

Clearly, the question is not whether it is more appropriate to refer to Kant than to Berkeley in regard to cubism; either one can be cited, although not simultaneously.¹⁵ It is more useful to locate the effects of their influences on conception, to identify what they “liberate” in the course of argument. It is therefore unnecessary to expand on Kahnweiler’s Kantianism here; I wish simply to note that, unlike his peers, he was not satisfied with just mentioning the German philosopher’s name (he resorts to this only once in *The Rise of Cubism*).¹⁶ Kahnweiler read Kant by way of his followers’ works—on perception, on history, on art and art history—texts that supplied him with concepts. He set these concepts in play without having to brandish their ultimate source each time like a trophy. Kahnweiler’s Kantianism would have little consequence had it not been the springboard that enabled him to conceptualize cubism, just as it led him to an occasional error of appreciation. Some examples of his misjudgment were: his interpretation of the *Demoiselles d’Avignon* as an unfinished painting, due to his conception of the work of art as a coherent whole—a position that led him, in regard to Gris, to a veritable neoclassicism as early as 1929;¹⁷ his absurd, often repeated idea, taken from Picasso’s no less ridiculous witticism, that the cubists in their paintings of objects tried “to define [precisely] their position in space”;¹⁸ his conception of a work of art as fulfilled in the minds of its spectators once they decode its signs and receive what he called its “message”—a position that caused him a profound

uneasiness, as described in his book on Gris, before the ambiguities of “hermetic” cubism in 1911;¹⁹ his dogmatic opposition between the beautiful and the agreeable, which led him, from his first texts, to categorically reject not only Matisse but abstract art as hedonistic decoration, and so on. There are many aspects of Kahnweiler’s aesthetics that are now out of date, and not a few of them derive from a normative application of Kant (that is, a Kant reread by the neo-Kantians).

All this means that Kant is not necessarily the indispensable Sesame of cubism, although he may have been for Kahnweiler. It is more important that Kahnweiler had a theory, unlike his French colleagues, and that he paid his tribute to the clichés of cubist criticism on “multiple points of view” or the “object’s

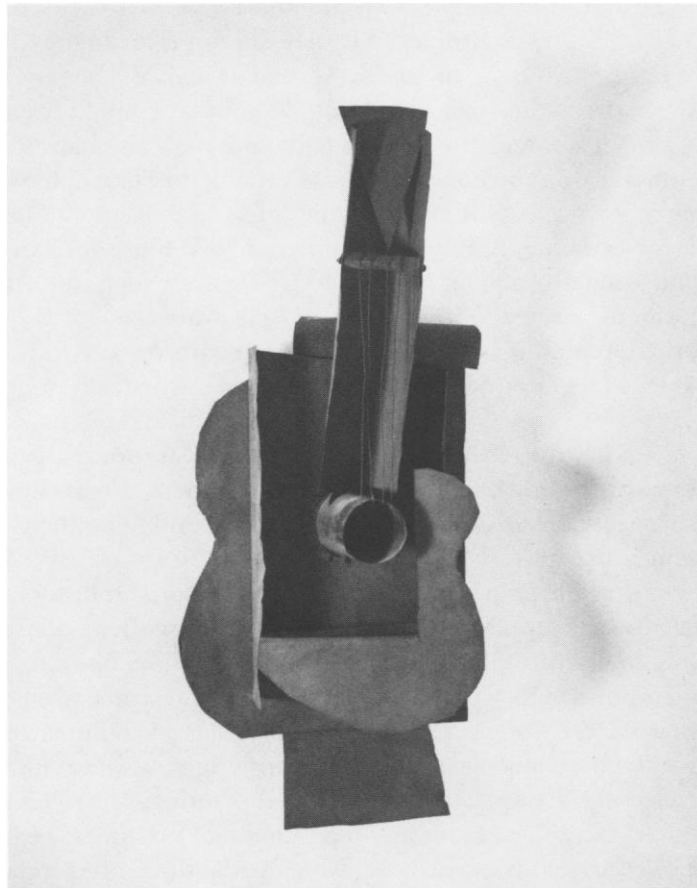


FIGURE 1. Pablo Picasso, *Guitare*, early 1912.
Sheet metal and wire, $30\frac{1}{2} \times 13\frac{1}{8} \times 7\frac{5}{8}$ ".
Collection: The Museum of Modern
Art, New York. Gift of the artist.

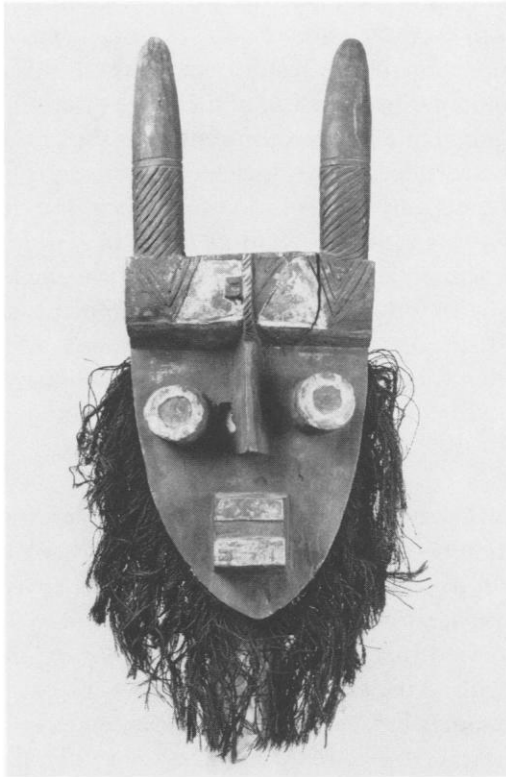


FIGURE 2. Grebo mask, Ivory Coast or Liberia. Painted wood and fiber, 25 $\frac{1}{8}$ " high. Musée Picasso, Paris (formerly, collection of Picasso). Gift of Marina Luiz-Picasso. Photo: Service photographique de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, Paris.

geometrical essence" through a body of doctrine that enabled him to arrive at other ideas. As the epistemologist Alexandre Koyré has written, "The possession of a theory, even a false one, constitutes enormous progress in comparison with the pretheoretical state."²⁰ For Kahnweiler, German aesthetic Kantianism authorized the emergence of a formalist criticism in the best sense of the term (attention to methods, to the means by which a work of art produces itself). The Kantianism of German art history provided him with a distinct consciousness of the historical implications of all artistic production. If we reread the astonishing text Kahnweiler wrote in 1920, "The Limits of Art History," we see that, in opposition to psychological interpretation based on analysis of the artist's hypothetical intentions, and against all positivist perception, which would abstain from evaluating facts by fixing them on the grid of a homogenous and empty time frame, Kahnweiler proposed an almost structuralist conception of the historian's work. Historians determine their object, the historical series, "or they suffer the degeneration of history into sterile professional ratiocination." Only the constitution of this theoretical object permits critical appreciation of the work of art: "No work is too insignificant if the series' integrity is jeopardized without it; none is important enough to figure there if the series exists as complete in its

absence.”²¹ It is of little consequence if certain assertions of this shattering text partake of the naiveté of the supposed “science of art” (*Kunstwissenschaft*) in fashion at the time; nor is it important if the historicism of these assertions appears debatable today. In combining the formalism of a Fiedler or an Einstein and the historical concepts of a Simmel or a Riegl, 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. He was the only critic to perceive that *Broc et violon* (1909–10) and *Le Portugais* (1911), both by Braque, were essential moments in cubism’s history;²² and he was the first to comprehend that a rupture had occurred for Picasso at the time of his stay at Cadaqués during the summer of 1910. Above all, he alone recognized, although in works after *The Rise of Cubism*, that the construction titled *Guitare* (fig. 1), completed by Picasso in 1912, is at once the origin of “synthetic” cubism and of a new era in the history of Western sculpture.

I wish to pause here and examine a question that only Kahnweiler, it seems to me, truly understood: the relation between cubism and African art. We might be surprised, on rereading *The Rise of Cubism*, to find no mention of African art in relation to the *Demoiselles d’Avignon*, and scarcely one vague allusion to this art in connection with the “Negro” period that followed for Picasso—even though Kahnweiler had discussed thoroughly at the end of the text the Ivory Coast mask (fig. 2), to which I shall return momentarily.²³ For Kahnweiler, to use Pierre Daix’s expression, “there is no Negro art in the *Demoiselles d’Avignon*,” or rather, if there is any borrowing it is only superficial; it concerns only African art’s appearance and not its substance.²⁴ Kahnweiler is completely explicit on this point in his book on Gris, in his 1948 article “Negro Art and Cubism,” and especially in his preface that same year for Brassai’s book of photographs, *Les Sculptures de Picasso*. As if criticizing in advance the recent Museum of Modern Art exhibition titled “Primitivism” in *Twentieth-Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, Kahnweiler maintains that, in spite of appearances, the formal affinities between African art and Picasso’s painting in 1907–8 are illusory.²⁵ To summarize, so that I might in turn offer a different formulation, Kahnweiler proposes two types of formal influence: one is morphological, the other structural. We see the morphological influence of Negro art in the “barbaric aspect” of Vlaminck’s paintings (his art “certainly shows the influence of the *appearance* of African sculptures, but not the slightest understanding of their spirit”).²⁶ We observe, on the other hand, a structural influence in the importance of the Grebo mask, purchased in the course of Picasso’s many “chasses aux nègres,” for the elaboration of the 1912 *Guitare*.

In spite of Kahnweiler’s and Daix’s assertions, there are indeed traces of African art in Picasso’s “Negro” period (figs. 3 and 4), but in a certain way, Kahnweiler was right to affirm that “the ‘savage’ quality of those pictures can be fully

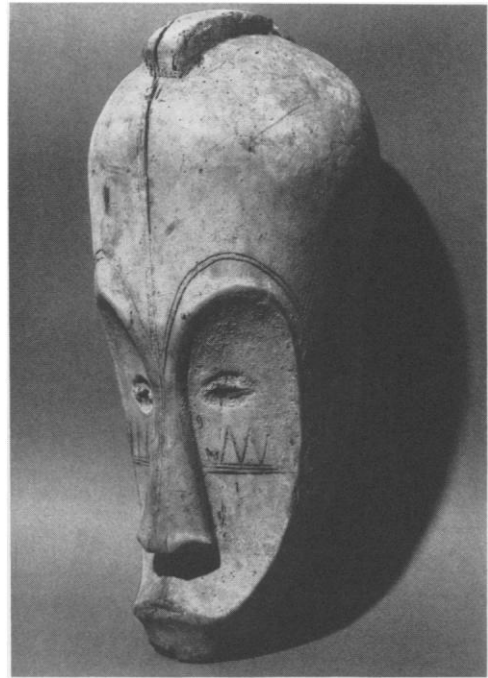


FIGURE 3 (left). Picasso, *Tête de femme*, 1908. Oil on canvas, $28\frac{7}{8} \times 23\frac{3}{4}$ ". Private collection, New York. Reproduced from "*Primitivism*" in *Twentieth-Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (New York, 1984), 1:291.

FIGURE 4 (right). Fang mask, Gabon. Painted wood, $18\frac{5}{8}$ " high. Collection: Vérité, Paris. From *ibid.*, 1:290.

explained by the influence of Gauguin's paintings and—above all—of his sculpture."²⁷ Kahnweiler describes a specific kind of formal borrowing, for which Gauguin's work provided the archetype. Regardless of their quality or novelty, the cubist work of Picasso's "Negro" period does not relate to African art in a fundamentally different manner from that of the formal relation posed by his 1906 *Portrait de Gertrude Stein* to the Iberian sculptures that had interested him at the time.²⁸

As Jean Laude has remarked, Picasso first noticed African *masks* for two reasons: as reliefs, mixtures of painting and sculpture, they worked in the limited space that Gauguin had admired in Khmer and Egyptian art;²⁹ and they served as marks of psychological absence, an aspect whose interest for Picasso is part of an expressionist quest that originated in the symbolist tradition and the *fin de*

siècle aesthetic³⁰—Ensor, for example, inverted the absence of psychological traits on a mask's face into a sign of morbidity. When Picasso became interested in African statuary, and completely abandoned all reference to Iberian sculpture, his curiosity derived from a purely morphological-expressionistic point of view. What he sought from African objects seen at the Trocadero or bought at the flea markets were *models* for deforming anatomical proportions, for deviating from a norm. We could say, exaggerating for the sake of argument, that his method of borrowing was not fundamentally different from the way in which a mediocre proto-art-deco sculptor like Jacob Epstein employed certain formal characteristics taken from his African objects, or again, from the way in which the German expressionists worked.³¹ (As Picasso, unlike others, never literally copied any African object, this comparison is an obvious oversimplification. Certainly at the start, however, Picasso was more interested in the formal vocabulary than in the syntactic arrangement of this art.)

With the *Demoiselles d'Avignon*, and throughout the following two years, Picasso worked within the kind of morphological relation initiated by Gauguin. If these works are in themselves radically new, it is the sources of the “deforming canon,” and their connotations, that are new, but not essentially the manner of using a model. This is what Kahnweiler meant when he affirmed that the *true* influence of African art in Picasso's work did not occur during the “Negro” period but began in 1912, after Picasso's discovery of the previously mentioned Grebo mask. Kahnweiler's insight, in saying that “the discovery of [Grebo] art coincided with the end of analytic cubism,”³² was his understanding that henceforth the imitation of an object's specific formal traits was no longer at issue, even if in certain respects the *Guitare* resembled the Grebo mask. Rather, what was significant was the understanding of its principle, what Picasso called the “raisonnable” character of African sculpture.³³

“It was the [Grebo] masks which opened these painters' eyes,” wrote Kahnweiler in reference to Braque and Picasso.

For example, the hollow of the guitar in some of Picasso's reliefs is marked by a projecting lead cylinder, in others by a plastilene cone. How can we fail to recognize in these the means (identical in the first case) by which the Ivory Coast artists create a volume whose limits they only indicate by the height of the cylinders representing the eyes?³⁴

From Grebo art, Picasso received simultaneously the principle of semiological arbitrariness and, in consequence, the nonsubstantial character of the sign.

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. Once this was recognised, the plastic arts were freed from the slavery inherent in illusionistic styles. 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 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 mask. 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.³⁵

Kahnweiler called this capacity to represent virtual volume in space “transparency.” The term is particularly ill chosen and confusing. No surface transparency provides access to a central core of the Grebo masks or of the *Guitare* (nor to the famous *Verre d’absinthe* that Kahnweiler summoned to support his terminology). “Transparency,” as well, seems to promise an immediate communicability; an idealistic 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.³⁶

“The overwhelming novelty for European sculpture of these reliefs,” Kahnweiler wrote about Picasso’s constructions, “consisted in that they burst open “opaque”—so to speak—volumes. The forms of these tumblers, of these musical instruments, is in no degree *described* in its continuity; continuity arises only in the creative imagination of the spectator.”³⁷ In order to read this sentence correctly, and to understand what Kahnweiler meant by “transparency,” I believe we must refer to Carl Einstein’s famous text *Negerplastik*, published in 1915, which Kahnweiler read during his stay in Berne and cited in “Negro Art and Cubism.” We must also return to the remarkable article Kahnweiler wrote during those years of war, “The Essence of Sculpture” (*Das Wesen der Bildhauerei*), to which he referred as well. For both Einstein and Kahnweiler, “Christian European sculpture” was not sculpture but rather “painting” that dared not speak its name.³⁸ Adolph von Hildebrand served as a target for both, with his elevation of the compromise represented by bas-relief to the dignity of an unsurpassable ideal. For Einstein, as for Kahnweiler, Western sculpture was frontal, pictorial. What Hildebrand’s theory enabled them to see was that frontality and pictorialism were aberrations resulting from *fear* of space, fear of seeing the sculptural *object* lose itself in the world of objects, fear of seeing the limits of art blur as real space invaded the imaginary space of art. Hildebrand never articulated this fear better than when he condemned the panorama, that nineteenth-century art which effectively plays with confused boundaries, or condemned the figures in wax museums, or denounced Canova’s tombs, to which he opposed those of Michelangelo:

Canova entirely separated his architecture from his figures, with the result that the architectural part has in itself the effect of a monument, while the figures appear to be set up in front without regard to any total spatial impression. The figures, indeed, belong more to the public than they do to the tomb; it seems as though they had just climbed up into

their positions. The single bond of unity between the architecture and the figures lies in the suggested act of their entering the tomb. What is here constructed is not a picture seen, but a drama acted out: —the figures are real men and women turned to stone. . . . There is no definite line drawn between the monument and the public; —as well bring a few stone spectators on the scene!³⁹

I have quoted this passage at length because it explains perfectly the terror of real space that was, for Carl Einstein and Kahnweiler, Western sculpture's indelible defect (hence their severe judgments on Bernini and Menardo Rosso, on sculptural pictorialism at its apogee). In many respects, this position is still held, and it has led the majority of critics to a fundamental misunderstanding of Picasso's cubist constructions.⁴⁰ This thesis, articulated most convincingly by Greenberg and long since adopted, is that the 1912 *Guitare* originated from "collages," meaning *papiers collés*:

It was as though, in that instant, he [Picasso] had felt the flatness of collage as too constricting and had suddenly tried to escape all the way back—or forward—to literal three-

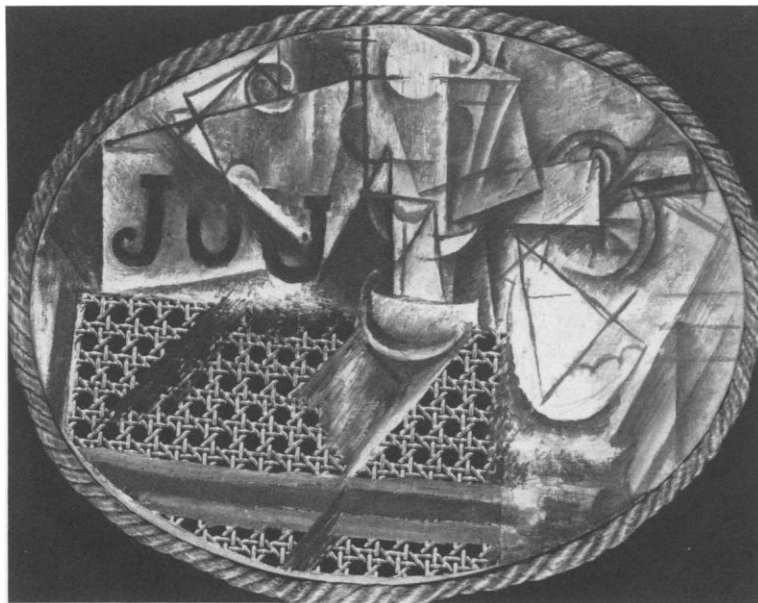


FIGURE 5. Picasso, *Nature morte au cannage de chaise*, spring 1912. Collage of oil, oilcloth, and paper on canvas, surrounded with rope, 10⁵/₈ × 13³/₄". Musée Picasso, Paris. Photo: Service photographique de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, Paris.

dimensionality. This he did by using utterly literal means to carry the forward push of the collage (and of Cubism in general) *literally* into the literal space in front of the picture plane.⁴¹

Such a thesis—which makes the *Guitare* a painting in space, a painting become sculpture—allowed Greenberg, in another context, to argue in favor of an optical, flat, pictorial sculpture, a sculpture that remains painting and that demonstrates the identical fear of space as Hildebrand's bas-relief.⁴² Above all, it denies the inaugural character of the 1912 *Guitare*, its role as the point of departure for synthetic cubism.

This classical interpretation of cubism was challenged by William Rubin in 1972, when he dated the *Guitare* as spring 1912 on the basis of conversations with Picasso. However, the painter's memories only further complicated matters. Picasso stated, in fact, that the *Guitare* preceded his first collage (*Nature morte au cannage de chaise*; fig. 5) by "several months." It would therefore date from the end of 1911 or the beginning of 1912, because this last work belongs to the cycle of oval still-lives from spring 1912.⁴³ This possibility seems absurd in every respect, as Picasso was, at that time, completely absorbed by the dialectic between literal surface and flat depth, so well analyzed by Greenberg, that led to the introduction of printed characters in his painting. We could counterpropose here the protean character of Picasso's career, the fact that he often worked in many directions simultaneously. However, his work from the end of 1910 up to the summer of 1912 remained more homogenous than ever, exclusively involving "purely" pictorial problems with which the dialogue with sculpture, so important in his preceding phase, had little to do. My hypothesis is simple: Picasso confused "first collage" with "first *papier collé*" in his memory, a common confusion and quite explicable almost fifty years after the fact.⁴⁴ While the collage of spring 1912 originated from the dialectic described by Greenberg in relation to "analytic" cubism—the introduction of an *actual* element on a flat surface serving as contrast, like the printed letters of 1911–12 or the nail in Braque's "trompe l'oeil" in 1909–10—the first *papier collé* of autumn 1912 derived from the *Guitare*, which should have been finished, as Edward Fry convincingly suggests, during the summer.⁴⁵

Is all this chronological quibbling? On the contrary, it is a question of articulating the development of a certain formal logic (that of "Picasso's system"), and not of retracing the biography of the individual Picasso. I would like to mark indelibly the birth of a new paradigm or an epistemological break (the terminology is of little importance), to indicate the radical transformation of the ensemble of conventions that constituted the domain of plastic art until this period—to provide by means of a formal analysis an instrument of historical inquiry. If we graft peremptorily the *Guitare* onto the problematic of the first collage, if we refuse to reconstruct the specificity of that invention, then we will

not comprehend its full force and effect. We will not see that if the principal rupture in this century's art was indeed that of cubism, this break was probably not made by the *Demoiselles d'Avignon* nor by analytic cubism but in the collusion between the Grebo mask and the *Guitare*. We will not perceive that from this event arose synthetic cubism, almost all this century's sculpture, and, to a great extent, the semiological investigation called abstraction. This thesis may seem excessive because it requires, at least, a rewriting of cubism's history (as well as a good part of the subsequent history of this century's art). Nor can it be understood without accepting my proposed chronology and realizing what is at stake in it. It is insufficient to simply reject Greenberg's "opticality" in order to render justice to the "objecthood" of the *papiers collés*; it is still necessary to reveal the mechanism of "Greenbergian" repression and respond to it. This repression is founded on a continuous narrative presentation of a formal problem's gradual resolution. Chronology is its backbone. To contest its chronology is to undermine the discourse's foundation. We cannot respond to Greenberg except by using his own particularly efficacious weapons.⁴⁶

Returning to Kahnweiler, Carl Einstein, and African art: if African sculpture proposes a new solution to the problem of its inscription in space, according to Einstein, it is in the dissociation of volume from mass. This sculpture gives an instantaneous impression of volume, not due to a pictorial illusion that the unseen mass lies just behind what we see, but through abrupt visual discontinuities (fig. 6). Einstein's essential point is that there is little or no modeling in African art (and though he does not use the term *montage*, his description of African art relies on this concept, explored by Picasso's *papiers collés* and constructions).⁴⁷ If we agree with Einstein's proposed formal reading, as Kahnweiler did, we are in a position to understand why Picasso's art could support only a morphological relation with African art during his "Negro" period. As Kahnweiler and many critics after him have remarked, the art inaugurated by *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* strove to transcribe the volumetric properties of sculpture onto a two-dimensional surface. The question remains, what were the means of that transcription? If we bracket the representation as seen from its different sides, a procedure whose tradition goes back to the polemics of the Renaissance *paragone*,⁴⁸ we perceive an intensification of light-dark contrast on the surface of solids (fig. 7), a dramatic chiaroscuro that owes nothing to Rembrandt's "aesthetic of Bengal lights" (to quote Henri Focillon), but on the contrary exaggerates the physical opacity of represented bodies. The illusionism of this process irritated Picasso, who limited his "realistic" intention as much as possible by the use of multiple, contradictory light sources. He did not, however, find a means to free himself from this process. Kahnweiler reports that in a lost painting of 1909, *Le Piano*, Picasso tried to replace chiaroscuro by true relief, but this timid use of real shadow remained a makeshift gesture that only brought the problem of painting back to Hildebrand's

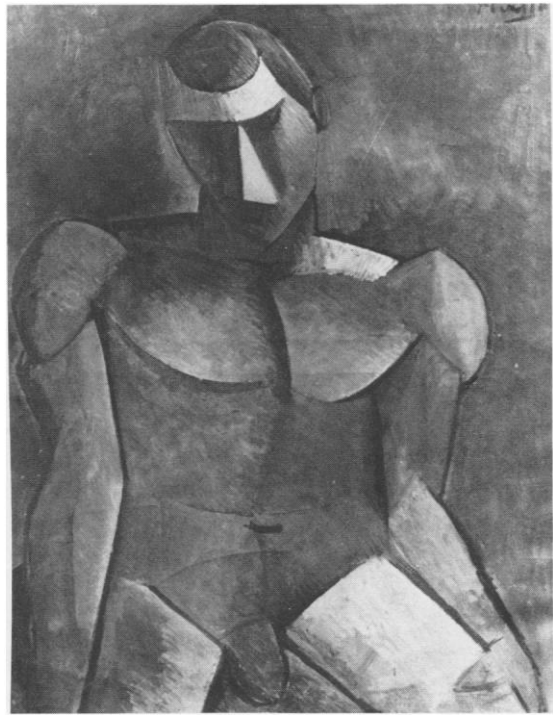
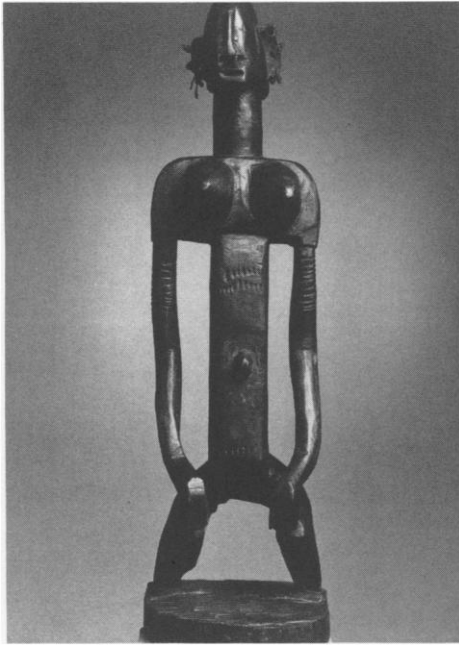


FIGURE 6 (left). Figure, Bambara or Dogon, Mali. Wood and metal, 27 $\frac{1}{8}$ " high. Private collection. From "Primitivism," 1:165.

FIGURE 7 (right). Picasso, *Homme nu assis*, winter 1908–9. Oil on canvas, 36 $\frac{1}{4}$ × 28 $\frac{3}{4}$ ". Musée d'art moderne du nord, Villeneuve d'Ascq. Donation Masurel.

solution.⁴⁹ Only after dissociating the contrast of shadow and light from its function as modeling in translating sculptural qualities into painting, only after understanding this function as one pictorial code among others, was Picasso in a position to value African art other than as a reservoir of forms—and then to become interested in what precisely in African sculpture owes nothing to modeling.⁵⁰ After this moment of dissociation, Picasso was able to glimpse possibilities for sculpture other than the direct carving that informed his primitivist attempts of 1907. He could then definitively thrust aside the pictorialism that he had brought to its height in the sculptures preceding his stay at Cadaqués by several months, such as the famous *Tête* at the end of 1909, where “the contrast of shadow and light is systematically employed; it follows a rigorous rhythm: bright zone, dark zone, light, shadow.”⁵¹

It is significant to mention here Picasso's frustrating sojourn at Cadaqués, for Kahnweiler locates the rupture in question at that point. Picasso brought back to

Paris from his summer of work several “pictures that did not satisfy him but in which rigid constructions were no longer imitations of solids in the round, but a kind of scaffolding” (fig. 8).⁵² According to Kahnweiler, “Picasso had pierced the closed form”;⁵³ chiaroscuro, if it must have a role in painting, could no longer serve to define solids. If we must wait two more years for the “true” discovery of African art, it is because the dissociation previously mentioned led Braque and Picasso first to a new analysis of Cézannean “passages” whose ambiguity drew them away from considerations of tactile space. Beginning by reflecting on the minimal conditions for the readability of pictorial signs, Braque and Picasso came

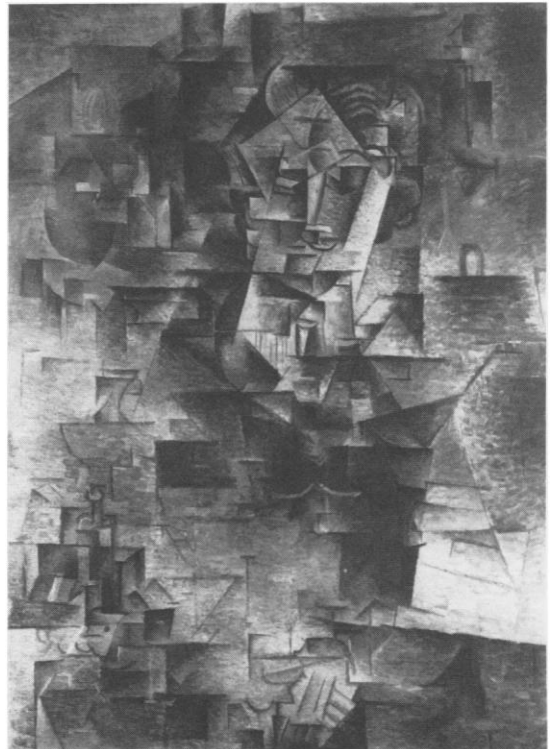
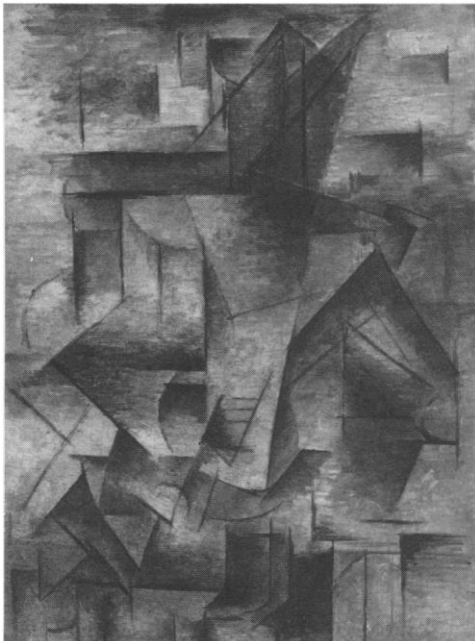


FIGURE 8 (*left*). Picasso, *Le Guitariste*, summer 1910. Oil on canvas, 39 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 28 $\frac{3}{4}$ ". Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. André Lefèvre.

FIGURE 9 (*right*). Picasso, *Portrait de Kahnweiler*, autumn 1910. Oil on canvas, 39 $\frac{5}{8}$ × 25 $\frac{5}{8}$ ". The Art Institute of Chicago. Gift of Mrs. Gilbert Chapman in memory of Charles B. Goodspeed. Photo courtesy The Art Institute of Chicago.

to question all the qualities of these signs. Only after this comprehensive inquiry, which lasted through the period of “hermetic” cubism (of which Kahnweiler’s portrait [fig. 9] constitutes one of the peaks), could Picasso experience a new interest in “Negro” art.

In order to give a more specific account of the lesson Picasso drew from the Grebo mask, and to follow Kahnweiler’s thought, another text on African art, strictly contemporary with Carl Einstein’s work, is particularly fecund here.⁵⁴ This work is *Iskusstvo negrov* (The Art of the Negroes), written in 1913–14 by Vladimir Markov, a painter and critic linked to the milieu of the Russian avant-garde. In spite of a certain number of clichés (due to its over-reliance on Leo Frobenius), this book, posthumously published in 1919 thanks to Mayakovsky, offers a particularly striking analysis of African art. According to Markov, its three essential characteristics are: 1) its statuary’s powerful sense of volume, brought about by the inorganic *arbitrariness* of its articulations (this idea resembles Einstein’s, but is formulated differently); 2) the diversity and *arbitrariness* of its morphological elements (called “plastic symbolism” by Markov, and corresponding to the semiological character that struck Kahnweiler in the Grebo masks); and 3) the diversity and *arbitrariness* of its materials, whose articulation seemed to be governed by the principal of montage.⁵⁵

This text, so similar to Einstein’s in many respects, is significant in that it refers explicitly to Picasso, while Einstein was satisfied with an allusion to modern French art in general,⁵⁶ and for its triple insistence on the arbitrary character of African art’s plastic system. Markov gives numerous examples of the three types of arbitrariness, which he makes explicit by a series of photographic montages that “strip” certain pieces (fig. 10). The syntax is “arbitrary” in that it no longer relies on anatomical knowledge, and therefore on the pictorial illusionism that always springs from this knowledge (the face and hair can be separated in two equal volumes, disposed on one side and the other of a cylindrical neck—an example to which we can add the protuberant quality of the Grebo mask’s eyes). The vocabulary is arbitrary and, in consequence, extends to infinity because the sculptural elements no longer have need of any direct resemblance to their referent. A cowry can represent an eye, but a nail can fill the same function. From this second type of arbitrariness unfolds the third (that of materials), as well as a complete range of poetic methods that we might now call metaphoric displacements. A cowry can represent an eye but also a navel or a mouth; therefore, an eye is also a mouth or a navel. Picasso, in fact, had perceived African art’s potential for metaphoric extension as early as 1907, as we can see by a drawing of that year where an African-Oceanian head engenders, through a simple formal declension, a head in tears, a head-as-leaf, and a head-as-flowerpot (fig. 11). Just before Picasso’s discovery of the Grebo mask, he insisted on the possibility of plastic

metaphorization at the heart of cubism by his use of the decorator-painter's "comb" (normally used to imitate the grain of wood) to portray the hair of the 1912 *Poète*. Werner Spies correctly writes that we "should like, in analogy with Freud's 'dream work,' to speak of 'cubist work.'"⁵⁷

It is well known that the concept of the arbitrariness of the sign, drawn from the conventionalist linguistics of William Dwight Whitney, an American specialist in Sanskrit, was formulated by Ferdinand de Saussure in his *Course in General Linguistics*, delivered in three years between 1907 and 1911 and published posthumously in 1916. There is indeed no chance that a young painter such as Markov would have been acquainted with Saussure's *Course* (the book, moreover, did not appear in Russia, at the earliest, until two years after its publication, when Markov was already dead),⁵⁸ but this does not affect the argument I wish to pursue. Indeed, Roman Jakobson has frequently maintained that the members of the Moscow Linguistic Circle understood that an interrogation of the arbitrary character of the linguistic sign was at the heart of all modern poetry because of their knowledge of cubist works before the Revolution (and not just any cubist work, but the exceptional selections in the Shchukin and Morozov collections).⁵⁹ Jakobson expressly associates Saussure's work, after he was finally directly

FIGURE 10. Reliquary figure (six views), Fang, Gabon or Equatorial Guinea. Photographed by Vladimir Markov at the Musée d'ethnographie du Trocadero, Paris. From *Iskusstvo negrov* (The art of the Negroes), 1919. Reproduced from "Primitivism," 1:150.





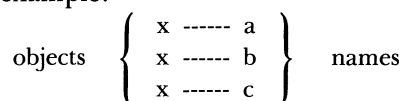
FIGURE 11. Picasso, *Masque et têtes*, 1907. Pencil, 8⁵/₈ × 6³/₈". Collection: Jacqueline Picasso, Mougins. From *ibid.*, 1:271.

acquainted with it, with that of the cubists': "Arriving in Prague in 1920, I procured myself the *Course in General Linguistics*, and it is precisely the insistence, in Saussure's *Course*, on the question of relations which especially impressed me. It corresponds in a striking manner with the particular accent given by cubist painters such as Braque and Picasso, not on the objects themselves, but on their relations."⁶⁰ Markov, with his responsibilities at the center of the Union of the Youth of Petrograd, was not only necessarily abreast of the great debate that then agitated Jakobson's friends Kasimir Malevich, Mikhail Matyushin, Alexei Kruchenykh, and Velimir Khlebnikov on the possibilities of an abstract poetry, but he was also in direct contact with the future theorists of Opoyaz, Viktor Shklovsky and Osip Brik, and perhaps even with the linguist Baudouin de Courtenay, who occasionally participated in the meetings of the Union and whose studies anticipated those of Saussure.⁶¹ What is important here is not the hypothetical meeting between Markov and a particular linguist, Saussurian or otherwise; it is that the notion of the arbitrary, even if not formulated as such, was at the heart of the debates of Russian modernity. It is equally crucial that Markov formulated this concept as such in relation to African art, and at the same time as Saussure's theoretical elaboration.

There is no space here, of course, to enter into a technical exposition of Saussure's concept of the arbitrariness of the sign, as it fluctuates through the *Course*

and as it has given rise to innumerable discussions among linguists, discussions that are moreover not closed.⁶² A digression is, nonetheless, necessary, because it will enable us to understand what Kahnweiler had intuited. I wish to emphasize that Saussure went far beyond the conventionalist notion of the arbitrary as an absence of a “natural” link between the sign and its referent, despite the fact that his first example of arbitrariness is typically conventionalist (the simple existence of multiple languages). For Saussure, the arbitrary involves not the link between the sign and its referent but that between the signifier and the signified in the interior of the sign. His principal target was the Adamic conception of language (language as an ensemble of names for things). This notion represents for him “what is crudest in semiology,” and he qualifies it as “chimeric” because it presupposes the existence of invariable, a priori signifieds that receive in each particular language a different formal vestment.⁶³ This angle of attack led Saussure to separate entirely the problem of referentiality (which he did not treat) from the problem of signification, understood as the enactment in what he called *parole* of an arbitrary but necessary link between an acoustic signifier and a “conceptual” signified.

This diagram, for example:



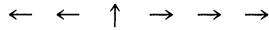
was false for Saussure, who added: “The true signification is a-b-c, beyond all knowledge of an effective rapport like x-a founded on an object. If any object could be the term on which the sign was fixed, linguistics would immediately cease to be what it is, from the summit to the base, and so would the human mind.”⁶⁴ For Saussure, language is a form whose units are differential (whether acoustic units [signifiers], “conceptual” units [signifieds], or signs, that is, conjunctions of signifiers and signifieds)—or, in the celebrated passage from the *Course*:

In language there are only differences. Even more important: a difference generally implies positive terms between which the difference is set up; but in language there are only differences *without positive terms* The idea or phonic substance that a sign contains is of less importance than the other signs that surround it.⁶⁵

In the numerous references made to these lines, however, the inflection cast by the following paragraph is often omitted: “But the statement that everything in language is negative is true only if the signified and the signifier are considered separately; when we consider the sign in its totality, we have something that is positive in its own class.”⁶⁶ The acoustic signifier and the “conceptual” signified are negatively differential (they define themselves by what they are not), but a positive fact results from their combination, “the sole type of facts that language has,” namely, the sign. Why is this positive, when everywhere else Saussure

insisted on the *oppositional* nature of the sign? Wasn't he reintroducing a substantive quality here, when all his linguistics rests on the discovery that "language is form and not substance"?⁶⁷

Everything revolves around the concept of *value*, one of the most complex and controversial concepts in Saussure. The sign is positive because it has a value "determined 1) by a dissimilar element that can be exchanged, which we can also represent as ↑, and 2) by similar elements that are comparable:



Both elements are necessary for value."⁶⁸ In other words, according to René Amacker's formula, "a) all value is defined in relation to the system from which it is taken, but b) all value is necessarily determined, as well, by the use we make of it, by what we can exchange for it, that is to say, by the class of things, exterior to it, that have that value."⁶⁹ A word's value derives from its position on the two axes of language: the axis of succession, of syntagm, which is governed by grammar (for example, in a sentence), and the axis of simultaneity, of paradigm, which defines the lexicon (a group of words that could occupy the same place in the sentence). This value is absolutely differential, like the value of a hundred-franc bill in relation to a thousand-franc bill, but it confers on the sign "something positive."

To explain his concept of value (and to differentiate it from signification, or the relation between a signifier and a signified, which fluctuates as it is realized in speech), Saussure invoked the metaphor of a chess game, a metaphor used by Matisse at the same time for rather similar reasons.⁷⁰ If, during a game, a piece is lost—for example, if the knight is carried off to some obscure corner by a child—it does not matter what other piece replaces it provisionally; we can choose arbitrarily (any object will do, and even, depending on the players' memories, the absence of an object). For it is the piece's function within a system that confers its value (and I am tempted to say that it is the piece's position at each moment of the game that gives it its signification). "If you augment language by one sign," Saussure said, "you diminish in the same proportion the [value] of the others. Reciprocally, if only two signs had been chosen . . . all the [concrete] significations would have had to be divided between these two signs. One would have designated one half of the objects, the other, the other half."⁷¹ 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 (Saussure's famous example is the different values of English *sheep* and French *mouton*, for *sheep* opposes *mutton* in English. "In speaking of a piece of meat ready to be served on the table, English uses *mutton* and not *sheep*. The difference in value between *sheep* and *mouton* is due to the fact that *sheep* has beside it a second term, while the French word does not.")⁷²

This concept of value, finally, is paradoxically linked to the notion Saussure

called the “linguistic sign’s relative motivation,” which has often been misunderstood. “Everything that relates to language as a system must, I am convinced, be approached from this viewpoint, which has scarcely received the attention of linguists: the limiting of arbitrariness.”⁷³ While in the first place, value concerns the opposition of signs to each other, “relative motivation” pertains to their “solidarity” in the system. And this solidarity, contradictory as it may seem, enters into the production of value. “*Dix-neuf* is supported associatively by *dix-huit*, *soixante-dix*, etc., and syntagmatically by its elements *dix* and *neuf*. This dual relation gives it a part of its value.”⁷⁴ Relative motivation, however, should not be considered as a negation of the semiological principle of the arbitrariness of the sign (which we must distinguish, as Saussure did, from the linguistic sign’s relatively *unmotivated* character). “In every system,” as Rudolf Engler notes, “even not entirely arbitrary signs and modes of expression draw their value from rules of usage much more than from their natural expressiveness. Signs of politeness, onomatopoeias, and exclamations offer examples of this [in the *Course*].”⁷⁵ “Not only are the elements of a motivated sign themselves unmotivated (cf. *dix* and *neuf* in *dix-neuf*), but the value of the whole term is never equal to the sum of the value of the parts. *Teach* × *er* is not equal to *teach* + *er*.”⁷⁶ In other words, “relative motivation” demonstrates that *not everything is possible in a given system of values*, that of each particular language. This guarantees the system’s force much more than it compromises it, associating its combinatory infinitude with the rigor of its laws. In no case does it indicate unconsciously in Saussure, as it has seemed to after the awkward interventions of the *Course*’s editors, the linguistic sign’s dependence on the referent.⁷⁷

I hope to be excused for this linguistic excursion, for I believe it closely encompasses Kahnweiler’s discussion of African art’s *scriptural* character, discovered by Picasso in his Grebo mask and explored in his 1912 *Guitare* and the *papiers collés* of the following months. It seems necessary inasmuch as the vulgar notion of the arbitrariness of the sign, which often remains simply the conventionalist view, obliterates the operative analogy here, first intuitively traced by Kahnweiler, between cubism and language.

What, in fact, did Picasso see in the Grebo mask’s protuberant eyes? It is erroneous to think that he arrived only at the conventionalist conception of the arbitrariness of the sign (that there is no resemblance between these protuberant eyes and what we habitually call “the windows of the soul”). As Kahnweiler understood, Picasso became aware, more specifically, of the differential nature of the sign, of its value: the plastic sign/eye’s value as a mark on an unmarked ground, within a system that regulates its use (to recall Kahnweiler’s text, “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, whose details, moreover, would have no significance

if isolated”).⁷⁸ The traditional anatomical syntax can be set aside entirely because the sign’s positive value as a semantic mark, “which depends on [the] presence or absence of a neighboring term”⁷⁹ and which allows its exchange, can be produced by any operation. Hence, Picasso’s continuous exploration of the immense mutability of signs at the heart of the same system of values: the mouth can undergo a rotation of 90° and surge forward from the face, producing a disquietingly vaginal, predatory kiss, or it can be multiplied according to a metaphoric play founded on the exchange of signs (the same sort of play that Markov observed in African art).⁸⁰ This can be seen in Picasso’s play on the minimum sign, prepared by all of “hermetic” cubism prior to the Grebo mask/*Guitare* conjunction and taken to an extreme in the series of *papiers collés* from spring 1913.⁸¹ Picasso’s reduction of his plastic system to a handful of signs, none referring univocally to a referent, causes their value to meet with numerous significations. A form can sometimes be seen as “nose” and sometimes as “mouth,” a group of forms can sometimes be seen as “head” and sometimes as “guitar.” Again, Kahnweiler writes:

The discovery of [Grebo] art coincided with the end of analytical Cubism. The period of investigation of the external world was over. The Cubist painters now meant to represent things by invented signs which would make them appear as a whole in the consciousness of the spectator, without his being able to identify the details of the sign with details of the objects “read.”⁸²

We can see in this last citation, however, that the “system of values” governing Picasso’s art, if not anatomical (illusionist, mimetic), remained figurative. This creates the “relative motivation” of his signs, the syntax of which the discovery of “Negro” art had liberated. The celebrated remark reported by Leo Stein (“A head . . . was a matter of eyes, nose, mouth, which could be distributed in any way you like—the head remained a head”)⁸³ corresponds exactly to the work accomplished in the notebooks of drawings from summer and autumn 1912, at the presumed moment of Picasso’s discovery of the Grebo mask and his elaboration of the *Guitare*.

Finally, and I believe this is the essential reason for the Grebo mask/*Guitare*’s inauguration of the series denoted as “synthetic cubism,” 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.

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 mask. . . . [Kahnweiler goes on:] The overwhelming novelty for European sculpture of these reliefs consisted in that they burst open ‘opaque’—so to speak—volumes. The forms of these tumblers, of these musical instruments, is in no degree *described* in its continuity; continuity arises only in the creative imagination of the spectator.⁸⁴

As Kahnweiler clearly saw, this understanding of the sign's nonsubstantial character led Picasso to his "open" constructions. The sculpture no longer had to fear being swallowed up by the real space of objects; it could formally employ space, transform emptiness into a mark, and combine this mark with all kinds of signs. In a sense, Picasso's *Guitare* is his response to Hildebrand.⁸⁵ This is confirmed in Picasso's subsequent experiment, in which he fabricated a *papier collé* figure that emerged from its vertical support, held a real guitar in space, and extended its

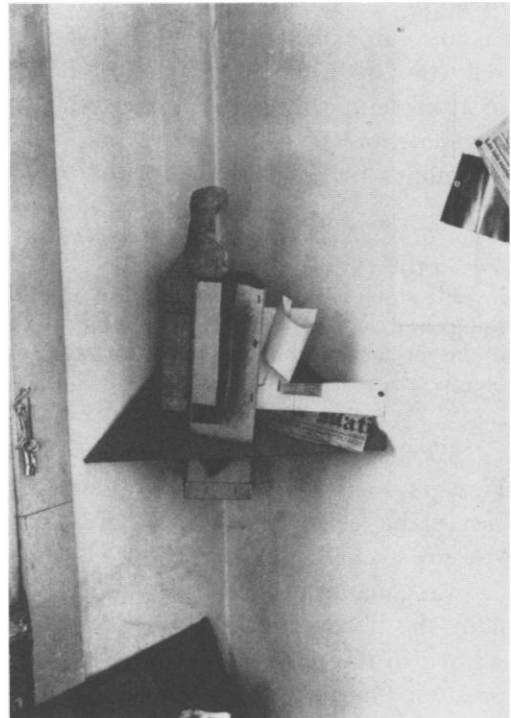
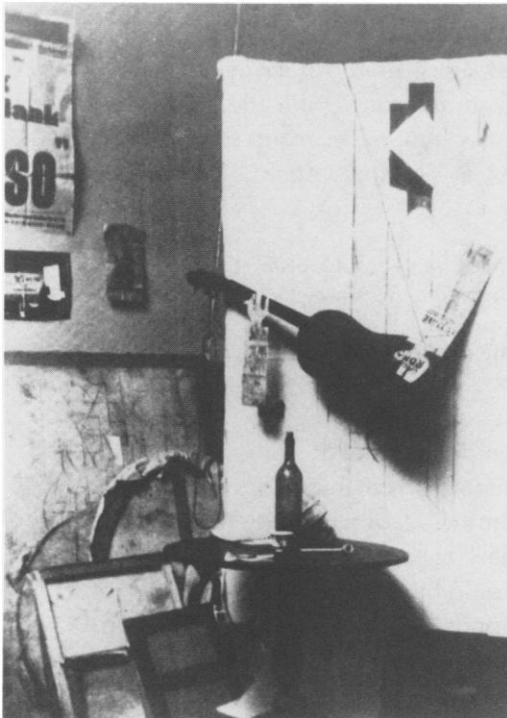


FIGURE 12 (*left*). Picasso, *Construction au joueur de guitare* (in Picasso's studio), 1913. Paper, guitar, and various objects; destroyed. Reproduced from Werner Spies, *Picasso: Das plastische Werk* (Stuttgart, 1983), 57.

FIGURE 13 (*right*). Georges Braque, *Construction* (in Braque's studio), 1913. Paper and cardboard; destroyed. This is the only existing document of Braque's paper sculptures, which were all destroyed. Reproduced from Nicole Worms de Romilly, *Braque, le cubisme: Catalogue de l'oeuvre 1907–1914* (Paris, 1982), 41.

paper legs under an actual table, on which was arranged a still life of a real bottle, pipe, and, most important, newspaper (an actual newspaper, i.e., the object that furnished the pasted figure's raw material; fig. 12). This mixing of real space and the space of art, similar to what Hildebrand abhorred in the panorama, the wax walls, and Canova's tomb, is at the heart of cubism, of the *objecthood* that it wishes to confer on the work of art and that Greenberg's reading tends to minimize if not efface. Rather than resort to a trivial conception of the "return to reality" that the collages should have achieved (and whose vacuity Greenberg has shown so adroitly), we should consider, from the perspective of cubist semiology, how "reality" in these works (the addition of real objects, the sculpting of real space) could have been incorporated—once it had been caught in a network of differences, in a system of values, once it had been transformed into a sign. Another equally significant experiment is that of Braque's unique paper sculpture, of which a trace has been conserved (fig. 13). Fixed in a room's corner, the construction annexes architectural space, its real context, by what we can call an indexical contiguity. The image's field is not separated from the supporting field; the real architectural corner is simultaneously support and part of the image. This directly anticipates Vladimir Tatlin's corner reliefs.⁸⁶

The infinite combination of arbitrary and nonsubstantial signs at the heart of a finite system of values—this is the *raisonnable* model disclosed by African art, for which, in a certain manner, the iconographic reduction of Picasso's work (emphasized, moreover, between 1912 and 1914) was preparatory.⁸⁷ When, in a moment of irritation, Picasso declared to a journalist that the African objects scattered throughout his studio were "more *witnesses* [témoins] than *examples*," he meant not only "witnesses" in the judicial sense but "landmark" [borne] and "evidence" [preuve] as well. The Grebo mask proved to him that it was not a sign's morphology that was important but its function, its value within a system. And Kahnweiler, I believe, was the first (other than Picasso, of course) to understand this,⁸⁸ just as he was the first to see how the 1912 *Guitare* opened up new perspectives. In a conversation reported by Kahnweiler, dated 9 March 1955, the artist described his repugnance before an exposition titled "The Creators of Cubism":

PICASSO: There is no cubism in all that. Everything disgusts me, my own things first of all. There is nothing good but Braque's *papiers collés* and Raynal's picture. All the rest is painting. The painted tables are even basically in perspective. What has led people astray is simply the multiple representation of objects. Whereas the *papiers collés* and the *Guitare* . . .

KAHNWEILER: Yet superimposed planes were no longer perspective.

PICASSO: No, but they were still a means of replacing it.⁸⁹

And André Salmon, one of Picasso's closest friends during the years of cubism, relates the emblematic function that the enigmatic *Guitare*, confusing all categories, played in Picasso's studio.⁹⁰

I have mentioned Kahnweiler's idea, expressed unflaggingly in his texts, that cubism is a writing (implying, thus, a reading). Unfortunately, he extended this metaphor to all of painting (defined as "formative writing"), and in terms of an obsolete linguistic conception. Not only did he commit a substantial error in his estimation of nonalphabetic writing and of the possibility of a pure pictogram, a concept now abandoned by the historians of writing, but again, as corollary, he stopped at an Adamic conception of language, in spite of his vivid understanding of the sign's differential nature.⁹¹ We can only lament that he did not have access to Saussure, for the Genevan linguist's theory would have allowed him to emerge from this imprisoning contradiction. We can see this contradiction in germ in Kahnweiler's first texts, indicating that perhaps he was not so much of a Kantian after all. In fact, in spite of his use of the Kantian notion of "dependent beauty" in speaking of the viewer's recognition of the object represented in cubist work—and in spite of his refusal to see in this act of recognition (which he called "assimilation") the scene of aesthetic pleasure⁹²—Kahnweiler founded his argument on an associationist theory of perception that obliged him to define "assimilation" as the final moment toward which all empirical commerce with the work of art is directed. Kahnweiler conceived cubism's "illegibility" early on as a provisional ill, its difficulty founded on a difference of degree and not of kind:

We also understand now why a new manner of expression, a new "style" in the fine arts often appears illegible,—as Impressionism at its time and now Cubism: the unaccustomed optical impulses do not evoke memory-images in some viewers because there is no formation of associations until finally the "writing," which initially appeared strange, becomes a habit and, after frequently seeing such pictures, the associations are finally made.⁹³

The incompatibility between Kahnweiler's Kantianism and his associationism produced a rift in his discourse. This all-too-apparent rift led him to stigmatize the "naive" spectator, who "identifies the sign with the signified" when rejecting the "askew nose" of Picasso's women, while allowing him to conceive what he called the reading of the painting as this same act of identification.⁹⁴ Once the painting is "read" according to a code, it "exists" in the spectator's "consciousness" because henceforth "he will have identified the sign with the object signified."⁹⁵ In fact, Kahnweiler lacked the concept that would have made his scriptural analogy other than an analogy: that of the referent. The naive spectator does not confound the "sign" and the signified, but, like Kahnweiler and the majority of art historians and critics, confuses the signified and the referent. As a result of this logical error, Kahnweiler's text fluctuates from siding with the "naive" spectator when speaking against the "stunted aesthetes" on the "subject in Picasso"⁹⁶ or when repudiating abstract painting (which had no signified for Kahnweiler because it had no referent in the world), only to becoming formalist again when insisting on the kinship between Mallarmé's project and that of synthetic cubism.

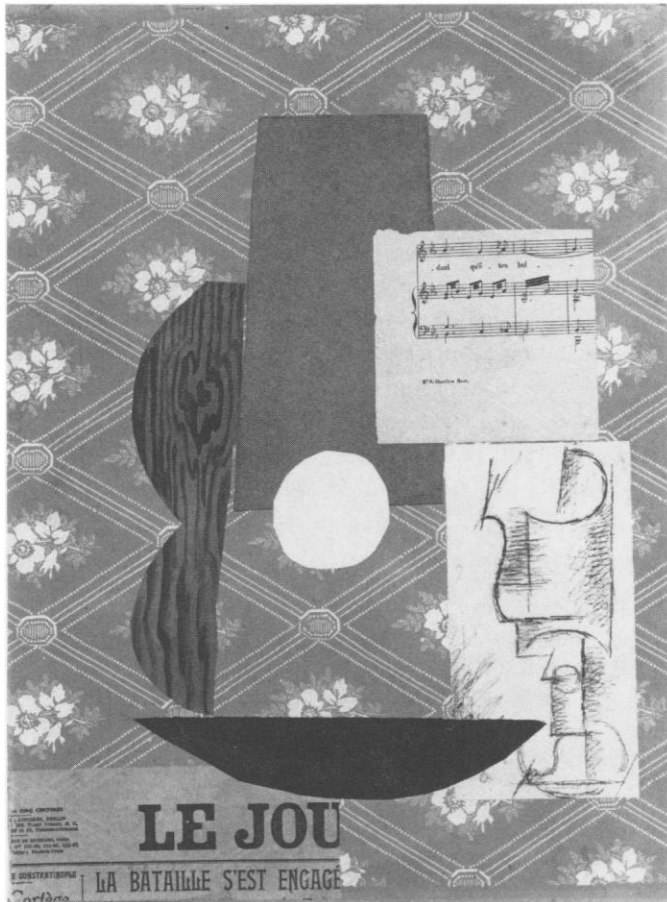


FIGURE 14. Picasso, *Guitare, partition, verre*, autumn 1912. Charcoal, gouache, and pasted paper, 24⁵/₈ × 18¹/₂". The McNay Art Institute, San Antonio, Texas.

I wish to conclude at this point, for when Kahnweiler speaks of cubism and Mallarmé, he is not satisfied with simply an anecdotal connection between this or that work of Picasso and *Un Coup de dés* (the most striking of which, participating in what we can call, after Freud, the logic of cubist “wit,” occurs in the *papier collé* where the title of the newspaper article, “un coup de théâtre,” becomes “un coup de thé”).⁹⁷ Kahnweiler links the virtuality, the nonsubstantiality of cubist signs with Mallarméan art, an art of folds, of spacing, of differentiation—of an exacerbation of the characteristics of writing, in Jacques Derrida’s broad sense. He insists on the object’s “vibratory suspension,” on the poem’s incantatory character

that makes the reader a creator. He even notes the war against chance that Mallarméan poetry endeavors to wage (the work's totalitarian structure, the determination of elements by "relations"), and links the "cubism" of Apollinaire's calligrammes to the importance of blank spaces in Mallarmé's work and their check on the signifier's linearity.⁹⁸ Kahnweiler's linking of cubist painting and Mallarmé is itself a theoretical act that makes us pardon his dogmatic anathemas against abstract painting (for which even Picasso reproached him).⁹⁹ Although he certainly was not the first to make this connection (as early as 1911, Ardengo Soffici wrote in *La Voce* that Braque's and Picasso's paintings "have the quality of a hieroglyph which serves to write a lyric reality . . . identical to a certain extent with Stéphane Mallarmé's elliptic syntax and grammatical transpositions"),¹⁰⁰ he was the first to understand its significance.

Rather than enter upon this issue in detail, which would be the subject of another article, I would like to quote these lines of Mallarmé's *Magie*, which served as a basis for Kahnweiler's connection. I cite them in relation to *Guitare, partition, verre* (fig. 14), one of Picasso's first *papiers collés*, which was completed some months after the *Guitare*, once the shock of the Grebo mask had been absorbed:

To evoke, in deliberate obscurity, the silenced object by allusive, indirect words, that amount to a uniform stillness, admits an attempt close to creating: verisimilar at the edge of the idea solely set into play by the enchanter of letters, until indeed, some illusion equal to the gaze shimmers. Verse, incantatory trace! and we will not deny to the circle which rhyme perpetually closes and opens, a resemblance with the fairy's or the magician's rounds amid the grass.¹⁰¹

—Translated by Katharine Streip

Notes

1. Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, *My Galleries and Painters*, dialogues with Francis Crémieux, trans. Helen Weaver (New York, 1971), 74.
2. Jacques de Gachons, "La Peinture d'après-demain (?)," *Je sais tout*, 15 April 1912, 349–51; quoted at length in Werner Spies, "Vendre des tableaux: Donner à lire," in *Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler: Marchand, éditeur, écrivain*, Exhibition catalogue, Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris, 1984), 17–44.
3. Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, *The Rise of Cubism*, trans. Henry Aronson (New York, 1949), 13; originally published as articles in the *Zürich Weissen Blätter* in 1916, reissued as a collection in 1920, and soon to be republished, with many essays previously unpublished in English, as *Aesthetic Confessions*, ed. and trans. Orde Levinson, by MIT Press. The first seeds of this text on cubism date from 1915, when Kahnweiler wrote the manuscript of *Der Gegenstand der Aesthetik*, not published until 1971 in Munich, and which bears the trace of his theoretical "apprenticeship" at Berne. The last three chapters of this book are dedicated to cubism and include a good

section of what became *The Rise of Cubism*. I thank Orde Levinson for acquainting me with this text.

On the titling of cubist paintings by Kahnweiler, see William Rubin, "From Narrative to 'Iconic': The Buried Allegory in *Bread and Fruit Dish on a Table* and the Role of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*," *Art Bulletin* 65, no. 4 (December 1983): 618, n. 13. Doubtless Kahnweiler's titles were occasionally inappropriate, as Picasso wrote him from Ceret in June 1912, concerning a painting that Kahnweiler wished to buy from him: "I don't understand the title you gave it"; cited in *Donation Louise et Michel Leiris*, Exhibition catalogue, Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris, 1984), 166. Otherwise, *Bouteille de marc de Bourgogne, verre, journal* (1913) seems to be the only one of Picasso's paintings named by the painter. It includes on the back an inscription in his hand: "A bottle of Burgundian marc on a round table / a glass and a newspaper in the background / a mirror / 1913 / Picasso" (we note, however, that the "mirror" has disappeared); Pierre Daix, *Le Cubisme de Picasso: Catalogue raisonné de l'oeuvre peint, 1907–1916* (Neuchâtel, 1979), p. 297, no. 567.

4. The final chapter of *Der Gegenstand der Aesthetik*, titled "Die Ausläufer des Kubismus" (The offshoots of cubism), already includes a critique of abstraction as hedonistic decoration, incapable of articulating a sense of space.
5. Kahnweiler, *My Galleries and Painters*, 42.
6. *Ibid.* On Kahnweiler's "negative publicity," see Spies, "Vendre des tableaux," 20.
7. Kahnweiler, *My Galleries and Painters*, 22.
8. Spies, "Vendre des tableaux," 33.
9. The facts are well known and reported in detail in *My Galleries and Painters*, 50. Kahnweiler was in Rome the day war was declared. This was, for him, "an unspeakable laceration." As a German, he did not wish to fight for Germany; French by choice, he did not wish to take part in the butchery. The French government's sequestration of his possessions, his retreat to Switzerland, and, as a final blow, as late as 1921–23, the absurd liquidation of his collection in public sale by the state followed. On this grotesque episode of the Third Republic's cultural policy and its intentional nature, see Jeanne Laurent, *Arts et pouvoirs*, (St. Etienne, 1982), 116–20.
10. Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, "Die Grenzen der Kunstgeschichte," *Monatshefte für Kunstwissenschaft* 13, no. 1 (April, 1920): 91–97; to appear in English in *Aesthetic Confessions*. Shortly after, Erwin Panofsky also cited Georg Simmel's article, "Das Problem der historischen Zeit" (in *Philosophische Vorträge* 12 [1916]; later published in Simmel, *Essays on Interpretation in Social Science*, ed. Guy Oakes [Totowa, N.J., 1980], 127–44); see Panofsky, "Zur Problem der historischen Zeit" (1927), reprinted in *Aufsätze zu Grundfragen der Kunstwissenschaft*, ed. H. Oberer and E. Verheyen (Berlin, 1974), 77–83.
11. See Spies's excellent article, "Vendre des tableaux," to which I owe a good part of what follows. See also Arnold Gehlen, "D.-H. Kahnweilers Kunstphilosophie," in *Pour Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler*, ed. Werner Spies (Stuttgart, 1965), 92–103. Gehlen and Spies justly compare Kahnweiler's position (well summarized in this sentence: "Only the man who is intimate with the painting of his time sees truly, fully") with Fiedler's; for Fiedler, not only is art a means of knowledge (nonconceptual) of the real, but at the extreme only the artist is able to see truly works of art.
12. Spies refers in his article to Apollinaire's irritated letter to Kahnweiler after learning of Kahnweiler's little interest in his book, *Les Peintres cubistes*; "Vendre des tableaux," 35.

13. On the legend of Bergson as godfather to cubism, see Edward Fry, *Cubism* (New York, 1978), 67. More recently, Timothy Mitchell has tried to demonstrate that “Bergson’s philosophy is as important to the development of Cubism as Schelling’s Nature Philosophy was to German Romantic painting,” which makes no sense unless one considers only, as does Mitchell, Jean Metzinger’s minor cubism and his theory; “Bergson, Le Bon, and Hermetic Cubism,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 36 (Winter 1977): 175–83. Kahnweiler never ceased to maintain his scorn for Albert Gleizes and Metzinger’s book (*Du Cubisme*, 1912) and to insist on Picasso’s small esteem for it; *My Galleries and Painters*, 43.
14. Maurice Raynal, “Conception et vision,” *Gil Blas*, 29 August 1912; reprinted in Fry, *Cubism*, 94.
15. Rosalind Krauss has shown all the benefits that can be drawn from an invocation of Berkeley apropos of cubism in her review of the exhibition “The Cubist Epoch,” *Artforum* 9, no. 6 (February 1971): 32–38.
16. Kahnweiler, *The Rise of Cubism*, 12. If Kahnweiler “effaced” almost all direct reference to Kant in *The Rise of Cubism*, it is noteworthy that Kant’s name occurs much more frequently in *Der Gegenstand der Aesthetik*, at the same time that Kahnweiler was undergoing his philosophical apprenticeship. Here, Kahnweiler refers most frequently to the Kant of the *Critique of Judgment*, while later references more frequently concern the first two critiques. See also the “ideal library” Kahnweiler proposed to Raymond Queneau, in which only the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Critique of Practical Reason* appear; Raymond Queneau, “D.-H. Kahnweiler,” in *Pour une bibliothèque idéale* (Paris, 1956), 156. (I thank Orde Levinson for this reference.) A rigorous analysis of Kahnweiler’s Kantianism should examine the privilege granted the two first critiques over the third, and the link there may be between this (neo-Kantian) privilege and Kahnweiler’s theory of perception, in that it contradicts certain of Kant’s propositions in the *Critique of Judgment*.
17. On this claimed unfinished status, see Leo Steinberg’s refutation in “The Philosophical Brothel,” *Art News* 71, no. 5 (September 1977): 20–29, and no. 6 (October 1977): 38–47; and the restatement by William Rubin contributing many documentary “proofs” in “From Narrative to ‘Iconic,’” 647–49.
18. Kahnweiler, *The Rise of Cubism*, 8. Picasso’s witticism can be found a few paragraphs above: “In a Raphael painting it is not possible to establish the distance from the tip of the nose to the mouth—I should like to paint pictures in which that would be possible.”
19. Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, *Juan Gris: His Life and Work*, trans. Douglas Cooper (London, 1947), 78.
20. Alexandre Koyré, “La Dynamique de Nicolo Tartaglia” (1957); reprinted in *Etudes d’histoire de la pensée scientifique* (Paris, 1973), 117.
21. To appear in English in *Aesthetic Confessions*. For Erwin Panofsky’s commentary on this text, criticizing Kahnweiler’s reading of Riegl as too influenced by Worringer, see “The Concept of Artistic Volition” (1920), trans. Kenneth Northcott and Joel Snyder, *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 1 (Autumn 1981): 24, n. 7.
22. Kahnweiler dated these two works incorrectly. He placed the first in spring 1910, whereas it dates from winter 1909–10, but particularly he dated *Le Portugais* (which he named *Joueur de guitare*) as summer 1910, while it is actually from 1911. His argument does not suffer from this, however, because although shifted in time, the logic of sequence is maintained.
23. “Thus Picasso painted figures resembling Congo sculpture”; Kahnweiler, *The Rise of*

- Cubism*, 8. This is all we find on African art and Picasso's "Negro" period in this text. On the other hand, the Ivory Coast mask is already associated with what Kahnweiler called the "open form" in Picasso's constructions, but in a rather elliptical manner. What engaged him especially at this time (and this interpretation seems more linked to the late phase of analytic cubism than to the constructions properly speaking) is the combination of "a scheme of forms and 'real details' (the painted eyes, mouth, and hair) as stimuli" (16).
24. See Pierre Daix, "Il n'y a pas 'd'art nègre' dans *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*," *Gazette des beaux-arts* 76 (October 1970): 247–70; and its refutation by Rubin at the time in "From Narrative to 'Iconic,'" 632ff.; and in his "Picasso," in "*Primitivism*" in *Twentieth-Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, Exhibition catalogue, Museum of Modern Art, 2 vols. (New York, 1984), 1:254ff.
 25. Kahnweiler, *Gris*, 75–76. "Negro Art and Cubism" appeared in English in *Horizon* 18, no. 108 (December 1948): 412–20. I believe it is no accident that William Rubin, who organized the New York exhibit, found this text "confused and confusing"; "*Primitivism*," 1:310. Brassai's book of photographs, for which Kahnweiler wrote the preface, *The Sculptures of Picasso*, appeared in English in 1949, trans. A. D. B. Sylvester (London), unpaginated.
 26. Kahnweiler, "Negro Art and Cubism," 412.
 27. Kahnweiler, preface to *The Sculptures of Picasso*.
 28. James Johnson Sweeney, "Picasso and Iberian Sculpture," *Art Bulletin* 23 (September 1941): 192–98.
 29. On these points see Jean Laude, *La Peinture française (1905–1914) et 'L'Art nègre'* (Paris, 1968), 257 and 262. In "Negro Art and Cubism," Kahnweiler distinguishes very clearly between the initial interest in masks (which are "reliefs") and the later interest in statuary (417, n. 2).
 30. I disagree here with Jean Laude, who cites André Breton with approbation: "'They have nothing in common with expressionist deformations,' André Breton correctly emphasized, in 1933, of the 1906–7 heads in *quart-de-brie*"; *La Peinture française*, 260. On the one hand, as both Leo Steinberg and Rubin have noted, it would be reductive to evacuate entirely the "savage" and (sexual) apotropaic connotations of the "Negro" heads of the right section of the *Demoiselles d'Avignon* and the works that followed. On the other hand, we should beware of confusing psychological inexpressiveness and anti-expressionism. Laude remarks, moreover, that Picasso's interest in African masks stemmed not only from their character of relief but from their psychological "emptiness," this interest being an issue, as well, of his difficulties at the time in his creation of the *Portrait de Gertrude Stein* and the solution he found in borrowing, for the writer's countenance, from Iberian sculpture (251). The expressionist deformation of the mask functions as a sign of a refusal of psychological depth.
 31. For an illustration of the borrowings in which Epstein and Karl Schmidt-Rotluff indulged, see "*Primitivism*," 2:397 and 438–39.
 32. Kahnweiler, preface to *The Sculptures of Picasso*. I have corrected the "Wobé" of the original text to "Grebo," according to the attribution of these masks given by experts.
 33. Rubin cites Salmon's account numerous times. "The images from Polynesia or Dahomey appeared to him as 'reasonable';" André Salmon, "Petite Histoire anecdotique du cubisme" (1912); reprinted in Fry, *Cubism*, 82. However, Rubin minimizes its scope considerably in interpreting it as meaning "factual" or "tangible" and pointing out from this an affinity with the style of Picasso's "Negro" period ("tactile,"

- “sculptural”), in opposition to the purely pictorial considerations of analytic cubism; *Primitivism*,” 1:309, n. 175.
34. Kahnweiler, “Negro Art and Cubism,” 419.
 35. Kahnweiler, preface to *The Sculptures of Picasso*.
 36. William Rubin, who found Kahnweiler’s text “confused and confusing” (see note 25), created, in fact, a confusion regarding this notion in Kahnweiler’s work. Kahnweiler associated “transparency” with the “superimposed planes” of Braque’s and Picasso’s painting in 1912, while Rubin believes that Kahnweiler associated it with the facts of analytic cubism, to which he finds an equivalent in the transparency of Antoine Pevsner’s sculptures. Against the ideology of transparency, see Rosalind Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), esp. 47–51, where cubist relief is interpreted as a war machine destined to sap the foundation of Western sculpture up to Rodin.
 37. Kahnweiler, preface to *The Sculptures of Picasso*.
 38. Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, “Das Wesen der Bildhauerei,” was published for the first time in the Weimar review *Feuer* in November–December 1919 (vol. 1, nos. 2–3, pp. 145–56); to appear in English in *Aesthetic Confessions*.
 39. Adolf von Hildebrand, *Das Problem der Form in den bildenden Künsten* (Strasbourg, 1893); the American edition is *The Problem of Form in Painting and Sculpture*, trans. Max Meyer and Robert M. Ogden (New York, 1907), 113.
 40. I have noted elsewhere the relation between Hildebrand’s position and Greenberg’s; Yve-Alain Bois, “The Sculptural Opaque,” *Substance* 31 (1981): 23–48. It is never as clear as in Clement Greenberg’s suppression in the second version of his essay “The New Sculpture,” published in *Art and Culture* (Boston, 1961), of the passage from the first version, published in *The Partisan Review*, where he assimilated modern sculpture to an object “as palpable and independent and present as the house we live in and the furniture we use”; “The New Sculpture,” *Partisan Review* 16, no. 6 (June 1949): 641. In other respects, Michael Fried was to take up again Greenberg’s second position. It is not fortuitous that we encounter under Hildebrand’s signature a condemnation of Canova’s theatricality as radical as that by Fried of the theatricality of minimalism; see “Art and Objecthood” (1967), reprinted in Gregory Battcock, ed., *Minimal Art* (New York, 1968), 116–47. In truth, Fried’s position is more complex and merits a longer development here. As he has himself indicated to me, his notion of anti-objecthood originated from a reading of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and in particular of “Le Langage indirect et les voix du silence” (in *Signes* [Paris, 1960], 49–104), which rests directly on Saussure. In his first text on Anthony Caro, from which a number of formulations were to be taken up again in “Art and Objecthood,” Fried proposed three notions of anti-objecthood. The first is “syntactic” and implicitly Saussurian (Caro’s sculpture functioning according to a system of differences), the second “optical” in Greenberg’s sense (concerning the use of color in Caro’s work), and the third more directly phenomenological, considering sculpture as bringing about a dialogue, by the indirect means of an abstract “gesturing,” with the world in which our bodies move. See Michael Fried, “Anthony Caro,” *Art International* 7, no. 7 (September 1963): 68–72.
 41. Clement Greenberg, “Collage,” reprinted in *Art and Culture*, 79.
 42. See Greenberg, “The New Sculpture” (second version): “Sculpture can confine itself to virtually two dimensions (as some of David Smith’s pieces do) without being felt to violate the limitations of its medium” (143). An argument in favor of the “opticality” of sculpture follows.

43. See William Rubin, *Picasso in the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art* (New York, 1972), 207. *La Nature morte au cannage de chaise* belongs to the series of oval still lifes begun after 1 February 1912 (publication of the booklet *Notre Avenir est dans l'air*, whose cover figures in three of these paintings; see Daix, *Le Cubisme de Picasso*, p. 278, nos. 463–66). It was finished before Picasso's departure for the South, as he mentioned it to Kahnweiler among the works remaining in Paris that he wished to keep (see *Donation Michel and Louise Leiris*, 167).
44. For a very clear distinction between the two, see Jean Laude, *La Peinture française*, 368–71, where it appears that Picasso only realized a handful of “collages.”
45. Edward Fry, review Daix, *Le Cubisme de Picasso*, in *Art Journal* 41, no. 1 (Spring 1971), 93–95. According to Fry, who cites a number of documents, Picasso should have bought his Grebo mask at the time of a trip to Marseilles in August 1912, which is quite possible. This said, the fact that Picasso had possessed another Grebo mask (referred to by William Rubin to challenge the terms of this argument; Laude maintains in another connection that Picasso owned the second mask as early as 1910) shows rather that the question is not that of the date of purchase but of an “epiphany” that could have occurred much later, and for which we must seek evidence in the work, not in the circumstances.
46. On the contrary, the absence of *papiers collés* in the Museum of Modern Art's “*Primitivism*” exhibition seems a symptom of blindness issuing directly from a noncritical adherence to Greenberg's reading, a blindness even more astonishing in that the exhibition opened with the Grebo mask/1912 *Guitare* pair, which might have made us think that Kahnweiler's lesson had been understood.
47. Carl Einstein, *Negerplastik* (Leipzig, 1915); French translation in *Médiations* 3 (Paris, 1961), 93–113; see also Jean Laude's introduction, 83–91. Certainly Einstein's interpretation, typical of German neo-Kantianism, insists much more on the shaping of space in African art than on the constitution of the figurative object, but we will see that it is precisely the inseparability of these two instances, once we have set aside the opposition figure/background, that Picasso discovered in African art. In fact, modeling is not completely foreign to African art (and is even rather important for the art of the Yoruba, the Baoulé, and Benin); however, the cubists, contrary to the Fauves, and especially in the second phase of their interest in African art (discussed here), favored the austere and hieratic art of Sudanese cultures and of the Dogon, an art that took nothing from traditional modeling.
48. On this point, see David Summers, “*Figure come Fratelli: A Transformation of Symmetry in Renaissance Painting*,” *The Art Quarterly*, n.s., 1, no. 1 (1977): 66–69.
49. Kahnweiler, “*Negro Art and Cubism*,” 416. (This is also reported in his preface to *The Sculptures of Picasso*.) Daix writes, “Picasso confirmed to me that he had destroyed this still life or ‘that he had made something else with it’” (*Le Cubisme de Picasso*, 83), which seems perfectly plausible.
50. Conversely, Jean Laude is perfectly correct in writing that André Derain “did not draw all the consequences from his discovery” of African art when the painter described his visit to the “*Musée nègre*” of London (the British Museum) to Vlaminck in these terms: “It is therefore understood that relations of volume can express light or the coincidence of light with this or that form”; Laude, *La Peinture française*, 303.
51. Werner Spies, “*La Guitare anthropomorphe*,” *La Revue de l'art* 12 (1971): 91. Kahnweiler remarks also, in his preface to *The Sculptures of Picasso*, on the exacerbated pictorialism of this *Tête*.

52. Kahnweiler, preface to *The Sculptures of Picasso*.
53. Kahnweiler, *Rise of Cubism*, 10.
54. On the circumstances of the editing of these two texts, see Jean-Louis Paudrat, "From Africa," in "Primitivism," 1:149–51. Einstein's book was doubtless written at the beginning of 1914 (its publication was slightly delayed by the war), Markov's book at the end of 1913 to the beginning of 1914.
55. Vladimir Markov, *Iskusstvo negrov*, was translated and published in French by Jean-Louis Paudrat as "L'Art des nègres," *Cahiers du Musée national d'art moderne* 2 (Paris, 1979): 319–27. In his introduction, Paudrat gives some biographical information on Markov, resituates his work in the context of the period, and ends on Markov's conception of "montage" ("a dynamic assemblage of heterogeneous materials"), which he compares to the organizing principles of Picasso's *papiers collés* and Tatlin's *contre-reliefs*.
56. See Einstein, *Negerplastik*, 99–100. Markov cites Picasso's remark (reported by Yakov Tugendhold): "It is not the characteristics of these sculptures that interests me, it is their geometric simplicity"; "L'Art des nègres," 324.
57. Spies, "Vendre des tableaux," 38.
58. See M. O. Čudakova and E. A. Toddes, "La Première Traduction russe du *Cours de linguistique générale* de F. de Saussure et l'activité du Cercle Linguistique de Moscou," *Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure* 36 (1982): 63–91. The article retraces the diffusion of Saussure's book in Moscow, and analyzes the response of Russian linguists at the time of their first confrontation with the Saussurian theory. Even before the (restricted) diffusion of the *Course* in Russia, Saussure's ideas were known by his student Sergei Karcevskii (76). See Roman Jakobson, "Sergej Karcevskij," in *Selected Writings*, vol. 2 (The Hague, 1971), 517–21.
59. Immediately after a passage on Karcevskii in the postface of the first volume of the *Selected Writings* (The Hague, 1962), Jakobson wrote:

Perhaps the strongest impulse toward a shift in the approach to language and linguistics, however, was—for me, at least—the turbulent artistic movement of the early twentieth century. The extraordinary capacity of these discoverers to overcome again and again the faded habits of their own yesterdays . . . is intimately allied to their unique feeling for the dialectic tension between the parts and the uniting whole, and between the conjugated parts, primarily between the two aspects of any artistic sign, its *signans* and its *signatum*.

See also on this point the interview with Jakobson published by Jean-Pierre Faye in *Le Récit humique* (Paris, 1967), where the linguist relates, "In 1913–14, I lived among the painters. I was the friend of Malevich" (281). The best analysis of what cubist painting represented for Jakobson can be found in *What Is Poetry?* (1933–34); *Selected Writings*, vol. 3 (The Hague, 1981), 750.

60. Roman Jakobson, "Structuralisme et téléologie" (1975), in *Selected Writings*, vol. 7 (Berlin, New York, Amsterdam, 1985), 125.
61. Jakobson insisted many times on Baudouin de Courtenay's role as precursor; see "Jan Baudouin de Courtenay," *Selected Writings*, 2:389–93. N. Slusareva has shown that a great number of Russian linguists were struck, once acquainted with the *Course*, by the similarity between Saussure's ideas and those of their teacher; "Quelques considérations des linguistes soviétiques à propos des idées de F. de Saussure," *Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure* 20 (1963): 23–46, esp. 27–28. On Baudouin de Courtenay, see

- the critical edition of Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale* by Tulio de Mauro (Paris, 1973), 339–40.
62. An excellent general view, taking into account the works proliferating after the appearance of the *Course* up to 1962, is given in Rudolf Engler, "Théorie et critique d'un principe saussurien: L'Arbitraire du signe," *Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure* 19 (1962): 5–65.
 63. Handwritten notes cited by Engler, *ibid.*, 59.
 64. Handwritten note cited by de Mauro in his edition of the *Cours*, 440.
 65. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (New York, 1966), 120. Rosalind Krauss was the first to cite this passage in connection with Picasso's cubist work, and specifically with the *papiers collés*; "In the Name of Picasso" (1981); reprinted in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985), 23–40. Her interpretation of cubism by way of Saussure is situated in a poststructuralist perspective that I do not hold here, preferring to keep to the more classical structuralist aspects of Saussurian linguistics in order to trace a relation between it and cubism. The elements that we bring forward from cubist work are not exactly the same. It is therefore appropriate that we do not "need" identical aspects of the same theory. This removes nothing from the fact that I owe much to her interpretation.
 66. The appearance of the word *positive* seems so strange here, at first reading, that we might be tempted to believe this an interpolation by the editors of the *Course*. For once, our suspicions are unfounded. The recent publication of students' notebooks that served as a basis for the edition of the *Course* shows that *positive* figures in three of these notebooks; Rudolf Engler, critical edition of the *Cours de linguistique générale*, vol. 1 (Wiesbaden, 1968), 272.
 67. Saussure, *Course*, 122.
 68. I cite this from the student notebooks published by Engler, *Cours*, 259, rather than from the *Course*, because the diagram, which shows very clearly that value is dependent on the paradigmatic relation and on the syntagmatic relation, was omitted by the editors of the *Course*.
 69. René Amacker, "Sur la notion de 'valeur,'" in *Studi saussuriani per Robert Godel* (Bologna, 1972), 14. This text represents, to this day, the best explanation of this particularly complex notion.
 70. Saussure frequently uses the metaphor of a chess game. The example of the knight can be found on p. 110 of the *Course* (for other occurrences, see pp. 22 and 88ff.). Matisse, as well, had a predilection for this metaphor; see *Matisse on Art*, ed. Jack D. Flam (London, 1973), 72 and 137.
 71. Student note cited by Amacker, "Sur la notion de 'valeur,'" 15. "Signification" appears in the place of "value" in the manuscript. I follow Amacker's correction here.
 72. Saussure, *Course*, 115–16.
 73. *Ibid.*, 133. The student notebooks read "limitation of arbitrariness in relation to the idea"; see Engler, *Cours*, 301.
 74. *Ibid.*
 75. Engler, "Théorie et critique," 10.
 76. Saussure, *Course*, 132. I have corrected the mistake of the American translator, who inverted the \times sign with the $+$ sign. With respect to "Teach \times er," Saussure referred to a preceding passage of the *Course*, which seems particularly pertinent in relation to cubism as it concerns the "syntagmatic solidarities"; cf. pp. 127–28.
 77. The gravest error of the editors of the *Course*, aside from the addition of the little

drawing of the tree in this chapter, was to have introduced a passage on the *unmotivated* character of the sign (figuring in a later lesson) in the passage concerning radical semiological arbitrariness, which must be distinguished from relative linguistic arbitrariness. Their interpolation reads as follows: “The word *arbitrary* also calls for comment. The term should not imply that the choice of the signifier is left entirely to the speaker. . . . I mean that it is unmotivated, i.e., arbitrary in that it actually has no natural connection with the signified” (68–69). The arbitrariness of the sign absolutely does not concern, in Saussure’s work, the relation between sign and referent but that between the signifier and the signified.

78. Kahnweiler, preface to *The Sculptures of Picasso*.
79. Student note in Engler, *Cours*, 261.
80. Rather than compare Picasso’s formidable *Tête* (1930), which effects this transformation of mouth to vagina, with the Jukun mask, which relates to it vaguely from a morphological point of view, the organizers of the Museum of Modern Art “*Primitivism*” exhibit could have compared it to an object having only a structural connection with it, effecting the same type of metaphorization, inasmuch as this semantic transformation is well described by William Rubin in his introduction to the catalogue (1:60). Picasso’s *Tête* and the Jukun mask are reproduced in the same work, 1:320–21.
81. See Daix, *Le Cubisme de Picasso*, p. 303, nos. 594–98.
82. Kahnweiler, preface to *The Sculptures of Picasso*.
83. Leo Stein, *Appreciation: Painting, Poetry and Prose* (New York, 1947), 177; cited by Fry, *Cubism*, 39.
84. Kahnweiler, preface to *The Sculptures of Picasso*.
85. Paul M. Laporte has perceived, on the contrary, a great similarity between Hildebrand’s theory of perception in his treatise and Braque’s and Picasso’s cubism. It is true that he only speaks in rather general terms of the works of these last, and that he keeps to “analytic” cubism, which accommodates itself very well to remarks on the inherent ambiguity in the perception of volume. Laporte never broaches the essential problem in Hildebrand’s work that preoccupies us here, the relation between sculpture and real space. If we can admit in a strict sense a certain relation between Hildebrand’s theory and analytic cubism (although this seems dubious and not very profitable), it still is impossible to elaborate such a relation for all of Braque and Picasso’s production after the 1912 rupture that I have tried to describe. See Paul M. Laporte, “Cubism and Science,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 7, no. 3 (March 1949): 243–56.
86. Picasso’s experiment was published for the first time in *Cahiers d’art* 25, no. 2 (1950): 282; see Daix, *Le Cubisme de Picasso*, p. 299, no. 578. Braque’s sculpture is reproduced in Nicole Worms de Romilly, *Braque, le cubisme: Catalogue de l’oeuvre 1907–1914*, preface by Jean Laude (Paris, 1982), 41.
87. See Jean Laude, *La Peinture française*, 390, for a comparison between the reduced iconographic repertoire of cubism and the vocabulary of African art.
88. In spite of his rich examination of the relation between African art and cubism during the years 1907–9, and in spite of his brilliant analysis of the characteristics of this art and the many points it had in common with the cubism of the following years, Jean Laude barely perceived the importance of the shock experienced by Picasso in 1912. Laude places the start of a more “profound” interest in this art in 1909, when Picasso had ceased to borrow directly from the forms of African art (*ibid.*, 323); he therefore does not make the *Guitare* an inaugural moment in Picasso’s work. His

proposed formal and functional analysis of African art remains to this day, after that of Einstein, the richest; see esp. 372–73, 382–88.

89. Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, “Entretiens avec Picasso,” *Quadrum* 2 (November 1956): 74. The allusion to “Raynal’s picture” is explained in this manner by Kahnweiler: “This concerned one of Picasso’s pictures (from the year 1917) belonging to Maurice Raynal, a picture representing a guitar and painted with the use of sand.”
90. See André Salmon, *La Jeune Sculpture française* (Paris, 1919), 103–4:

Some witnesses, already shocked by the things covering the walls, which they refused to call pictures because they were made with oilcloth, packing paper, and newspapers, said while pointing with superiority at the object to which Picasso had devoted the most thought and care:

—What is that? Does that rest on a pedestal? Does that hang on the wall? Is it painting or sculpture?

Picasso, dressed in the blue of Parisian artists, responded in his most beautiful Andalusian voice:

—It’s nothing, it’s “el guitare!”

And thus the watertight compartments were demolished. We were delivered from painting and sculpture, liberated from the imbecilic tyranny of genres. This is no longer this and that is no longer that. It’s nothing, it’s “el guitare!”

91. For Kahnweiler’s theory of writing, which postulates a double origin of languages (pictographic from painting; alphabetic from mnemonotechnical signs), see *Gris*, 35–46. Kahnweiler’s conceptions, and the works to which he referred, have been made obsolete by more recent research. See I. J. Gelb, *A Study of Writing* (Chicago, 1952), passim.
92. See Kahnweiler, *Der Gegenstand der Aesthetik*, chap. 14, pp. 54–55.
93. *Ibid.*, chap. 3, p. 26. I quote Orde Levinson’s translation here. Kant explicitly rejects “associations” in the formation of the judgment of taste; *Critique of Judgement*, trans. J. H. Bernard (New York, 1951), 77ff., but his point of view is not so removed from Kahnweiler’s when he announces several times, as Michael Podro has noted, that aesthetic satisfaction can elude us on the one hand when we are confronted by too familiar objects and on the other hand when we are not familiar enough with the elements that we need to arrange, nor practiced enough in the unification of these elements; see Podro, *The Manifold in Perception* (Oxford, 1972), 19–21.
94. Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, “Le Vérable Béarnais” (1947), to appear in *Aesthetic Confessions*.
95. Kahnweiler, *Gris*, 40.
96. Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, “Le Sujet chez Picasso” (1951), to appear in *Aesthetic Confessions*.
97. Daix, *Le Cubisme de Picasso*, p. 293, no. 542. On Picasso and Mallarmé, see Ronald Johnson’s article, which records the occurrences of these references in his cubist work; “Picasso’s Musical and Mallarméan Constructions,” *Arts Magazine* 51, no. 7 (March 1977): 122–27. On Mallarmé and cubism in general, see Laude, *La Peinture française*, 351; and Christopher Green, “Purity, Poetry and the Painting of Juan Gris,” *Art History* 5, no. 2 (June 1982): 182 and passim.
98. Apart from the text titled “Mallarmé et la peinture,” to appear in *Aesthetic Confessions*, Kahnweiler insisted on the relation in his book on Juan Gris. See particularly *Gris*, 90–91 and 130, as well as 46, n. 1, on Apollinaire.
99. “Two days before, he had reproached me violently because I was attacking abstract

art”; Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, “Entretiens avec Picasso au sujet des Femmes d’Alger,” *Aujourd’hui* 4 (September 1955): 12. See, for example, in *Juan Gris*, his attack against Mondrian. “Mondrian’s so-called paintings are unfinished because there is no means of finishing them; they are not paintings, that is to say, writing. They never get beyond the preliminary stage, so they are a kind of decoration” (118). For a critique of the notion of reading in Kahnweiler’s work, see Spies, “Vendre des tableaux,” 40–41.

100. Cited by Laude, preface to de Romilly, *Braque, le cubisme*, 53. See also Gino Severini, “Symbolisme plastique et symbolisme littéraire,” *Mercure de France*, 1 February 1916, 466–76, which averts the traditional parallel between Mallarmé and impressionism in order to compare the “partitioning of ideas” of the poet with the “partitioning of form” of Braque and Picasso (esp. 468–69).

101. Stéphane Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris, 1945), 400:

Evoquer, dans une ombre exprès, l’objet tu, par des mots allusifs, jamais directs, se réduisant à du silence égal, comporte tentative proche de créer: vraisemblable dans la limite de l’idée uniquement mise en jeu par l’enchantement de lettres jusqu’à ce que, certes, scintille, quelque illusion égale au regard. Le vers, trait incantatoire! et on ne dénierait au cercle que perpétuellement ferme, ouvre la rime une similitude avec les ronds, parmi l’herbe, de la fée ou du magicien.