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Studies in American Fiction, Volume 39, Issue 2, Fall 2012, pp. 175-205 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: [10.1353/saf.2012.0011](https://doi.org/10.1353/saf.2012.0011)



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"Shutters Shut and Open": Making Sense of Gertrude Stein's Second Portrait of Picasso

Linda Voris

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Now that one can listen to Gertrude Stein reading "If I Told Him / A Completed Portrait of Picasso" (1923) in an audio recording available online, it seems especially odd that we should have no adequate critical interpretation of this remarkable verbal portrait.¹ Certainly the difficulty of the portrait method presents a formidable obstacle. "If I Told Him" is Stein's second portrait of the artist and one of a series of second portraits she wrote in a style that relies heavily on monosyllabic words, particularly shifters and modifiers, whose exacting operations result in an anti-mimetic, monochromatic surface. Indeed, one critic proposes that "If I Told Him" can serve as an example of what her detractors deem "solipsistic" and nonsensical in a Stein text.² Another obstacle to critical understanding of the portrait stems from its apparent subject and its claims for portraiture. Understandably, critics are tempted to read the portrait of Picasso for biographical clues and to emphasize referential elements of the portrait in order to address its textual opacity. Readings based on a biographical interpretation select elements accordingly, often omitting much of the text and, as I will explain, reading past the method of the portrait and undermining its experiment. For as many critics note, Stein's portraits deliberately contest conventions of representation based on resemblance. By resemblance is meant the expectation that the portrait be a likeness of the subject, reproducing his or her appearance in physical and characteristic attributes in keeping with realist conventions. But not only does Stein's text refuse to conform to an expectation that portraiture is the art of resemblance, it has also proven highly resistant to interpretation as an experimental text that "makes sense" in the compositional terms of its unfolding verbal surface.

I propose that we can resolve the critical dilemma elicited by the portrait in its dueling claims for portraiture and compositional experiment by recognizing Stein's radical epistemology. For Stein, the portrait is an experiment in representation that turns on an investigation of knowledge claims. In my view, the experimental work of the early twenties that led to this series of second portraits coincides with an important epistemological shift for Stein, one that motivates the textual strategies she deploys in "If I Told Him," among other texts of the period. Far from unreadable, "If I Told Him" can serve as an instructive text because it presents critical epistemological questions she then engaged and the resultant challenges for writing, including how to make "knowing" a compositional effect rather than a report or recollection. I argue that an understanding of Stein's epistemology during this period can help us as readers and critics to adopt a more radical critical practice. Once we recognize that reference or denotation in the text accords with a radical empiricist and not a representational theory of knowledge, then we cannot continue to reinstate the rationalist premises of conventional representation. We need a new and more dynamic model for reading the compositional expression of the portrait. It is precisely because the referential pull of details is so strong in a portrait of Picasso that the text becomes a good test case of a critical approach informed by an understanding of Stein's epistemology.

At the end of the summer of 1923, Stein visited Picasso and his family in Antibes on the French Riviera, reaffirming their friendship after a period of cooling.³ Picasso's mother was also visiting and Stein met her for the first time.⁴ From there Stein visited the painter and sculptor Juan Gris, who was in Nice managing stage design, and this, too, was a visit after some estrangement. Stein was in the company of painters and friends of long standing once again. During her stay in Nice Stein resumed writing portraits after a brief hiatus in this genre and there she wrote second portraits of Carl Van Vechten, Alice Toklas, and Picasso.⁵ Obviously, the biographical record alone does not explain the distinctive new style of portraiture that emerges in these second portraits. Yet, despite its apparent critique of resemblance, "If I Told Him" continues to be read on the basis of likeness, as though the resemblance of Picasso and Napoleon were at issue.⁶ This results in privileging the opening lines:

If I told him would he like it. Would he like it if I told him.

Would he like it would Napoleon would Napoleon would would he like it.

If Napoleon if I told him if I told him if Napoleon. Would he like it if I told him if I told him if Napoleon. Would he like it if Napoleon if Napoleon if I told him. If I told him if Napoleon if Napoleon if I told him. If I told him would he like it would he like it if I told him.⁷

This passage has been read as though Stein staged a comparison of the two men, posing the question, "would [Picasso] like it if I told him" that he resembles Napoleon? (453). Ulla Dydo concludes flatly, "Picasso is Napoleon, the builder of new empires and the conqueror of women."⁸ Steven Meyer claims that Picasso, "the intense little Iberian," has become "the emperor of modern painting."⁹ While in her first portrait, "Picasso" (1909 or 1910), Stein suggests that he had a "following," if she draws a comparison of Picasso and Napoleon in her second portrait, what does she mean by it?¹⁰ Oddly, the text does not complete the comparison. Does it mock Picasso's hubris or is it cautionary? The portrait presents particular challenges for criticism *because* it is a portrait of Picasso about whom much is known; readers may assume they recognize biographical references or can second-guess Stein's stance toward her subject.

In an early study of Stein's innovation in portraiture, for example, Wendy Steiner finds in the second portraits "a difficult but discoverable reference to the portrait subject" and "portrait perception involving comparison and memory."¹¹ But whereas in "Picasso" Steiner claims that the repetition and variation of phrasing raise epistemological questions concerning "what is known of the subject, and what the mode of this knowledge is," she finds that repetition and variation in "If I Told Him" is only "ornamental."¹² It would seem that Steiner reaches this conclusion because she has determined the "meaning of [its] initial question," namely, that "If I told him would he like it" entails a "comparison of Picasso with Napoleon (both dynamic but diminutive leaders)."¹³ Although Steiner notes several metadiscursive elements of the portrait including Stein's examination of mimesis, repetition, and "the whole Picasso/Napoleon metaphor," she interprets the end of the portrait based on the resemblance: "For if Picasso is like Napoleon, and if Napoleon was eventually beaten, and if history teaches, then Picasso should realize that he is in trouble. (By this time Picasso had turned away from cubism to neoclassicism and Stein was growing less and less enthusiastic about his work.)"¹⁴ My intention isn't to single out Steiner, but to propose that little has changed in analysis of this portrait since her pioneering study when biographical reference remains the basis of interpretation. This approach will be limited insofar as it regards the opening and closing lines of the portrait as a key to the whole, neglects the density and resistance of the portrait's overall method, and reinstates genre conventions for reference.¹⁵ The persistent wish to resolve the comparison of Napoleon and Picasso, to uncover the portrait's "secret," reveals the expectation that despite its qualifications, "exact resemblance" is instrumental to the portrait, and this, in one way or another, devolves into the expectation that the portrait presents a resemblance. In a history of the literary portrait, Ulla Haselstein explains that while classical studies of character were not visually based, the modern term "literary

portrait" suggests its competition with the mimeticism of portrait painting and that the literary portrait strove "to achieve some sort of plastic presence of the individual by literary means," in addition to aspects it could presumably do better, including representing "psychological traits held to be essential for the represented subject."¹⁶ While for Haselstein Stein's literary portraiture "amounts to a modernist reinvention of the genre," she concludes that Stein "retains [its] most fundamental feature, namely its referentiality."¹⁷

And yet, reading Stein's portrait of Picasso for resemblance means adhering to conventions of representation based on an epistemology of "knower" and "known," and on the dualism of subjects and objects that is predicated in propositions. Stein lampoons this form of knowledge in a later section of the portrait in lines that reiterate the predicative form "He is," as if she began (but failed to complete) multiple propositions: "He is and as he is, and as he is and he is, he is and as he and he and as he is and he and he and and he and he" (465). It may seem that the challenge in reading Stein's portrait of Picasso is that we cannot know the Picasso she knew and chose to represent and that we do not understand the method of representation at hand. But in order to analyze the method of the portrait, we must understand that it is based on a radical epistemology, one that defies conventional expectations about knowing another and representing that experience. Stein's portrait presses us to consider what constitutes portraiture when the operations of similarity and difference underlying representation are not used to stage a stable comparison, or, to put this in the terms of the portrait, when "exactitude" is much practiced but not in the service of verisimilitude and realistic likeness. Reading selectively for biographical reference means reading past the intricate compositional surface (and the bulk of the portrait) and treating language use as if it were transparent in its referential function. In effect, this biographical interpretation of the portrait's references reinstates a model of representation that the portrait contests: despite its teasing invitation to read for resemblance to Picasso, the historical subject, Stein's portraiture resists or undermines the expectation that the portrait be a likeness of its subject, as if enacting a Cubist challenge to representational practice. We do well to remember Rosalind Krauss's strenuous objections to biographical interpretations of Cubist collage in her essay, "In the Name of Picasso." To reduce interpretation of Picasso's paintings to the proper name (of his then-current lover, typically) Krauss argues, is to treat the name as if it has no sense other than reference and to treat visual representation as merely a picture or label for the object. As we shall see, Stein's portrait makes much use of Picasso's name. But her method, as Krauss claims, for the word fragments in Picasso's paintings, involves "a rather more exacting notion of reference, representation and signification."¹⁸

Over the howls of those familiar with the Cubist analogies to Stein's work, I propose that the comparison proves a useful visual analogy for Stein's method of splintering referential operations and elaborating the difference between denotative and expressive aspects of propositions.¹⁹ Viewers have become adept at recognizing how referential details in a Cubist painting cease to be referential, entering instead into a complex set of visual and verbal associations that mines expressive qualities and explores the practice of signification. Likewise, for Stein's portrait of Picasso we need a strategy for tracking the intratextual elaboration that forms the portrait surface, that is, a strategy for reading, as Marjorie Perloff has recommended, "semiotically rather than referentially, 'in' rather than 'for.'"²⁰ This strategy should help to interpret details that appear to involve reference or elicit our expectations of reference as it contributes to representation. But perhaps the test of my approach is that it also proves useful for the quirky references of the portrait, such as the allusion to Paul Revere's warning signal, that continue to baffle critics because these cannot be readily fixed by biographical reference.²¹

A Radical Epistemology

Read in the sequence of composition, we can see that Stein's burst of portraiture in a new style follows "An Elucidation," a piece she wrote in the spring of 1923. In my view, this lively text is the culmination of Stein's experiments in "landscape writing" and an articulation of her new epistemology. Therefore, Stein resumed writing portraits in August 1923 when she had a new model for what constitutes "knowing." Let me briefly summarize why an exploration of knowledge should have emerged from experiments in landscape writing. The break in Stein's portrait writing coincides, as Steiner long ago observed, with Stein's experiments in playwriting, in particular, a new investigation of the form she called "landscape plays."²² Stein began her "landscape writing" in 1922 during an extended stay in the Provence region in the South of France. However, the texts she wrote during this period, beginning with the play *Lend A Hand or Four Religions* (1922), are not descriptive accounts of the region. Landscape gave Stein a model for looking that was not looking for resemblance or verisimilitude but looking for the composition of relations and therefore a spatial homology for composition. The landscape homology proved a new and exciting way of framing a recurrent interest, namely, the "problem of time in relation to emotion."²³ As Stein explained in her 1934 lecture "Plays," the "problem with plays" is the lack of congruence between the action of the play and the viewer's emotion. Beginning as it does *in media res*, the conventional play already is ahead of the viewer who must familiarize herself with characters and background information. If a play could

be structured as a landscape so that in place of dramatic action it achieved its effects by means of the relations among elements, then the viewer "could keep time" with the play much as landscape and viewer seem to coincide or to be co-present in time and space:

I felt that if a play was exactly like a landscape then there would be no difficulty about the emotion of the person looking on at the play being behind or ahead of the play because the landscape does not have to make acquaintance. You may have to make acquaintance with it, but it does not with you, it is there [.]²⁴

Stein reasoned that if she could create similar presentational force in her landscape plays, she would solve the temporal problem she had identified.

In successive experiments with landscape plays and other genres, Stein appears to have discovered that a paradox sustained in landscape, namely that is both "there" and constructed by a viewer, is similar to the paradox she thought structures knowledge. "How do you know anything," Stein asked in a later lecture. "[W]ell you know anything as complete knowledge as having it completely in you at the actual moment that you have it. That is what knowledge is, and essentially therefore knowledge is not succession but an immediate existing."²⁵ Problems of representation, including the challenges of portraiture, belied a paradox in the nature of knowledge itself: knowledge may be acquired incrementally, but the subjective experience of "knowing" seems immediate and present. Whereas Stein had formerly understood this paradox in knowing in temporal terms, experiments with the landscape homology became the grounds for recasting the problem in spatial terms. The paradoxes of landscape would provide Stein with a complex model for exploring knowing as if it were both procedural, a matter of moment-by-moment construction, and ineffable, expressed only through the totality of composition.

Therefore, Stein's landscape writing was highly generative, resulting in a burst of playwriting and a new style of portraiture because landscape became a visual homology for a breakthrough in epistemology, that is, a model of equivalence in place of a representational theory of knowledge.²⁶ A representational model assumes a mimetic relation between the objects of experience and rational processes, and this presumed correspondence limits the conception of experience to what can be so represented. If thought begins with *something*, it is a something that conforms, for Kant, to the "law of reproduction," an *a priori* principle that secures the "synthetic unity of appearances and makes their reproduction possible."²⁷ The unity of consciousness guarantees the unity of its objects. The given is thereby determined for a subject (whether or not it so exists) in conformance with the processes of representation, including substitution, conceptualization, classification, and the predication of subjects.

Stein deliberately foils these processes in "An Elucidation," an animated and hilarious text in which she reframes her epistemological inquiry with the spatial homology of her landscape writing, treating elucidation as though it were a problem of place. Stein reveals that conventional explanation is a shell game of sorts because of its substitutive operations: explanation both assigns place to examples and takes the place of their particularity. She flattens the hierarchy of the rational premise, the relation of primary to secondary terms, of explanation to example, and continually defers any summary or synthetic statement. Instead, Stein demonstrates that while it may require space in which to unfold by means of connections among multiple series, elucidation does not "take place" in the text, it is nowhere localized and cannot be summarized. Knowing or understanding is an event that transpires in the text as the result of contingent relations among equivalent terms that can be variously related.

The epistemology Stein comes to in these years is consistent with the radical empiricism of William James, her professor when she was a student at the Harvard Annex (later renamed Radcliffe College), and of Gilles Deleuze, who extends the empiricism of Hume. Empiricism differs from transcendentalism in that it does not begin with wholes (the Self, the World, the subject) but with parts, that is, with "pure impressions" from the given (the "flux of the sensible, a collection of impressions and images") and with principles of human nature which exert selective and constitutive roles.²⁸ James proposes that all things, including mental and physical experiences, occur within *pure experience*, an undifferentiated flux of sensations that exists prior to the imposition of conceptual categories.²⁹ In his lectures on pragmatism and radical empiricism, James claims that language reflects the flow of sensation in its transitive relations but that we tend to ignore this in favor of language practice that fixes substantives and their predicative states.³⁰ Depending on the pacing of subjective experience, we are more or less aware of transitive relations, that is, not the object, but "a passage, a relation, a transition *from* it, or *between* it and something else."³¹ Skeptical of the emphasis in philosophy on disjunction, an emphasis deemed necessary to assert the difference between "knower" and "known," James's radical empiricism insisted "that the relations between things, conjunctive as well as disjunctive, are just as much matters of direct particular experience, neither more so nor less so, than the things themselves."³²

In its emphasis on relations, radical empiricism introduces a paratactic discourse in place of a dialogic—a surface model of connections, events, and encounters in place of a depth model. In a highly original reading of Hume, Deleuze asserts that the true project of empiricism is to endeavor to sustain an experiential relation to a pre-predicative realm, "a zone of indetermination," that accompanies every determination, and from which we

might extract new, previously unthought concepts. With the logic of relations empiricism introduces a new power, that of conjunctions that may overrun or subvert the primacy of predicate forms. Deleuze asserts, "Thinking *with* AND, instead of thinking IS, instead of thinking for IS: empiricism has never had another secret."³³

Stein appears to have understood that it is *only in language* that we might glimpse the infinite potential of conjunctive and disjunctive relations, and thereby conceive of reality from a perspective other than that conditioned by representation.³⁴ As Lyn Hejinian claims, "James thoroughly understood, and Stein animated in practice, the vital, even vivacious, relationship of language forms and structures to perception and consciousness."³⁵ Rather than begin with subjects, Stein begins with language, including its odd capacity to express without a speaker, to refer without fulfilling denotation, to impart meaning without establishing the conditions of truth and without recourse to predicate logic. Likewise, Deleuze explores the possibilities for the encounter with "*something unconditioned*" through a philosophy of language.³⁶ In the *Logic of Sense*, Deleuze claims that the three relations typically identified within the proposition—denotation, manifestation and signification—form a circular logic insofar as each depends for completion on the others. To ask, as Stein repeatedly does during this period, "What do you mean by that?," triggers an infinite regression of denotation and signification. According to Deleuze, we break out of the "circularity between ground and grounded" by identifying a fourth dimension of the proposition, an expressive dimension:³⁷

Let us consider the complex status of sense or of that which is expressed. On the one hand, it does not exist outside the proposition which expresses it; what is expressed does not exist outside its expression. This is why we cannot say that sense exists, but rather that it inheres or subsists. On the other hand, it does not merge at all with the proposition, for it has an objective (*objectité*) which is quite distinct.³⁸

Finding that none of the modes of the proposition serves as foundation or ground for meaning, Deleuze instead splits the proposition into two dimensions, denotation and expression. Sense is neutral to the modalities of the proposition; it is released or emerges by means of maintaining the difference between expressive and denotative dimensions. When he distinguishes an expressive dimension of a proposition, Deleuze theorizes that there exists a dynamic process unconditioned by the determination of the predicate modes of the proposition. We must not mistake "sense" in this account for linguistic meaning lest we simply reintroduce signification. Deleuze claims that sense is curiously ineffable ("it inheres or subsists") because of its peculiar relation to language: it is neither word nor

thing, but the "articulation of their difference."³⁹ Sense is a register of value or of relative intensity released through the expressive potential of language. It is attributed but it is not the attribute of the proposition (a predicate), rather it is attributed to the thing or state of affairs in question. In Deleuze's example, "green" designates a property of the tree, the mixture of light and chlorophyll, but "to green" is "an attribute which is said of the thing."⁴⁰ In this it depends upon the expressive dimension of the proposition, but it is not identical with the proposition; rather, sense is "exactly the boundary between propositions and things."⁴¹

To conceive of sense in this way is to circumvent the dualism that James noted in language use that, on the one hand, instates "singular proper names, substantives, and general adjectives which indicate limits, pauses, rests, and presences" and, on the other, transitive relations."⁴² Deleuze takes pains not to reinstate a reductive duality but to find the duality within aspects of the proposition: "The duality in the proposition is not between two sorts of names, names of stasis and names of becoming, names of substances or qualities and names of events; rather, it is between two dimensions of the proposition, that is between denotation and expression, or between the denotation of things and the expression of sense."⁴³

This formulation of sense or sense-making offers a complex model for understanding the use of referential detail in Stein's portrait of Picasso and for radically reformulating the model of knowledge we assume underlies the method of her second portraits. Evidently, certain lines of the portrait entail reference to biography, both to Picasso and Stein's life, past and present, along with references to painting and to the compositional problems of writing the portrait. But we are not sufficiently subtle when we reduce the referential gesture of the portrait to a matter of denotation, and none of these references singularly or in combination gives us the meaning of the portrait. If on Stein's radical model knowing is a surface event constituted by the articulation of the difference between denotative and expressive aspects of the proposition, we cannot hope to understand the portrait if we settle for reference or denotation. In the portrait, Stein persistently qualifies denotation with expressive qualities, including the complex modality suggested by the demonstrative adverb *as*:

A note.

They cannot.

They dote.

They cannot.

They as denote. (466)

Indeed, reading the portrait for Picasso's resemblance to Napoleon, and limiting its meaning to a paraphrase of referential detail, means neglecting the bulk of the portrait, including the intricate hinging and unhinging action that results from the recurrence of the mercurial word *as*, in its persistent interruption and qualification of denotation. The predicative "He is" must be continually modified by "as he is," which suggests a problem of knowing and therefore a problem for writing. Or, as Stein would ask in "Portraits And Repetition," a later lecture, "I wonder is there any way of making what I know come out as I know it, come out as not remembering."⁴⁴ Reading for references, we miss Stein's experiments with the operations of reference and representation, including her efforts to abstract the expressive dimensions of resemblance and difference and to redirect these to the textual surface.

Neither should we expect that Stein's second portrait will be a likeness of Picasso, a summary of his character, or a record of Stein's experience of Picasso. We have allowed that this is a modernist portrait, but not altered our expectations accordingly, including asking "what the pursuit of likeness looks like now," as T. J. Clark says of Cubist portraiture. The opening passage of the portrait playfully anticipates and frustrates our expectations of portraiture based on resemblance insofar as Stein teases that she has withheld an important assertion. Readers can be excused for feeling that the resemblance has been broached offstage or completed before we began reading: "Would he like it" (*what?*) "If I told him" (*told him what?*). The portrait pointedly does not answer this sort of question for which the answer is a summary statement. Instead, Stein reflects on her method: to have posed repeated questions in the passage amounts to "askings" and this prompts a subsequent line, "Exactly as *as kings*" (464, my emphasis). What might be read as a veiled slight concerning Picasso's hubris (he, like Napoleon, thinks himself imperial) becomes a material aspect of the text that produces sense in at least two dimensions: first by extending the surface of the text on a contiguous axis, the word "kings" summons the word "queens." Second, by abstracting the word "as" from the word "askings" and the phrase "as kings," Stein initiates one of the text's chief occupations, which is to subject propositions to the operations of modality. She blocks the denotative and signifying dimensions of a proposition (implied references to Napoleon and Picasso and the concept of hubris) and renders the statement expressive or, more exactly, proceeds by refusing to fix denotation and amplifying expressive aspects of the proposition instead: "Exactly as as kings."

In place of resemblance or representation, what we want to identify is the expression of the portrait, that is, the sense expressed by statements as these enter into relations with others. Sense is a product of the text, not a record of Stein's impressions of Picasso,

and as such, it is multiple, contingent, and elusive. This necessarily raises difficulties for criticism: if the portrait is making sense and this cannot be arrested, how can we analyze or interpret the portrait? To claim that the portrait consists in an event that transpires at the surface of the text may seem to echo Stein's own claims that to read her work with enjoyment is to understand it. Asked in a radio interview on her lecture tour in Chicago how she would explain her work, Stein challenged her interviewer's assumptions about explanation and understanding: "Don't you see what I mean? If you enjoy it [her writing] you understand it, and lots of people have enjoyed it so lots of people have understood it."⁴⁵

This is the gist of a recent divide in Steinian criticism. Jennifer Ashton objects that an emphasis on the "material form" of Stein's texts—what Perloff has called "new literalism"—is not reading, but experience.⁴⁶ According to Ashton, literalism entails treating the text as material, as an object, and an object cannot mean it can only *be* and be experienced.⁴⁷ Indeterminacy is the necessary consequence of literalism; the meaning of the text will be what readers make of it, and the reader's experience will replace interpretation. Oddly, although Ashton insists on interpreting the meaning of the text, she does not see the need to explain how she defines meaning. Apparently, the author's intention is one determination for Ashton who relies on Stein's lectures for claims concerning intention. Ashton cautions that indeterminacy undermines intention: "Once meaning is imagined as a function of the experiential effects of a poem, it cannot be a function of intention."⁴⁸ Only in the closing pages of her discussion, when she dismisses "experiential meaning," does it become evident that by meaning Ashton has meant semantic meaning all along. But even if we do not regard their difficulty as an invitation to indeterminacy, no one would claim that semantic meaning is readily evident in Stein's experimental texts, and Ashton offers little in the way of guidelines for deciding such meaning in texts whose decidability seems the very issue. After all, critics such as Perloff, Hejinian, and Charles Bernstein, whom Ashton faults for emphasizing the "material form" of Stein's work, are responding to its heightened materiality, that is, the non-transparency in language use that confounds semantic meaning. In the radical empiricism of her writing in the early twenties, Stein baffles rationalist efforts to divide meaning and experience, sense and thing. In composition, Stein practices a form of making sense as an expression that is neither simply denotation nor signification.

The impasse in critical approach reveals that the tendency to reassert rationalist premises in Steinian criticism is perennial and that we need an alternative method, one which treats epistemology as a compositional question. Because Stein made a lifelong study of knowledge and its relation to composition, what counts as meaning or making sense is precisely what is at issue, and we need not proceed as if there were no philo-

sophical alternatives to rationalism and the logical coherence of predication. To accept Ashton's analysis of the critical field would put us at a curious impasse in Stein studies that no doubt we will want to avoid. Either with Ashton we look to the author's intention for meaning or, with Perloff (in Ashton's characterization of indeterminacy) we constitute our own meanings. But are these really our choices for meaning? Is meaning to be restricted to Stein's or the readers' intention? Instead, given its experiments with language use, the text is making sense with and without Stein's intention or that of its readers. Where Ashton insists that "to understand what [the text] means" is opposed to "causing an effect" on readers because interpretation cannot be experience, she neglects that the text makes effects of a different kind, and here I agree with Perloff that the texts are more compositional than representational.⁴⁹ The Stein text creates effects as words and series have effects on other words and other series, thereby forming a composition.

As such, the portrait presents the exciting potential of making contact with possibilities as yet undetermined by predication for and by subjects as conventionally known. Provided that we can circumvent our tendency to reassert the logic of predication, perhaps we can trace the dynamic expression of the portrait if we attend not to names but to the intricate and multiple relations accruing and dissolving between equivalent terms. Although the event of the text is elusive, we can detect its compositional effects and identify the compositional problem staged by the particulars of the text. As I will demonstrate, a number of series cross the portrait, and the textual event transpires in the resulting expression as elements of each series resound in relation to those of other series and to other variables in the text. In place of tracing resemblance, we can examine the compositional problem articulated by the main attributes of the text, including its insistent rhythms, monochromatic reduction, obsession with modality, and its unyielding surface.

Reading the Portrait, "If I Told Him/A Completed Portrait of Picasso"

Interpretation of "If I Told Him" involves coming to terms with the implications for portraiture of Stein's extreme reliance on relational parts of speech. This is functional language that refers to the orientation and relation of states of affairs, as well as to relations among parts of speech within the sentence, establishing quantity, sequence, and manner of connection as well as to other relations. It is the language of exactness. Stein placed a high premium on exactitude, a quality she associated with her own work and that of Juan Gris.⁵⁰ It is characteristic of Stein's inventiveness and her sense of humor that she should practice exactitude for other than mimetic ends. Although a dominant characteristic of Stein's second portraits is a display of exactness, such exactitude no longer

renders likeness. Instead, Stein "exacts" subtle differences in the varying senses imparted by the operations of prepositions, articles, and adverbs. The composition forms as an intricate survey of the directional, conjunctive, demonstrative, and expressive implications suggested by transitive relations. This exacting practice simultaneously critiques the limitations of representation and creates a new compositional totality.

The following passage serves as an example of Stein's exacting practice. It has been read as sealing the resemblance of Picasso to Napoleon.

Exact resemblance. To exact resemblance the exact resemblance as exact as a resemblance, exactly as resembling, exactly resembling, exactly in resemblance exactly a resemblance, exactly and resemblance. For this is so. Because. (464)

Surely we hear the irony in the phrase, "as exact as a resemblance"—as exact as *that!* In this passage, "to exact resemblance" signals a bid to "exact" difference, not similarity. We are confronted with differences that concern singularity of outcome in our expectations of both exactitude and resemblance (the difference between "*the* exact resemblance" and "*a* resemblance"); differences implied by inserting modality ("exactly *as* resembling" versus "exactly resembling"); and differences enacted when "exactly" is considered independently ("exactly and resemblance") and when it is considered one of the practices of establishing resemblance ("exactly in resemblance"). In place of resemblance, this is dissembling and with purpose: it exposes, rather economically, the dissembling entailed in finding resemblance, including that we can identify stable points of comparison and that the outcome will be singular. Instead, Stein suggests that the difference between "resembling" and "a resemblance" is worth exploring. Reading on, we are presented with the difference between "The first exactly" and "At first exactly," between "Presently" and "As presently," between "As trains" and "Has trains," and between "Father and farther" (465). Once we recognize that this process of "exacting" difference is the method of the entire portrait, it becomes evident that something more than a resemblance of Picasso and Napoleon is afoot.

I will return to this bid "to exact resemblance," but first I want to explore the way in which Stein complicates the comparison she suggests between Picasso and Napoleon in the opening passages of the portrait: "If I told him would he like it. Would he like it if I told him. Would he like it would Napoleon would Napoleon would would he like it" (464). Reading in the sequence of composition, we find that these lines of the portrait echo a passage from "Am I To Go Or I'll Say So," a play Stein wrote in the summer before leaving Paris for the South of France. In the play, an anonymous general is engaged in

a functional war with the operations of the word *general*: “For a general. / Before the general. / In this case not in general.”⁵¹ The portrait “If I Told Him” reprises the following passage from the play:

The general likes.
If he likes.
If he likes to be told.
And if he likes it to be told.
And if he likes it as well.
And if he tells as well.
And if to tell.
And as if to tell.
Very well. (116)

This echo across texts should give us pause when framing a comparison of Picasso and Napoleon, “both dynamic but diminutive leaders.”⁵² We might instead understand the singsong reference to Napoleon as a knowing comment on the limitations of conventional portraiture that relies on relating individual to type. In 1921 Gris published a statement in *L'Esprit Nouveau* illustrating his “deductive method” of painting with what would become a famous example of bottles made from cylinders. Subjugating subject matter to composition, the “deductive method” entailed “mov[ing] from the general to the particular rather than the particular to the general.”⁵³ Likewise, in Stein’s portrait, both Napoleon and Picasso will need to be rendered “general” in order for the totality and autonomy of the composition to emerge as “particular.” Provocative as it is, the bid to “exact resemblance” is misleading; the portrait doesn’t develop the resemblance of Picasso to Napoleon. Instead, Stein takes pains to dissolve the particulars associated with these figures into neutral compositional elements by means of a “mad internal multiplying” of relational terms.⁵⁴ Composition first and foremost, and subject matter only as a result, as Gris insisted.⁵⁵

If they are generals, what Picasso and Napoleon preside over is composition, and Stein seems to have associated the proper name “Picasso” with modern composition itself. In her 1932 monograph, *Picasso*, Stein credits the artist with replacing the Napoleonic general-on-horseback model:

Really the composition of this war, 1914–1918, was not the composition of all previous wars, the composition was not a composition in which there was one man in the centre surrounded by a lot of other men but a composition that had neither a beginning nor an

end, a composition of which one corner was as important as any other corner, in fact, the composition of Cubism.⁵⁶

Let me begin at the end of the portrait so as to trick what James called our "habits of association" enough to see what the text makes of this initial pairing and of resemblance.⁵⁷ The last third of the portrait is composed mainly of a long, slender column of one- and two-word lines. The short succession of lines on the page is graphically striking and perhaps the equivalent of Stein's visual impression of striation at the seashore, the "movement of the tiny waves on the Antibes shore."⁵⁸ Surely it is an echo or corruption of the warning signal, "One if by land, and two if by sea," recounted in Longfellow's poem, "Paul Revere's Ride" (1861):

One.
I land.
Two.
I land.
Three.
The land.
Three
The land.
Three
I land. (466)

This seems to be a broken signal, returning always "land" and never "sea" until we appreciate the homonym "island" inscribed in "I land." Mention of an island must remind us of Napoleon's exile to Elba. If this seems far-fetched, consider that Napoleon landed near Antibes on his fateful return to the mainland from Elba. Perhaps the famous palindrome, "Able was I ere I saw Elba" enables us to see that "able" is very nearly spelled in "P/ablo." The association implied to Revere, a hero of the American Revolutionary War, cleverly introduces the words "revere" and "revolution," although they do not appear in the portrait text. The word "revolution" complicates the pairing of Napoleon and Picasso, because now we realize that the portrait presents a series of revolutionary heroes: Picasso, whom Stein credited with the "Cubist revolution," joins Paul Revere of the American Revolution, and Stein herself, "An American Revolutionary of Prose,"⁵⁹ according to the title of an article published earlier that year in *Vanity Fair*. Napoleon, a son of the French Revolution who brought the revolutionary spirit to an end, is the odd one out. However, the proper name Napoleon is itself a member of another series, that of enumerated emperors.

The reference to Revere introduces a series of “Pauls” in the portrait: there is Paul Revere, Paul Picasso (as he signed early work), and perhaps Paulo, Picasso’s son, who was two years old in the summer of 1923. Picasso celebrated the feast day of St. Paul. Obviously, the word “revere” raises questions about reverence in portraiture, but it also has a more local and concrete association to the “Riviera” where Stein met the vacationing Picasso family. It may also suggest Pierre Reverdy, the poet and a defender of Cubism who published the first issue of *Nord-Sud* in 1917. The journal was named for the metro line connecting Montmartre, where Picasso lived until 1912, and Montparnasse, two centers of the avant-garde. To this series we might also add Jacques Rivière, a contemporary commentator on Cubism. Rivière wrote astutely about the difficulties Cubism must confront in materializing depth while demonstrating the flatness of the picture. “Depth will appear as a subtle but visible slippage keeping the objects company; it will hardly matter that literally they remain on the same plane: between them will creep this positive distance this spacing produced by the little sloping shadows.”⁶⁰

But why should the portrait of Picasso include association to Paul Revere? In *Picasso*, Stein links the French and American revolutions and repeats the observation she made on meeting Picasso’s mother in the summer of 1923: “Physically Picasso resembles his mother whose name he finally took.”⁶¹ We learn also that “[h]is mother’s family were silversmiths.”⁶² As any American schoolchild knows, Paul Revere was an accomplished silversmith. It is a happy accident of history that a man named *Revere* is credited with helping to usher in the *American Revolution*—an event that might be grossly characterized as a lack of *reverence* for the English crown. It is a connection that Stein with her attention to proper names would not have missed. By means of association from Revere to Picasso’s contemporaries Reverdy and Rivière, we discover splintered references to Picasso’s contemporary context in the portrait much like the fragmented and multiplying references of Cubism. If these seem wild associations, my own misgiving is that they are not wild enough. That is, what we want in a reading strategy is a way of treating reference as a fleeting gesture, to catch sight of its indexical motion and see this turned back to the portrait surface and elaborated, rather than allowing reference to fix meaning. None of these references is definitive; the fragments and their elaboration combine to form the totality of the composition.

But to return to the portrait: once we recognize Revere’s warning signal, we cannot help but recognize another code-like sequence in a previous passage:

Shutters shut and open so do queens. Shutters shut and shutters and so shutters shut and shutters and so and so shutters and so shutters shut and so shutters shut and shutters and so. And so shutters shut and so and also. And also and so and so and also. (464)

In both cases, the signaling operates through the effects of repetition. Here, the open vowel of “so” substitutes for the “open” position, permitting the shutters to continue to “shut” without having opened. Are these odd codes figures for signification itself? If so, Stein shows that it need not depend upon difference between signifiers—or not in any ordinary way—repetition alone can create difference. These passages invite the question, when is a code not a code, or when does it fail to signal? Perhaps Stein makes reference to the Code Napoléon, the civil code Napoleon I instituted in 1804, the year he established his empire. This would suggest that we should not treat Napoleon as a stock figure for a defeated general. The Napoleonic Code set the tone for French civil life well into the twentieth century, and this rule of law governed Picasso and Stein's Paris. This set of laws granted the middle class equality, abolished privileges of birth, forbade labor unions, safeguarded property rights, and gave men control over their wives. It was because the Code Napoléon did not outlaw the practice of homosexuality that turn-of-the-century Parisian salons could include the frank display of male homosexuality and, with greater discretion, the same-sex flirtations of women.⁶³

Shutters, of course, also suggest the open windows motif in painting in which a window frames a still life or the view of an exterior. In a rare instance in which he anticipated Picasso, Gris was first to adapt the open windows motif to Cubist practice in 1915.⁶⁴ Picasso painted a series of these paintings on a visit in 1919 to St. Raphael. In Stein's portrait, the stammering shutters keep readers on the surface of the text, thereby suggesting a condensed reference to the use of the open window motif as a metaphor for the lack of depth in the painting. Concerning Gris' practice, the artist historian Christopher Green observes, “The openness of the open windows was one of two options, the other was to close in the objects.”⁶⁵ Stein's portrait takes up the latter option, creating a shallow plane through the dense iteration of relational words: we are unable to establish the grounds for representation, refused a view to an exterior beyond the portrait surface. The illusion of depth and of movement in space is restricted to the surface planes of the text.

At least one line of the portrait speaks to Stein's awareness of the neoclassical figures Picasso was painting in 1922 and 1923. In her monograph, Stein described Picasso's *Deux Femmes Calligraphiées*, a small painting of two women dressed in long classical robes standing side by side. Her collection includes a painting from these years, *Calligraphic Still Life* (1922), and this may be the painting Stein thanks Picasso for in a postcard she sent him in February 1923.⁶⁶ Stein claimed that Picasso's “calligraphy” derived from Cubism and that it was, for him, the equivalent of writing: “It is necessary to think about this question of calligraphy, it must never be forgotten that the only way Picasso has of speaking, the only way Picasso has of writing is with drawings and paintings.”⁶⁷ In this

she echoes Kahnweiler's observation about Picasso's work, "Painting and sculpture are forms of writing. Their products are signs, emblems, and not a mirror, more or less distorted, of the external world."⁶⁸ In *Deux Femmes Calligraphiées*, the women's hair and robes are composed of curling lines and wave patterns. In Stein's portrait, "robes" becomes "rob" and drawing that is writing is "quotable": "Can curls rob can curls quote, quotable" (465). Reference to painting as a "way of writing" is yet another way to link Picasso's art with Stein's own, multiplying the senses of "quotable" and once again embedding the word "able."

Let me return once more to the passage that begins "Shutters shut and open so do queens." Suggesting as it does "shudders" this passage accounts for a good deal of the portrait's erotic charge. As others have observed, variations on the phrase "and so" rhyme visually and aurally with "Picasso."⁶⁹ Indeed, spelling out "Picasso" we see that much of the portrait derives from his name. In her monograph Stein emphasizes Picasso's vision, insisting on the uniqueness of his seeing things "as he saw them, as one can see when one has not the habit or knowing what one is looking at."⁷⁰ Picasso's name spells out "his vision," that is, "[P] I c [see] as so." Subsequent phrases are variations on Picasso's name including, "As a so" and "As even say so," and much of the portrait takes shape as the network of these punning fragments expands (466). The word "as" is itself a fragment, a shortened form of the Old English compound "all-so."⁷¹ The text is composed—it "persists" as Stein says—by means of the extraordinary resourcefulness of these monosyllabic words.⁷²

As a member of an enumerated series, the proper name Napoleon invites Stein to explore the operations of succession and the implications for representation when one term establishes a model by appearing "first." If in the following passage the first mention of "first" concerns Napoleon, the first emperor of France, who "came first," historically and in the portrait before Picasso, its iteration expands beyond biographical reference:

Who came first Napoleon at first. Who came first Napoleon the first.

Who came first, Napoleon first.

Presently.

Exactly do they do.

First exactly.

Exactly do they do too.

First exactly.

And first exactly.

Exactly do they do.

And first exactly and exactly.

And do they do.

At first exactly and first exactly and do they do.

The first exactly.

And do they do.

The first exactly.

At first exactly.

First as exactly.

As first as exactly.

Presently.

As presently.

As as presently. (464-5)

The name Napoleon serves as an example of the operations of representation when these entail description or narration ("at first"), denotation ("the first"), or involve signification, the relation of one concept to another ("first"). Terms that would ordinarily establish succession or sequence ("At first") are prevented from doing so through an emphasis on modality ("As first") and an exploration of the differences expressed by temporal markers including "At first," "Presently," and "As presently." The passage is difficult because it simultaneously investigates the logical and temporal implications of succession. Terms such as "At first" that initiate a logical declaration or proposition such that it identifies "first causes" or "initial premises," lose their capacity to frame such a statement when modified by shifters. The certitude expressed by "First exactly" is qualified and diluted by variations ("And first exactly." / "The first exactly." / "At first exactly."). Which of these clauses expresses the primacy of a first cause and is this primacy necessary for the practice of exactitude? We have ventured far from the one-for-one indexical gesture that identifies "Napoleon the first." Indeed, the illusion of the punctual subject is shattered by the subtle differences in time sense suggested between "Presently" and "At first." But what is the difference between "As presently" and "As as presently?" This stammering dramatizes the operations of "as" and calls our attention to the difference in expression between "First exactly" and "First as exactly."

This steady ticking of differences forms the surface of the text; it is the "guarantor of [its] totality" much like the grid of Cubism.⁷³ We cannot read selectively for a resemblance of Picasso without acknowledging that in so doing we disregard a main characteristic of the text, namely that proper names such as "Napoleon," or nouns such as "kings" and "shutters" emerge only momentarily before they are splintered and ab-

sorbed in an intricate set of relations that will not ground stable representation. As in a Cubist grid of 1912, the unfolding surface of Stein's portrait both generates and contains this kind of action, "the effort at likeness, the opening into depth."⁷⁴

The Cubist analogy holds not because the portrait subject is Picasso (second portraits of Carl Van Vechten and of Alice Toklas also practice this style) but because Cubist fragmentation and elaboration of referential detail provide a useful visual analogy for Stein's method of deferring denotation and expanding expressive aspects of propositions. As in the Cubist grid, reference in Stein's portrait is open-ended; it isn't fixed by identification and doesn't stop at names. Clearly the phrase "Napoleon the first" in the passage above does not merely refer to the historical person but serves to initiate an inquiry concerning succession in its logical and temporal domains. We have to read the entire passage in order to hear the difference that emerges as the certainty of denotation ("the first") is hijacked by the expression of temporal and modal variations. This recursive method of endlessly mining the denotative gesture for expressive properties forms the surface of the text and motivates its successive moves. Likewise, referential detail we may identify in a Cubist painting enters into a complex set of visual and verbal associations that mines its expressive qualities and explores, as Krauss claims, the "structure of signification" itself.⁷⁵

Since the Cubist grid is hardly a monolithic entity, let me briefly summarize the accounts that inform my discussion. Art historians differ on whether to regard the grid of 1912 as the extension of the Cubism of the years 1908 to 1910 or whether to regard this development as a discontinuous break. For Pepe Karmel, whose study is based on extensive research of Picasso's drawings, the grid is the next step in continuous investigations concerning figuration and projective space. According to Karmel, Picasso and Braque invented the rectilinear grid sometime in the winter of 1909–10 by rotating the two-dimensional diagonal lattice of paintings such as Picasso's *Three Women* (1907–08) or Braque's 1908 landscapes. The Cubist "grid" is a misleading term insofar as it implies a regular pattern of horizontal and vertical lines, whereas what is meant is something more like three-dimensional scaffolding. The grid was the outcome of Picasso and Braque's experiments with open form and, as such, a cleaner break with verisimilitude than the faceted Cubism of 1908–09 whose vocabulary of flat, geometric shapes could be interpreted as distortions of the human form. Paintings of 1909 such as Picasso's *Seated Woman* integrated figure and background through an intricate system of faceting but at the cost of pictorial space—the "sensation of depth was squeezed out."⁷⁶

Struggling with open form meant reconfiguring the relation of the body or object to surrounding space. Picasso's initial efforts were intensely spare; even loyal supporters

such as Kahnweiler lost faith, deeming these paintings “unfinished.” In a painting such as Picasso’s *Nude*, painted in Cadaqués in 1910, the figure dissolves into a stark, abstract composition of lines and planes. This is the period in Picasso’s life that Clark calls “grim.”⁷⁷ While Stein and her brother Leo were among Picasso’s principal supporters—between 1905 and 1909 they purchased thirty-five of his paintings—during these years they too ceased to buy his paintings.⁷⁸ Karmel claims Picasso inserted Stein’s calling card in the painting later titled *The Architect’s Table* as a deliberate enticement to regain her support, but it is also true that the paintings of 1912 were more likely to appeal to Stein as they did to others.

According to Karmel, by 1912 Picasso made new figurative use of the grid, giving him new “armature” for the figure and an approach that replaced naturalistic conventions without relinquishing the “power of sculptural form,” the mass of the figure and the volume of the setting.⁷⁹ A “radically inorganic structure,” the grid was an appealing solution because it provided a substitute for the human skeleton and a new way to evoke projective space. Within the grid, planes and curves advance or recede by virtue of shading rather than naturalistic perspective. The combination of overlapping forms and shading constituted a new kind of projective space no longer anchored to the base of the picture.

Clark objects to the “commitment to narrative continuity” in accounts of Cubism from 1907 to 1912 because it obscures the “disconnected quality” of the Cubist grid itself” (175). In his view, paintings of 1911–12 from the “classic moment” of Cubism, paintings such as Picasso’s *Man with a Pipe* (1911) for example, are not an extension of the experiments begun in Horta in 1910. According to Clark, Picasso backed away from the extreme sparseness of the 1910 paintings, and during his stay in Céret in the summer of 1911 he opened his painting outward to the world again, admitting light into the grid as the means of creating a totality. The Cubism that followed takes hold of the world, and “[t]he grid shivers again with Cézanne’s perceptual uncertainties.”⁸⁰ But it is also, for Clark, an acknowledgment of failure, namely the failure to find an alternative model of representation. Clark concludes that the Cubism of 1911 investigates the means of illusionism, and in so doing it “gives a metaphorical account of what the pursuit of likeness now looks like.”⁸¹

The “pursuit of likeness” has bearing on Stein’s work, but before returning to it, I first want to underscore that for these art historians flatness per se was not the issue in Cubism. Karmel asserts, “absolute flatness, eliminating volume as well as mass, was essentially antipathetic to Picasso.”⁸² Clark claims that “owning up to flatness” in Cubist painting proved to be more difficult than the avant-garde had imagined: “It would only be done by discovering what it was in flatness that could be put utterly at the service

of the depiction of depth; it would only be by having the surface be chock-full, almost overwhelmed by spatiality—having the surface in some sense be depth, be its complete and sufficient realization—that the true force of painting’s confinement to two dimensions would be made clear.”⁸³ As I have argued, once we cease to read selectively for biographical reference, Stein’s portrait of Picasso presents readers with a non-yielding surface, one that does not readily disclose a naturalistic resemblance of its subject. Like the Cubist surface so “chock-full” that it suggests spatial depth, the polysemy of Stein’s language use creates a portrait surface full of spaces opened and only momentarily filled by the shifting senses of relational terms. The homogeneity of the portrait surface, which can seem a barrier, unfolds, revealing panel after panel of surface planes. These textual spaces open through the nuanced variation suggested in manners of approach, direction, handling, and apprehension. In an approximation of Cubist experiments with open form, Stein’s repeated stress on the conjunctive functions of the word *as* forms a hinge between solid forms and surrounding space, and reveals the myriad transitive relations made possible in the space typically foreclosed by attention to substantives. Representation is ungrounded by the peculiar eruption of the word *as*. Its constant iteration without fixing its modality demonstrates that the referential gesture might be expressive, procedural, and open to constant realignment. Insofar as it modifies manner, the adverbial *as* suggests that many modalities are possible. In expressing conjunction, it reveals that relations are contingent and reversible, and in metaphoric expression in which one thing seen is *as* another, it reveals the equivalence of terms.

In addition, Stein heightens the expressive dimension of the textual surface by exaggerating rhythmic properties of the portrait. The passage that begins “[s]hutters shut and open so do queens” is one such example. Following on the opening passage with its rhythmic, unanswered question, “Would he like it if I told him,” we begin to detect a pattern of blocking the answering response: the shutters operate like a coded sequence, returning always the same signal, much as the question recurs without answer. And yet a great deal transpires on the textual surface merely by interrupting and abstracting the codelike expression of signification itself, the pairing of signifier / signified, or the binary of questions and response, or of shutters open or closed. With so much elaboration, clearly the passage does not concern denotation (whether the shutters shut), but instead creates a pronounced rhythm that abstracts the expression “to shut.” As I have suggested, that the shutters shut without opening is not a bad figure for the way that depth emerges from the surface of a Cubist painting. In Stein’s portrait the passage is uniquely expressive without relying on illusionistic depth: it echoes the proscenium space of open window painting, it alludes to the signaling function of signification and demonstrates that it

depends on difference, and it engenders a real sense of movement (of shutters that shut) without involving mimetic representation.

This is where the Cubist analogy serves us well; the strategies we have for tracing the complexity of referential gestures without limiting the meaning of the painting to representation prove useful in interpreting Stein's portrait where reference does not fix meaning. Consider the intricate play of references to Braque and "that famous return from Le Havre" in Picasso's painting *Violin and Anchor* (1912). How are the violin, anchor, and pipe of the painting connected? Karmel suggests that the original title of the painting, "Le Violin d'Ingres," may refer to the 1911 performance of famed violinist Jean Kubelik at the Ingres exhibition at the Galeries Georges Petit, where Kubelik performed on a violin once owned by Ingres. Picasso and Braque most likely did not attend the concert, but they would have learned of it from André Salmon's announcement in the *Paris-Journal*. Both Picasso and Braque introduced violins into their paintings around this time. "Le violin d'Ingres" refers to a hobby pursued with intensity and as such may refer to Braque's own hobby, which was playing the concertina (a small accordion). And the anchor? Braque, who came from Le Havre (lettering in the painting reads "[H]AVRE") was fond of visiting bars frequented by sailors. In his 1913 *The Cubist Painters*, Apollinaire wrote of "that famous return from Le Havre," the return of Picasso and Braque from a visit to Le Havre in April 1912.⁸⁴ That "Kubelik" spells out a connection to Cubism was not lost on Picasso and Braque. Braque painted the name in a 1912 still life that also implies punning reference to the "Maggi-Kub," a bouillon cube.⁸⁵ Concerning interpretation of these signs, Karmel asserts that *Violin and Anchor* "is replete with symbols and biographical allusions; [but] whether these add up to a meaning, or any kind of paraphrasable content, is another question."⁸⁶

Similarly, as I have shown, Stein's second portrait of Picasso contains "episodes of likeness," or referential tokens, in the series of Pauls, the calligraphic curl, allusion to Picasso's mother, and so on. The shutters that open and close with erotic suggestiveness may allude to the theatricality of the open window motif in Picasso's paintings, as well as to the Napoleonic code of permissions and restrictions. But none of these references fix the meaning of the portrait; instead, the work of the portrait is to transform these elements into a new totality. Reference is splintered and multiplied, its indexical gesture is doubled back to the textual surface where it is inscribed and expands in a complex grid of interrelated associations and intratextual elaboration. We read elements of the portrait most productively when we give free rein to potential references and connections, granting the "means of illusionism" their full powers of suggestion all the while resisting the temptation to fix denotation and determine likeness. The portrait is not a summary

statement of Picasso's character nor a rendering of Stein's impression of his intensity. Rather, it is an effort to express "knowing" him as an event of the text where knowing is expression, the sense of propositions as they transpire, and as sense is released in series that cross the text. The multiple series are expressive because they defer denotation and signification, opening up the space for multiple and reversible connections among elements. The series of revolutionary heroes (Paul Revere / Stein / Picasso) complicates the initial comparison implied (Picasso and Napoleon), but at the same time this series reveals another related to the word "revere" (revere / reverence / revolution), which in turn complicates our reading of the first. To these two series we must add the series of Pauls that includes Paul Revere, Picasso's son, and Picasso who initially signed his paintings Paul. There is the series of codes (of which the warning signal is one), and the series including contemporaries (Reviere / Reverdy), to which we add place, the Riviera. Clearly, we cannot reduce the splintering, multiplying connections possible within and among these series to a summary statement concerning Picasso's irreverence or that of Stein's in writing his portrait. Stein has written the portrait so that its meaning is impossible to rephrase or summarize, staging the event of the text instead as an action or activity of the text that ensues as we trace the varied senses expressed by means of multiple series. Taken together, the multiple series comprise the textual surface and determine the compositional problem formulated in the text which concerns the relation of particulars to the general; questions concerning reverence in relation to revolution, painting, and portraiture; the practice of signification; and the uses of exactitude in exacting difference. None of these strands determines the theme or subject of the portrait. Rather, sense is expressed when the denotative aspect of the serial elements is crossed by the shifting senses of *as* in its variable operations indicating manner, time sense, and modality.

What then becomes of Stein's bid for exactitude? Her reliance on monosyllabic words and adverbial relations involves the text in much "truing and fairing" of the kind at work in the Cubist grid. The sense of "Presently" is modified by "As presently" and "exact" by "exactly." Both in word choice and in method, the portrait is obsessed with exactness. Likewise, of Picasso's paintings at Céret, Clark has claimed: "The way painting continues, it turns out, is by counterfeiting necessity (on the surface) but having one's metaphors of matter reinstate (on the surface) pure contingency at every point."⁸⁷ Isn't this a fair account of Stein's method, as well? As if there were some depiction or task that the incessant adjustments were aimed at, some necessity for the "exactness" Stein keeps insisting on that does not ever really pan out or not with the urgency suggested. And isn't her method similar—her use of the words *as*, *so*, *at*, *also*—words whose meanings are contingent on context?

In the stammering iterations of the portrait, its obsession with “the exact resemblance as exact as a resemblance, exactly as resembling,” Stein only pretends to pursue likeness. This “exacting” process, as we have seen, is more accurately an exploration of the inexactitude of mimetic practices. Yet, in this elaborate and humorous pretense Stein may in fact capture a critical aspect of Picasso’s painting in 1912, a method that Clark calls “painting on the basis of as if.”⁸⁸ According to Clark, by the time Picasso painted *Ma Jolie* (1911–12), *The Architect’s Table* (1912), and *Man with a Pipe* (1911), he had understood that an alternative to representation was not possible. Clark treats the paintings done in Céret and on Picasso’s return to Paris as “counterfeiting” an alternative system of representation:

“What would it be like,” these paintings ask, “to have a new means of representing the world, and have those means be complete and efficient, with the power to discriminate a whole other set of aspects to visual—maybe mental—appearance?” “It would be like this.” Not that the pictures actually do discriminate such another set of aspects, but they succeed in imagining, and indeed representing, what such a discrimination would involve, what the signs of it would be—as regards pictorial density, for instance, or flexibility and exquisiteness of handling, or thickness of clues to spatial location.⁸⁹

Likewise, it would be a mistake to think that the exacting method of Stein’s portrait somehow constitutes a likeness of Picasso that we could recognize if only we understood the language of the portrait. Instead, like Picasso, Stein depicts “what the pursuit of likeness now looks like,” now that she has exposed the *as* at the heart of representation—the doubling and inexactness of comparison, the displacements and substitutions of illusionism.⁹⁰ If it were possible to portray a likeness of Picasso, “[t]o exact resemblance,” it would entail parsing an impossibly intricate set of subtle differences among the contingent terms that determine relation. It must expose the doubling of resemblance (“Exactly as as kings.”); splinter and multiply reference (Napoleon / Picasso / Revere / Reverdy / Rivière / Riviera / Stein); amplify contingency exponentially; and demonstrate that handling matters, that the relational nexus of knowing and presentation is everything: “he is” must be endlessly complicated by “as he is.” The portrait is composed of all that is typically lost in representation. It is made of transitive relations and expresses the contingency in viewing and the expressive dimension in language that dissolves when we look for a portrait subject. It is not a likeness of Picasso but a depiction of what such a likeness would require, and this accounts for its difficulty, its obdurate quality, and also its lightness, the unmistakable insouciance of its tone. Stein is pleased to uncover the activity of exactitude, to extract the word “act” from “exact”: “Now actively repeat at all, now actively repeat at all, now actively repeat at all” (464). The artist is exacting; this

is, after all, how the portrait is formed, extracting one word from another and exacting difference from repetition. Resemblance can never be exact.

Notes

1. Audio files recorded in the winter 1934–35 during Stein’s U.S. tour can be accessed through PennSound, Center for Programs in Contemporary Writing, University of Pennsylvania, at http://media.sas.upenn.edu/pennsound/authors/Stein/1935/Stein-Gertrude_If-I-Told-Him.mp3. Originally published in *Vanity Fair* in April 1924, Stein included the piece in *Dix Portraits* (1930), translated into French by George Hugnet with Virgil Thomson, and later in *Portraits and Prayers* (1934).
2. Robert Chodat, “Sense, Science, and the Interpretations of Gertrude Stein,” *Modernism/modernity*, 12 (2005): 581–605.
3. In a telegram to Picasso dated September 11, 1923, Stein announced her arrival: “ARE IN NICE WILL FIND YOU ON THE BEACH WEDNESDAY PM UNLESS HEAR OTHERWISE LOVE TO EVERYBODY = GERTRUDE.” *Pablo Picasso, Gertrude Stein: Correspondence*, ed. Laurence Madeline (Seagull Books: New York, 2008), 272. See Stein’s account of this period “of not seeing each other” (from around 1919 to 1921) in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 193–94.
4. Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, 221.
5. In my view, the new style of portraiture begins with “And too./Van Vechten./A Sequel to One,” the second portrait Stein wrote of Carl Van Vechten in August 1923 before leaving Paris for Nice. For unknown reasons this portrait was not cataloged with Stein’s work and was not published until it was discovered by Edward Burns in the Stein manuscripts. *Letters of Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten 1935–1946*, vol. 2, ed. Edward Burns (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 861. Dates of the first portraits are as follows: “Picasso” in 1909 or 1910, “Ada” (Alice Toklas) in 1910, and “One. Carl Van Vechten” in 1913.
6. Wendy Steiner, *Exact Resemblance to Exact Resemblance: The Literary Portraiture of Gertrude Stein* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 109; Ulla E. Dydo, *A Stein Reader* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 453; and Ulla E. Dydo with William Rice, *Gertrude Stein: The Language that Rises 1923–34* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2003), 74; Steven Meyer, *Irresistible Dictation: Gertrude Stein and the Correlations of Writing and Science* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 315–16; Ulla Haselstein, “Gertrude Stein’s Portraits of Matisse and Picasso,” *New Literary History* 34, no. 4 (2003): 737; Joan Retallack, ed. *Gertrude Stein: Selections* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 7.
7. Gertrude Stein, “If I Told Him/A Completed Portrait of Picasso,” in Dydo, *A Stein Reader*, 464. Subsequent references to the portrait are to this edition and will be cited in the text.
8. Dydo, *Gertrude Stein: The Language That Rises*, 74.
9. Meyer, *Irresistible Dictation*, 315.
10. Dydo dates the composition of “Picasso” to 1909 or 1910 in *Gertrude Stein: The Language That Rises*, 30. Years later, Stein made the comparison of Picasso and Napoleon in *The Autobiography of Alice*

B. Toklas: "Picasso was more than ever as Gertrude Stein said the little bullfighter followed by his squadron of four, or as later in her portrait of him, she called him, Napoleon followed by his four enormous grenadiers" (58). As I argue, we want to discover what becomes of this comparison in the compositional experiment of the portrait.

11. Steiner, *Exact Resemblance To Exact Resemblance*, 107.
12. *Ibid.*, 108.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*, 109.
15. Steiner, 101. Henry M. Sayre has objected that in seeking to identify reference, Steiner misses Stein's intent, which is to "undermine the referential certainty of language" and to "re-present representation." Sayre, "The Artist's Model: American Art and the Question of Looking Like Gertrude Stein," in *Gertrude Stein and the Making of Literature*, ed. Shirley Neuman and Ira Nadel (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988), 24, 26.
16. Haselstein, 724.
17. *Ibid.*, 727. According to Haselstein, "If I Told Him" is a resemblance of Stein, a "self-portrait in the guise of a portrait," by turns a stammering and mocking deflation of her earlier admiration, a dramatization of her competitive resentment of Picasso who always "came first," and a "playful exorcism" (738).
18. Rosalind E. Krauss, "In the Name of Picasso," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), 32. Krauss charged William Rubin with introducing the "Autobiographical Picasso," the critical tendency to reduce Picasso's style to biography, neglecting transpersonal aspects of style. The impetus for Krauss's critique was Rubin's discussion in a 1980 lecture of Picasso's "Seated Bather" (1930) and "Bather with Beach Ball" (1932), paintings he claimed were distinctive in style and whose style was determined by Picasso's response to their subjects, his wife, Olga, and his young lover, Marie-Thérèse Walter. In "Reflections on Picasso and Portraiture," a later essay, Rubin qualifies, but ultimately reiterates his claim: "The formal invention which made possible the metaphoric languages of these two canvases cannot be attributed to the 'influence' of either Olga or Marie-Thérèse; however, the differing formal vocabularies of the paintings clearly reflect Picasso's responses to the characters of their 'models'" (66). Indeed, although Rubin claims that in Picasso's "conceptual" portraiture, metaphorical associations to an individual subject fade as the "morphology" is redeployed and its "contingency" is revealed, nonetheless for each development in painting style, Rubin identifies portrait subjects and biographical references and reduces the expressive dimension of associations to representation. Krauss's objection to art history practiced as "a history of the proper name" is that it limits the proper name to extension only (its meaning constrained to denotation) rather than also considering intension, that is, connotation and conceptual status that broadens its association to a "plurality of instances" (25, 27). Krauss finds this approach to Picasso's work especially egregious insofar as his collages contest such "semantic positivism" and demonstrate "command of the structure of signification: no positive sign without the eclipse or negation of its material referent" (34). Historical or personal detail

is deployed in a complex interrogation of the structures of representation and therefore Krauss's analysis is particularly apt for Stein's portrait which, as I argue, playfully acts *On the Name of Picasso*. T. J. Clark recently dismissed the tendency to biographical reductionism ("Biography is banality writ large. . .") in "Monster," the fourth in the series of the Andrew Mellon lectures he gave at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. in Spring 2009 (podcast on the museum website).

19. For examples of the Cubist analogy in Stein criticism see Charles Altieri, *Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 241–47; Marjorie Perloff, "Poetry As Word-System: The Art of Gertrude Stein," *The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999); Steiner, *Exact Resemblance To Exact Resemblance*. See also Steiner, *The Colors of Rhetoric: Problems in the Relation between Modern Literature and Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 177–96.
20. Marjorie Perloff, "After Language Poetry: Innovation and Its Theoretical Discontents," in *Differentials: Poetry, Poetics, Pedagogy* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 164.
21. Brian Reed questions the reference to Paul Revere's warning signal: "why interject such a strange trivial aside into the portrait of an influential avant-garde artist? But who cares?" in "Now Not Now: Gertrude Stein Speaks," *ESC* 33, no. 4 (December 2007): 103–13.
22. Steiner, 105–6.
23. Stein, "Plays," in *Lectures In America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), 104.
24. *Ibid.*, 122.
25. Stein, Lecture 2 in *Narration: Four Lectures By Gertrude Stein* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1935), 21.
26. I am proposing that we treat the new style of portraiture that emerges with the series of second portraits in the late summer of 1923 within the context of the compositional experiment of the landscape plays, an experiment that carries across genre distinctions during this period. In this I differ in method from Steiner's early approach and more recent criticism that focuses on portraiture as genre. Despite evident differences in their style, Steiner grouped the portraits of 1923 with the second phase of Stein's portraiture, the "visually-oriented period" that begins in 1911 or 1913 and extends through 1925 (Steiner, *Exact Resemblance to Exact Resemblance*, 65). Generic concerns matter as Stein returns over years to the question, "what it was that [she] wanted to have as a portrait, what there is that was to be the portrait," and yet by neglecting intervening texts we risk missing the compositional experiment that informs a new style of portraiture ("Portraits and Repetition," *Lectures in America*, 291).
27. Gilles Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity: An Essay on Hume's Theory of Human Nature*, trans. Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 110.
28. *Ibid.* Deleuze paraphrasing Hume's concept of the given and on principles of human nature, 87, 98.
29. William James, in "The Thing and its Relations," an appendix to "A Pluralistic Universe," in *Writings 1902–1910* (New York: The Library of America, 1987), 782–83. The series of Hibbert Lectures were published as "A Pluralistic Universe" in 1908; the appendix revised an article published in 1905. Bruce Kuklick, "Note on the Texts," 1353–54.

30. James addressed the role of language in shaping the experience of flux: "But the flux of [pure experience] no sooner comes than it tends to fill itself with emphases, and these salient parts become identified and fixed and abstracted; so that experience now flows as if shot through with adjectives and nouns and prepositions and conjunctions. Its purity is only a relative term, meaning the proportional amount of unverballed sensation which it still embodies." Ibid. James asserted that "prepositions, copulas and conjunctions" are equally a part of the flux of pure experience as are nouns and adjectives, but they dissolve into the "stream" so soon as they are applied to a new portion. James appears to have anticipated the concept of pure experience through his attention to the role of transitive relations in language in *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), vol. 1 (New York: Dover, 1950), 245–46. An abridged version of *Principles* was assigned reading at the Harvard Annex when Stein was a student there.
31. James, *Principles of Psychology*, 243.
32. James, "The Meaning of Truth," in *Writings 1902–1910*, 826.
33. Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 57.
34. In a study correlating Stein's work with nineteenth-century scientific and philosophical inquiry, Meyer also concludes that she practices a radical empiricism in her writing, which he calls a form of "poetic science" (49). According to Meyer, Stein's "preference for relational parts of speech . . . was a literary prejudice that James, framing his psychological hypotheses in grammatical terms, had confirmed her in" (235). See also Lyn Hejinian's discussion of James's influence on the relational or "lateral" method of *Tender Buttons* in "Language and Realism," one of "Two Stein Talks" in *The Language of Inquiry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 98–101.
35. Hejinian, "Language and Realism," 92.
36. Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, ed. Constantin V. Boundas, trans. Mark Lester (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 19.
37. Ibid., 18.
38. Ibid., 21.
39. Ibid., 25.
40. Ibid., 21.
41. Ibid., 22.
42. Ibid., 25.
43. Ibid.
44. Stein, "Portraits and Repetition," in *Lectures in America*, 181.
45. Quoted in William Lundell, "Gertrude Stein: A Radio Interview," *Paris Review*, no. 116 (Fall 1990): 85–97.
46. Jennifer Ashton, *From Modernism to Postmodernism: American Poetry and Theory in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 2. Marjorie Perloff, *21st-Century Modernism: The "New" Poetics*. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002).
47. Ashton, 9. See Charles Altieri's response to Ashton's insistence on distinguishing between meaning and experience in "The Motive for Metonymy (A Parochial Theme in Two Parts)," Nonsite.

org, no. 4 (Winter 2011). According to Altieri, "Ashton . . . invokes definitional rigor in domains where she probably should admit a great deal more indeterminacy—or, at least, gradations in our vocabulary for relations between meaning and experience in works of literature." Nonsite.org, no. 5 (Spring 2012).

48. Ashton, 27.
49. Ashton, 4–5. Perloff, 54. Perloff credits Lyn Hejinian for the insight that it was Flaubert who "seems to have given Stein the license to stress *composition* rather than *representation*, the play of signifiers rather than the pointing relation of signifier to signified." *21st-Century Modernism*, 54.
50. Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, 211.
51. Stein, *Operas and Plays* (Barrytown, NY: Station Hill Press, 1987), 116.
52. Steiner, 108. As Dydo notes, "Geography" (1923), which Stein wrote in the same *carnet* as "If I Told Him," also includes reference to Napoleon (*The Language That Rises*, 72).
53. Christopher Green, *Juan Gris* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 52.
54. T. J. Clark, *Farewell to An Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 171.
55. Green, 52.
56. Stein, *Picasso* (Paris: Librairie Floury, 1938; reprint, Boston: Beacon Press, 1960), 11.
57. James, *The Principles of Psychology*, vol. 2, 88.
58. Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, 222.
59. The full title of the article is "A Portrait of Jo Davidson / An American Revolutionary of Prose Sets Down Her Impressions of an American Sculptor," in *Vanity Fair* (February 1923), 19 (6): 48, 90. Although it is signed, "By Gertrude Stein," evidently this attribution refers to Stein's text, "A Portrait of Jo Davidson," which appears after a short, unsigned, introduction of "Miss Gertrude Stein, an American now living in Paris" and the method of her "literary experiment" by analogy to "the new school of French painters" (48). The article includes three illustrations of portraits: Man Ray's photograph, "Gertrude Stein Posing for Jo Davidson," Jacques Lipchitz's bust of Stein, and Picasso's *Portrait of Gertrude Stein*. I concur with Edward Burns who ascribes the title "An American Revolutionary of Prose Sets Down Her Impressions of an American Sculptor" to the "unsigned article" in *Letters of Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten*, vol. 1, 94, n 5. That she should be regarded as a "Revolutionary of Prose" coincided with Stein's own estimation of herself. In a 1929 letter to Henry McBride she wrote "and anyway what am I, I am an American, Alice says a civil war general in retirement, perhaps." Richard Bridgman, *Gertrude Stein in Pieces* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 209 and repeated in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, 16.
60. Quoted in Clark, 205.
61. Stein, *Picasso*, 2. Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, 221.
62. Stein, *Picasso*, 2.
63. Shari Benstock, *Women Of The Left Bank, Paris, 1900–1940* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 47–8.

64. Green, *Juan Gris*, 63. In 1921 Stein and Toklas visited Gris in Bandol, a seaside town on the Mediterranean coast, where he was painting a series of open window motifs. On their return to Paris, Stein and Toklas purchased one of these paintings, "The Table in Front of the Window," from Kahnweiler. *The Steins Collect: Matisse, Picasso, and the Parisian Avant-Garde*, ed. Janet Bishop, Cécile Debray, Rebecca Rabinow, (San Francisco: Museum of Modern Art in association with New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 293.
65. *Ibid.*, 62.
66. Madeline, 264.
67. Stein, *Picasso*, 38.
68. Quoted in Pepe Karmel, *Picasso and the Invention of Cubism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 19.
69. Although Meyer notes that the portrait "rearrange[s]" Picasso's name, he reinstates the question of resemblance: "Hence the portrait is riddled with plays on Picasso's name, beginning with the inquiry concerning the extent to which his name and person can be compared with Napoleon's" (315).
70. Stein, *Picasso*, 18.
71. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. "as."
72. Stein, ed. Burns, *The Letters of Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten 1913–1935*, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 88.
73. Clark, 219.
74. *Ibid.*, 190.
75. Krauss, 34.
76. Karmel, 69.
77. Clark, 211.
78. Karmel, 76.
79. *Ibid.*, 55.
80. Clark, 219.
81. *Ibid.*
82. Karmel, 87.
83. Clark, 204–5.
84. Karmel, 185–91.
85. Neil Cox, *Cubism* (London: Phaidon Press, 2000), 268–71.
86. Karmel, 185.
87. Clark, 220–22.
88. *Ibid.*, 212.
89. *Ibid.*, 213.
90. *Ibid.*, 221.