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Abstract

Guillaume Apollinaire, one of the most original poets of the early twentieth-century French *avant garde*, played a crucial role in the enunciation of modernist aesthetics. Through innovative poetic forms, Apollinaire set forth a new aesthetics which underscored the inherent ambiguity of an increasingly turbulent modern context. Apollinaire's interest in the pure dynamism of the contemporary material landscape, and his attraction to the image that explodes with immediate presence, also led him to a natural curiosity in the visual arts. Identifying with the Cubist mosaic style of inclusion, the juxtaposition of reality and imagination, and the simultaneity of spatial and temporal movement, Apollinaire saw modern artists as "singers of a constantly new truth," inventors of a uniquely authentic modern experience. Apollinaire composed verse to honor his favorite painters, but he also wrote critical studies on the visual arts, and he declares that it is in Cubist art that we can discover a truly successful endeavor to come to terms with the upheavals of modernity. In several texts Apollinaire devotes specifically to Picasso, he argues that his canvases contain the most essential aspects of modern art: a new interpretation of light, a genuine understanding of the elusive notion of the "fourth dimension," and an incarnation of the most modern of principles, surprise. Apollinaire's texts on Picasso, examples of his *poésie critique*, do not remain simply words printed on a page, but are transformed into an extension of the painting he wishes to convey, experimental and unpredictable in discursive tone and poetic style. Through these texts, Apollinaire moves beyond the parameters of a journalistic style of criticism, as his pieces on Picasso take on a chameleon-like power of movement, engendering unique forms of an *avant-garde* improvisation, the painting of prose poetry.

Keywords

Guillaume Apollinaire, original, poet, twentieth-century, French avant garde, avant garde, modernist aesthetics, modernist, ambiguity, pure dynamism, visual arts, Cubist mosaic style, cubism, reality, imagination, spatial and temporal movement, authentic, authentic experience, Picasso, modern art, light, fourth dimension, surprise, poésie critique, experimental, unpredictable, prose poetry, painting

The Poetics of Visual Cubism:
Guillaume Apollinaire on Pablo Picasso

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The name of Guillaume Apollinaire has come to be considered as one of the most natural to be found in the twentieth-century French canon, his inclusion taken for granted on reading lists, in bibliographies, and on the shelves of autodidacts. Yet both his assumed Frenchness and his role as “canon-fodder” are in fact quite paradoxical, for his origins are most curious and his aesthetics most revolutionary. As a poet and prose writer, critic and active participant in the *avant-garde*, Apollinaire is widely recognized as an enormously influential aesthetic mind in the early years of the twentieth century, and his perspective embodies a cultural and ideological attitude unlike any that came before him.

Wilhem Apollinaris de Kostrowitzky—the real name of Apollinaire—settled in Paris in 1902 at the age of 20, where he took on the rather impulsive first pseudonym of “Guillaume Macabre,” then devised the more creative and personal form of “Guillaume Apollinaire,” a name that acts as an anchor for the disparate flotsam of his complex identity. Apollinaire’s persona represents a model of careful self-construction; he actively projected a spectacular image of himself, protean and magnanimous, and he became one of the most recognizable figures on the Paris streets in the years preceding World War I.¹ Apollinaire embodies in fact a curiously successful case of a mythomaniacal sense of self, for what we can confirm of his factual biography tends to heighten, not disperse, the aura of fable often associated with his

name. A legend in his own time, described by André Breton as “lyricism in person” (23), Apollinaire’s life was as fragmented and surprising as the new forms of poetry and painting whose cause he championed.²

Apollinaire was born in Rome in 1880, the illegitimate child of a Finnish-born mother of Polish origin and Russian nationality; he never knew his father, who was rumored to be a Vatican nobleman. His early years remain veiled in obscurity, though we know he traveled extensively through various Mediterranean seaports, and as a young man, he subsisted as a bank clerk to support his mother, while he began his literary career as a ghostwriter of doctoral dissertations and erotic novels. In 1911, he was accused, arrested, and imprisoned for six days for the theft of the *Mona Lisa* from the Louvre, a caper for which he was not directly responsible, though he was indirectly involved.³ On more than one occasion, he challenged a fellow literary critic to a duel for an ill-received review; fortunately, these disputes were settled without violence. So extravagant in fact was the folkloric nature of his life that Apollinaire the man seems to dematerialize behind the mask of his own creation, and H. L. Mencken even writes of him in 1924 as embodying an elaborate hoax, citing his name only in quotation marks. His end was tragic, in a word. Though of Italian nationality, he enlisted voluntarily with the French forces at the outbreak of the First World War, and spent two years at the front, simultaneously fighting and writing poetry. On March 17, 1916, eight days after he finally obtained his French citizenship, Apollinaire received a serious head wound from the debris of a shell, and was sent back to Paris. Upon his return, and after extensive surgery on his skull, his friends insisted that he had somehow fundamentally changed, both in his personality and in his work. He died in 1918, at age 38, weakened from his wound and from the gas of the battlefield, one of the many victims of the devastating influenza epidemic of that year. As he lay on his deathbed in November, his demise was accompanied by ill-timed cries of “Down with Guillaume!” directed not at him, but at Kaiser Wilhelm in Germany.

In the case of this most original poet and critic, it is useful to keep this biographical data in mind because Apollinaire believed that life was an inherently artistic adventure, and art, a primary element in the experience of life, the two elements indivisible. This was no ivory-tower poet; hearty of appetite, robust of stature, and hale of health, Apollinaire expressed his optimistic enthusiasm and pure *joie de vivre* through his energetic personal motto, “I amaze.” He leapt without hesitation into the chaos of modern life, open to all stimuli like a hyperactive transmitter of the disordered perceptions, emotions, and ideas of the wildly unpredictable *avant-garde* years, an era unique perhaps in its overwhelming sense of the new, of the double-edged sword of modernity. Along with awe-inspiring new technologies and unprecedented possibilities for communication, transportation, industry, and beyond, the escalating force of progress brought with it a menace of dehumanization and the disintegration of meaning, problematizing the role of the individual besieged by the ambivalent new forces that culminated in the overwhelming horror of world war. Challenged by the at once stimulating and terrifying urban landscape, the sudden strangeness of the everyday world, Apollinaire formulated a purely aesthetic response, and declared defiantly: “I am not afraid of art,”⁴ and he writes of the unmatched singularity of the dimensions, both metaphysical and physical, of the modern cityscape:

The rainbow is bent, the seasons quiver, the crowds push on to death, science undoes and remakes what already exists, while worlds disappear forever from our understanding, our mobile images repeat themselves, or revive their vagueness, and the colors, the odors, and the sounds to which we are sensitive astonish us, then disappear from nature—all to no purpose. (*CP* 9)

To seize and translate the turbulent atmosphere of the new, he counseled his fellow poets and artists to accept nothing at face value and to always seek out the unlikely and the unusual. For him, this new art was to embody dynamic lived experience, a multifaceted expression of spontaneous, immediate sensation.⁵

Though he wrote for the theater and published short stories, novels, anecdotal pieces, and essays, Apollinaire is best known

for his rethinking of French poetry, particularly for his original style of combining elegant lyricism and radically new form in the collections *Alcools* (1913) and *Calligrammes* (1918). Throughout his literary career, he wrote pieces in traditional meter, as well, with the time-honored themes of love, death, and the search for self linking his early work to a centuries-old tradition of French prosody, but he focused primarily on verse of an increasingly more modern nature, liberating his expression towards a form of poetics unfettered by punctuation and in wholly free verse. Apollinaire the poet is perhaps most celebrated for his work with what has been named—not without controversy—“literary cubism,” the exploration in language of the principles of unlikely juxtaposition, immediate spontaneity, and the reconsideration of the dynamics of the material world.⁶ In this vein, he fashioned unusual linguistic and structural systems, such as his “letter poems” and “conversation poems” which fragment rational discourse and defy conventional syntax and style, but the most obviously radical of his experiments remains his *Calligrammes* (for which he considered the evocative early title of *And I Too am a Painter*). Through these poems, Apollinaire explores the figure of the ideogram, conceived as a kind of still life in words, in which the typographical form of a text suggests visually either the object observed or the metaphysical movement of the poet’s thought as it turns around the object, considering it from a variety of perspectives. These experiments in poetic collage posit a reexamination of the notion of linearity, both temporal and spatial, and an emphasis on gesture, on the very act of writing in all its visually evocative power, underscores the move to reorganize space, both on the page and in the mind’s eye.⁷

Apollinaire’s interest in the pure dynamism of the material landscape, as well as his attraction to the image that emerges on the page in all its immediate presence led him to a natural curiosity in the visual arts. The appearance in 1913 of his *Méditations esthétiques: les peintres cubistes*—in fact the only independent volume of art criticism he published—represents one of the most original critical sources available on the Cubist movement.⁸ Before Apollinaire’s study appeared, the only sources in print were

Albert Gleizes's and Jean Metzinger's *Le Cubisme* and André Salmon's *La Jeune Peinture française*, which both appeared in 1912. It is interesting to note that although it is in Apollinaire's analysis of Cubism that he makes a significant formal distinction among what he perceives as four separate kinds of Cubist expression—scientific, physical, orphic, and instinctive—these categories actually had little real impact on either the painters or the critics associated with the movement, and the true value of the volume clearly lies elsewhere, as we will examine further, in the innovations of his discursive tone.

Apollinaire represented a crucial link between the poets and the painters of the era, a kind of human “hyphen” as Gertrude Stein described him, joining literary and visual art. As a pivot for the forces of modernism, Apollinaire became an active figure in the literary journals of the first two decades of the twentieth century—his first journalistic critical text dates from 1902 and his last from 1918—contributing to many well-established reviews, as well as serving as director for certain periodicals, and founding his own publications.⁹ His peculiar force was that of a catalyst, not only as a founder of artistic journals, an avid collector of artworks, and an ardent supporter of exhibits and galleries, but most fundamentally as a critical voice for the still-disparate groups of young painters. He wrote extensively on the artistic movements of his time, and his contributions of art criticism on such painters as Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, Juan Gris, and Robert Delaunay helped to shape the early careers of these artists, as well as the overall direction of twentieth-century art. As a testament to his widespread influence among these artists, we have portraits of Apollinaire by a surprising number of diverse painters from the early 1900s: Picasso, Rousseau, Vlaminck, Metzinger, de Chirico, Mogdilianni, Larionov, Picabia, Duchamp, and Laurencin, among others.¹⁰

In a practical application of Baudelaire's celebrated adage that the most apt illustration of a painting is a poem, Apollinaire sometimes wrote verse to honor his favorite painters, as with Delaunay, Picasso, Chagall, and Rousseau, yet it can be argued that his many critical articles hold the real key to the originality of his perspec-

tive. A true “poet-critic” in the tradition begun by Diderot, Apollinaire, like Baudelaire, was a self-taught art critic and he began his art theory naïve to technical terminology and to the conventional precepts of the field. His work was spontaneous, impetuous, and ahead of its time, and like many *avant-garde* pioneers, he was often misunderstood, underestimated, or disregarded. Yet for one who began as a novice in the appreciation, analysis, and promotion of painting, the accuracy of Apollinaire’s taste is uncanny, for his favorite painters—Picasso, Braque, Delaunay, and Matisse, for example—are now considered among the most influential artists of the century.

For the writers and artists of the *avant-garde*, Apollinaire embodied the prophet of modernity, a wandering minstrel of contemporary life, and a true believer in the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson, who once wrote: “For the experience of each new age requires a new confession, and the world seems always waiting for its poet.”¹¹ In 1918, Apollinaire published in *Le Mercure de France* a vital text entitled “L’Esprit nouveau et les poètes,”¹² in which it becomes clear that for Apollinaire, the central principle of *avant-garde* art is the total freedom of the artist, whether visual or literary, the creator’s autonomy based on a rejection of fallen idols and clichéd forms, as well as on the refusal to imitate reality from a passive or subservient position. For him, “modern poets are above all singers of a constantly new truth” (“New Spirit . . .” 235), and poetry is understood primarily as an active gesture of creation, in which the poet reigns as a kind of god, a figure of alchemical magic whose kaleidoscopic vision engenders a mosaic of images and ideas.

Apollinaire saw the mission of an aesthetic critic as a spiritual duty to link the modern self both to the past and to the future, grounding the individual in historical time. In this light, he alludes in his writing to the remark of Ernest Hello that “the critic must be as accurate as posterity; he must speak in the present the words of the future” (*Apollinaire on Art* xxix). He felt that the art of the turn of the century had stagnated in monotonous complacency, no longer in sync with the modern spirit, and he was convinced that the work then most lauded by the Academy was in-

competent, derivative, and dull. Yet his was not a simplistically binary system, and though Apollinaire can declare: "I detest artists who are not of their time" (CP 25), he also argues that the artists of modernity are the inheritors of a powerful aesthetic tradition, a history undeniable, but still incomplete without continued innovation, in the quest to surpass the complacency of the quotidian. Against this wave of mediocrity, he knew that a measured, careful response was necessary to bring about the aesthetic revolution of which he dreamt, and in his most enthusiastic tone, he promises: "Nothing unstable will send us off half-cocked. We will not be suddenly turning back. Free spectators, we will not sacrifice our lives to our curiosity. The smugglers of appearances will not be able to get their contraband past the salt statues of our customs house of reason" (CP 10-11).

Though Apollinaire coined many important aesthetic terms of the *avant-garde*, such as "Surrealism" and "Orphism," and though he explored and commented upon other schools of visual art, such as Fauvism, Futurism, and Simultanism, it is in his analysis of Cubism that we can discover his most strikingly original voice.¹³ Apollinaire's timely interest in those he described as "the young who think in plastic"¹⁴ was well-received among the painters, for when he discovered the young Cubists prior to 1910, they were in great need of a spokesman. In 1911, the year of the first official Cubist exhibit, as well as one of the most productive years of Apollinaire's career as an art critic, he found himself faced with the stubborn prejudices of his public as he tried to explain the value of the new art. He declares:

But how is one to explain these things in the pages of a newspaper [*L'Intransigeant*] at a time when every exhibition hall in Paris proclaims the triumph of the most mediocre paintings, while the independent painters, harried by a hatred that is all too easy to understand and pursued by every jackass in Christendom, find no home for their works? (*Apollinaire on Art* 135-36)

With their strikingly new style and shocking manipulation of composition, perspective, and representation, naturally the Cubists did not at first enjoy great public support.¹⁵ They were ridiculed by academic art critics, refused by State salons, and over-

looked by gallery owners and art dealers who considered them to be bizarre and immoral, if not completely crazy and dangerous.¹⁶

Perhaps the clearest source of the affinity that Apollinaire felt with these painters lies in the notion that the Cubists of the period from approximately 1905 to 1920 emphasized in their work the same forces that animate Apollinaire's later, most original verse: spontaneity, simultaneity, and the vibrant nature of the concrete world. For Apollinaire, verbal and visual artistic expression both explore processes of fragmentation and simultaneity, and he argues that as a poet makes use of a dictionary, a painter turns to concrete material.¹⁷ The Cubists combined a renewed aesthetic sense of geometric form with an appreciation of the dynamism of visually-perceived objects. The many forms of their art expressed the continual flux of modernity through new methods and forms, like collages, found objects, and physical experiments with the multiple dimensions of the artwork.¹⁸ To convey the total impression of the human perception of an object, argues Apollinaire, painters like Picasso, Derain, and Léger shifted the emphasis from the image of an object to the idea we hold of it, depicting on the canvas all its angles, both physical and conceptual, in a new imaginary and perceptual space. The artwork thus becomes the equivalent of the concrete object, not its imitation, but its aesthetic rival. Moreover, space is freed from traditional perspective and composition, acting no longer as a frame that surrounds a depicted object, but presented as an integral, active participant in the dynamic spectacle of the painting.

In his more general pieces, such as the 1908 "Three Plastic Virtues," the 1912 "Reality: Pure Painting," and the 1918 "The New Spirit and the Poets," Apollinaire advances his revolutionary call to arms, establishing his appeal around his own three graces, key elements he names Purity, Unity, and Truth.¹⁹ Through these "three plastic virtues," Apollinaire insists on the total freedom of the artist, presented as a unique being, a chosen seer whose quest is to explore the multitude of potential forms of beauty expressible in an artwork. As Apollinaire perceives the first of these elemental essences, purity is revealed to be vital, even divine, in the modern aesthetic endeavor: "To insist on purity is to baptize instinct, to humanize art, and to deify personality" (*CP* 10):

Purity is a forgetting after study. And for a single pure artist to die, it would be necessary for all pure artists of past ages never to have existed. Painting purifies itself in Europe with the ideal logic which the older painters handed on to the new ones, as if giving them new life. And that is all. This painter finds pleasure, that one, pain; one squanders his inheritance, another becomes rich, and still others have nothing but life. And that is all. . . . (CP 10)

Against fashion and “good taste,” utility and social progress, the purity inherent in the cosmic values of the universe must be primary in art, expressed as contingent illustrations of an absolute. Apollinaire argues that to keep a focus on the pure will lead to the unified, to a continued sense of cohesion and purpose in the artwork. Of the concept of unity as illuminated in the work of modern artists, Apollinaire writes:

The picture will exist ineluctably. The vision will be entire, complete, and its infinity, instead of indicating some imperfection, will simply express the relation between a newly created thing and a new creator, nothing more. Otherwise there would be no unity, and the connection which the different points of the canvas have with various dispositions, objects, and lights, would reveal only an assemblage of odds and ends, lacking all harmony. (CP 11)

And as for truth, which figures as the third vital figure in Apollinaire’s theoretical aesthetics, he suggests: “Truth is always new. Otherwise truth would be a system even more wretched than nature itself” (CP 11). Brimming with potential, uncorrupted by time, truth complements purity and unity through its moral force and aesthetic power: “To explore truth, to search for it, as much in the ethical domain, for example, as in that of the imagination—those are the principal characteristics of the new spirit” (“New Spirit” 227).

Thus it is through this modern trinity that for Apollinaire Cubist art asserts its independence and integrity in the project to reevaluate objective reality. In his 1908 text, “The Three Plastic Virtues,” Apollinaire employs the term “Cubism” for the first time; indeed, the word’s history begins that same year and can be traced to an ironic comment made by Matisse, when faced with a landscape painting by Braque, then a young upstart: “Well!” he

exclaimed, “look at all the darling little cubes!”²⁰ Primarily through Apollinaire’s criticism, however, the term becomes of course quite serious, decisive in the development of modern art. To sing the glories of Cubism, Apollinaire first denounces what he describes as the decline and ruin of Impressionism; though he recognizes the undeniable genius of such painters as Gauguin, Cézanne, and Degas, he asserts that their time has passed, that contemporary European culture has moved to a different conceptual space, and that the twentieth-century soul must have twentieth-century art.²¹ Apollinaire further argues that Cubism is more complete than Naturalism or Realism because it incorporates a multiplicity of elements from ordinary life seen from many perspectives simultaneously, the objective world dignified by the creative subjectivity of the ordering consciousness of the modern mind. In a revolutionary tone, he declares: “The time has come for us to be the masters. And good will is not enough to make victory certain” (*CP* 9). And yet, it is not the Impressionist group in painting, nor any single aesthetic or ideological movement in any art form that Apollinaire perceives as the ultimate obstacle to progress. In “The New Spirit and the Poets,” he declares:

The new spirit is above all the enemy of estheticism, of formulae, and of cultism. It attacks no school whatever, for it does not wish to be a school, but rather one of the great currents of literature encompassing all schools since symbolism and naturalism. It fights for the reestablishment of the spirit of initiative, for the clear understanding of its time, and for the opening of new vistas on the exterior and interior universes which are not inferior to those which scientists of all categories discover every day and from which they extract endless marvels. (237)

To the remnants of nineteenth-century style, he saw Cubism as the necessary reaction, and he declares: “You cannot carry around the corpse of your father on your back. You must leave him with the other dead” (*CP* 10). Apollinaire saw thus in Cubist artists a powerful affirmation of autonomy, both aesthetic and ethical, a unique and constructive response to the aggressively destabilizing forces of culture and history.

It may prove most useful at this point to concentrate specifically on Apollinaire’s criticism of Picasso, for not only does it

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illustrate the poet's uncanny intuitive sense of aesthetics, and present a creative discursive style and tone, but also it posits a uniquely perceptive view of modern subjectivity, a distinctively artistic understanding of a specific historical moment. When Apollinaire and Picasso met in 1904 in Paris, they immediately recognized in each other a shared passion for modernity's "convulsive beauty," as Breton would describe it, and for the need to revitalize European artistic expression. For many years, the two carried on a strong, if sometimes stormy friendship, and together they explored new avenues of interdisciplinary aesthetic work.²² It is Picasso who, with affectionate irony, dubs Apollinaire the "Pope of Cubism," as he sensed that the poet's inventive vision and imagist language could constructively translate into the realm of writing what he himself hoped to produce with line, color, and form. Early on, Picasso was rarely in the public eye; before WW I, he gave only one exhibit of his work, in 1902, and the first volume devoted to his art, Jean Cocteau's *Ode à Picasso*, did not in fact appear until 1917. Apollinaire felt it his duty, then, as a poet and a participant in the enterprise of the *avant-garde*, to promote an artist he instinctively sensed was unlike any other.

Apollinaire owned more than 100 works by Picasso—many of which he received on the backs of postcards while he was in the war—and he wrote poems dedicated to the painter (as with his "Noble Picasso" from *Calligrammes*), but it is perhaps in his art criticism that we can find his most effective, most artistic homage. In often imagistic texts resembling poems in prose, such as "Picasso, Painter, and Draftsman," and "Young Artists: Picasso the Painter," both from 1905, and the 1912 "From Michelangelo to Picasso,"²³ Apollinaire makes clear that his preferred painter is Picasso, for "Picasso ranks among those of whom Michelangelo said that they deserve the name of eagles, because they surpass all others and pierce through the clouds until they reach the sunlight" (*Apollinaire on Art* 196). He asserts that in this artist's work can be found what he saw as the most essential aspects of modern art: a new interpretation of light, an illustration of the elusive notion of the "fourth dimension," and an incarnation of the most modern of principles, surprise.

Indeed, Apollinaire's aesthetic theory and Picasso's painterly practice share a common reconsideration of the notion of light, crucial to the rethinking of pictorial and poetic value. "Painting," muses Apollinaire, is "an astonishing art whose light is illimitable" (CP 24); no longer inherently linked to, and thus limited by, its opposite, darkness, light in modern painting moves beyond traditional values and chiaroscuro, and he declares: "The new artists demand an ideal beauty, which will be, not merely the proud expression of the species, but the expression of the universe, to the degree that it has been humanized by light" (CP 18). In Picasso, the innovative concept that Apollinaire calls "simultaneous contrast" replaces the aging notions of prevailing art theory; the painter reanimates the virtues of light, discovering in it the capacity to illuminate the pure aura of idea, the very light of the mind as it reflects upon the objects of the external world.²⁴ Apollinaire writes of "the simultaneity that alone is creation," arguing:

All else is but notation, contemplation, and study. Simultaneity is life itself, and in whatever order the elements of a work succeed each other, it leads to an ineluctable end, which is death; but the creator knows only eternity. Artists have for too long strained toward death by assembling the sterile elements of art, and it is time they attained fecundity, trinity, simultaneity. (*Apollinaire on Art* 265)

Picasso, argues Apollinaire, "accustomed himself to the immense light of depths" (CP 21), and in his work, the immediacy of a moment of lived experience erupts on the canvas, emitting its phosphorescent understanding of the new, in an ecstatic moment of epiphany and illumination. "All bodies stand equal before light," Apollinaire declares, "and their modifications are determined by this dazzling power, which molds them according to its will" (CP 10). To describe Picasso's art most succinctly, Apollinaire chooses the image of the flame, the concentration of light in all its most potent energy, as a purifying fire that cleanses through its destructive power and allows for the phoenix of the new aesthetics to rise from the ashes of the past:

Flame is the symbol of painting, and the three plastic virtues burn with radiance. Flame has a purity which tolerates nothing alien, and cruelly transforms in its image whatever it touches. Flame has a magical unity; if it is divided, each fork will be like the single flame. Finally it has the sublime and incontestable truth of its own light. (*CP* 10)

From this perspective, Apollinaire then suggests that Picasso's vision reaches the light of life itself: "Such eyes are as attentive as the flowers whose desire it is always to behold the sun. O inventive joy, there are men who see with these eyes!" (*CP* 19). The originality of Picasso's vision, both imaginative and perceptual, succeeds at penetrating through the haze of imitation, passivity, and routine. The ultimately spiritual aura of art, and the Apollonian side of Apollinaire himself, find illumination in the mirror of Picasso's canvas.

The effects of pure luminosity in Picasso's work are complemented by that which Apollinaire describes as the "fourth dimension," a kind of figuration of the infinite, attainable only through an autonomous, magical, artistic challenge to the apparent limits of space and time:

The painters have been led quite naturally, one might say by intuition, to preoccupy themselves with the new possibilities of spatial measurement which, in the language of the modern studios, are designated by the term: the fourth dimension. Regarded from a plastic point of view, the fourth dimension appears to spring from the three known dimensions: it represents the immensity of space eternalizing itself in all directions at a given moment. It is space itself, the dimension of the infinite; the fourth dimension endows objects with plasticity. (*CP* 13-14).

The fourth dimension is a spiritual quality of imagination, directly related to the creative process, a subtle perceptual faculty both esoteric and methodical.²⁵ Apollinaire recognizes in Picasso's eye the capacity to perceive in all directions at once, both spatial and temporal, endowing objects with a renewed sense of presence and utility. Picasso has mastered the art, in Apollinaire's view, to capture the multidimensional potential of time in a space, working towards the impression on the canvas of an existential har-

mony, perhaps not unlike a modern, formal reincarnation of the ancient Music of the Spheres:

Representing planes to denote volumes, Picasso gives an enumeration so complete and so decisive of the various elements which make up the object, that these do not take the shape of the object, thanks to the effort of the spectator, who is forced to see all the elements simultaneously just because of the way they have been arranged. Is this art profound rather than noble? It does not dispense with the observation of nature, and acts upon us as intimately as nature itself. (CP 22)

For Apollinaire, Picasso represents the authentic creator, an almost mystic seer who contemplates space both inside and out, sounding the depths of the human psyche while he casts his gaze towards the external landscape of the modern world. “Sharply,” asserts Apollinaire, “Picasso questioned the universe” (CP 21). The painter’s vision arrives thus at truly human images, those of a shared cultural imaginary that “float in the azure of our memories, and partake of divinity, in order to damn the metaphysicians” (CP 19). Where Picasso can detect with natural grace this otherworldliness of the quotidian, most of us remark nothing, and yet, as Apollinaire suggests, “If we were alert, all the gods would awaken” (CP 19). For Apollinaire, Picasso is like a wild man, both wise and sensual, dancing round the incandescent fires of passion, fear, and desire. His godlike sense of subjectivity illustrates the poet’s notion of the painter as divine, and as he writes: “Each god creates in his own image, and so do painters. . . . Artists are above all men who want to become inhuman” (CP 11). Moreover, the spiritual transformation that takes place through a work of art is not a unique phenomenon reserved for the artist alone; the work also allows the spectator to discover his or her own sense of primeval passion, producing a deification of the individual personality:

But above all, the painter must contemplate his own divinity, and the pictures which he offers to the admiration of men will confer upon them, likewise, the glory of exercising their divinity—if only for a moment. To achieve this, it is necessary to encompass in one glance the past, the present, and the future. The canvas should present the essential which alone can elicit ecstasy. (CP 10)

This epiphanic moment shared by painter and spectator is generated by the third key element Apollinaire emphasizes, surprise, defined by the poet as “the greatest source of what is new” (“New Spirit” 233).²⁶ In another allusion to Baudelaire, for whom “the beautiful is always bizarre,” Apollinaire accents the delight in novelty and the taste for the unusual that characterize Picasso’s work, of which he writes: “Surprise laughs savagely in the purity of light” (CP 21). Apollinaire underscores the eerie, odd, almost painfully unexpected style of Picasso’s art, and in a simile that prefigures later Surrealist poetry, he suggests that a Picasso painting, *Malagueno*, “bruised us like a brief frost” (CP 21). The painter’s capacity to uncover the abnormal, the arbitrary, and the unforeseen in the multiplicity of modern life strikes Apollinaire as one of his most awe-inspiring—and disturbing—talents; he declares: “A man like Picasso studies an object as a surgeon dissects a cadaver” (CP 13). In such a way, Picasso comes to embody an unlikely yet harmonious combination of mystical and naturalist thought, painting the totality of the human spirit in all its ambivalence and contradiction. As he writes in “Picasso, Painter, and Draftsman”: “It has been said of Picasso that his work bears witness to a precocious disenchantment. I believe the opposite is true. Everything enchants him, and his incontestable talent seems to me to be at the service of a fantasy that justly blends the delightful with the horrible, the abject with the refined” (*Apollinaire on Art* 13). By questioning old ways to perceive and represent the phenomena of space and time, Picasso asserts his autonomy, and aggressively seeks out truth.

Through his writing, Apollinaire defies the misleading distinction commonly established, since Lessing, between poetry and painting, between word and image. On many occasions, Apollinaire writes of Cubism as “poetic painting,”²⁷ and he takes an interesting interdisciplinary turn in his approach to the new aesthetics, suggesting for example that “we are moving towards an entirely new art which will stand, with respect to painting as envisaged heretofore, as music stands to literature. It will be pure painting, and music is pure literature” (CP 12); again, in the same text, he argues that “geometry is to the plastic arts what gram-

mar is to the writer" (13), positing an evocative parallel in form among the arts.²⁸ Through his experimental work with painters, as in his collaborations with Picabia and Delaunay, Apollinaire formulates a new concept of "music," presented as a metaphor for a style of painting freed from the traditional demands of mimesis and representation, not unlike the autonomy of musical sounds, unhindered by the strictures of the semantics of language. This new understanding of music is complemented quite naturally by his concept of "plasticity," an equally liberating notion focusing on the Cubist reinterpretation of the appearances of the concrete world. Together, Apollinaire's music and plasticity create a new realm of artistic potential that reveals a deep and subtle system of correspondence in both literary and visual art. Form, no matter the details of its specific nature, present in poetics or in color and line, is for Apollinaire the key principle to accent in his critical view.²⁹ Added to this groundwork is the presence of simultaneity, of the inclusion of several dimensions—spatial, temporal, and semantic—and prose thus unfolds under Apollinaire's eye as a generic framework brimming with potential.

Moving beyond the parameters of a journalistic style of criticism, or a docile textbook approach to art history, Apollinaire's pieces on Picasso take on a chameleonlike power of movement, engendering unique forms of an *avant-garde* improvisation, the painting of prose poetry. The primitive, magical sense of self-in-the-world discernable in Picasso's vision is equally present in Apollinaire's texts on his art. Through the play of shape and sound, of word and image, Apollinaire sculpts a discursive style which combines elements of theory, biography, autobiography, fiction, and historical chronicle. As in the strikingly visual text Apollinaire entitles simply "Pablo Picasso," first published in the review *SIC* in May, 1917, he blends both pictorial and linguistic imagery to capture the impression of visual art, to communicate the sensual experience of a work by Picasso. As one of the most experimental pieces of Apollinaire's critical corpus, this text, a rectangular block of prose with no conventional punctuation added (only some ellipses and exclamation marks pepper the text), presents a series of lines of writing, all of which, in a move reminiscent of a more

purely poetic genre, begin with a capital letter. In the middle of this dense textual space, white areas suggesting enigmatic objects (A violin? A boat?) give the impression of having been physically cut out of the text, to be used perhaps in a new collage. Clearly constructed to be viewed as well as read, this 1917 piece, described by Apollinaire as a “lyric ideogram,” illustrates his notions of “poetic painting” and “plastic lyricism,” for the language itself is interrupted, fragmented by the shapes suggested in the negative spaces, the blanks expanding with implication and innuendo. Through an inverse application of the “calligramme” technique, Apollinaire accents a favorite Picasso motif, to grant form to the void. As he writes of Picasso’s canvasses: “The object is the inner frame of the picture, and marks the limits of its profundity, just as the actual frame marks the external limits” (*CP* 22).³⁰ Reminiscent of the painter’s early experiments with still life, these forms penetrate imaginative reality, they intersect with language, while they leave open their meaning to our own interpretations. Writing and painting become thus reciprocally proportionate, two terms of a kind of mystical formula of aesthetics, in constant communication one with the other, a formulation of the fourth dimension.³¹

In a very powerful sense, Apollinaire’s texts on Picasso are no longer simple words printed on a page, but are transformed into an extension of the painting he aims to convey. In fact, his originality as an art critic represents the most important element that led to his being often overlooked, dismissed, or mocked by much of the public and the more conventional art theorists. As Apollinaire aims to communicate to his readers the impression a painter such as Picasso conveys to his viewers, the prose of his criticism must necessarily eschew that which may most commonly seem imperative: a logical approach, a linear method, or a progressively developed argument.³² In fact, Apollinaire was hardly unaware of the often uncomfortable effect his discursive style had on his readers, but this awareness did not turn him away from his own innovative methodology; in his “Salon des indépendants,” which appeared in the March 19, 1912 issue of *L’Intransigeant*, Apollinaire declares:

I can say that for the last seven years, in the columns of this newspaper and in other publications, I have been stating certain truths about contemporary art that no one else would have dared to write. People were sometimes dazzled by these truths, as they are by a piercing light. Yet I had the satisfaction of knowing that my statements were enlightening to a chosen few. One's eyes quickly become adjusted to brightness. The torches I ignited have, in turn, ignited others. (*Apollinaire on Art* 211)³³

Since the earliest appearance of Apollinaire's critical pieces, many other critics took aim at his aesthetic approach, denouncing him for a variety of faults, from disorganization, to deliberate obscurity, to amateurish dilettantism.³⁴ Yet Apollinaire's work is in fact undeniably positive and productive, as he constructs an actively creative voice to herald in the *avant-garde*, a discourse as ambivalent as the era in which it is born. At once analytic and synthetic, traditionalist and innovative, Apollinaire's *poésie critique* reflects the two complementary aspects of the mind of this writer, the order and adventure which tempt him from opposing sides.

Through texts such as "Pablo Picasso," Apollinaire poses the problem of the modern historical self, concentrating on the issues of isolation and alienation within a framework of urban fortuity. He further suggests that the individual, severed from the reassuring traditions of the past, blinded by the mechanized flurry of the present, and perplexed by the coded signs of the future, has no alternative but to confront the instability of history, as a defaced narrative defigured by its own unpredictable energy. He presents the exploration of the new, the search for authentic truth, and the affirmation of the self as a universal moral gesture, an act not limited only to those who create directly with word or color. For Apollinaire, one can be a poet in any field, through adventure, curiosity, courage, and revolt. Indeed, these quirky art historical texts reflect the turmoil of an era, the mixture of excitement and dread experienced by the *avant-garde*, in a singular, epiphanic moment of the awakening of the modern self. In the end, Apollinaire conceives of Cubist art as an invention, an expression of the urgent consciousness of modernism, and as a

manner to write or to paint the individual into an ambivalent, fully modern landscape.

Notes

1. For useful biographical information, particularly regarding the cultural atmosphere in which Apollinaire worked, see Shattuck, *The Banquet Years*; Décaudin, “Apollinaire à la recherche de lui-même”; and Michaud, “Comme un gretteur mélancolique: essai sur la personnalité d’Apollinaire.”

2. See Shattuck’s introduction to *Selected Writings of Guillaume Apollinaire*: “Apollinaire, in his verse and in his life, was successively a clown, a scholar, a drunkard, a gourmet, a lover, a criminal, a devout Catholic, a wandering Jew, a soldier, a good husband. These are partial revelations he made of himself. They resolve into two distinct themes: a huge gaiety and vitality which carried him through life with apparent assurance, and an equally strong but slightly muted note of tragedy and despair which was the reverse side of the same life” (5).

3. On the same day that the theft of the painting was announced, August 24, 1911, a piece by Apollinaire entitled “Et la garde qui veille aux barrières du Louvre . . . Le Rapt de *La Joconde*” appeared in *L’Intransigeant*; in this text, he decries the poor security at the Louvre and reproaches the French government for its negligence. Two weeks later, he himself comes under suspicion by the authorities, because of his contact with Géry Pieret, who was employed as his secretary and who had actually stolen some statuettes from the same museum, in order to prove how easily one could steal fine art from the Louvre.

4. *The Cubist Painters* 23. Henceforth, references to texts from *Méditations esthétiques: les peintres cubistes* will be indicated by the abbreviation CP, given that for the present study they are taken from Abel’s translation entitled *The Cubist Painters: Aesthetic Meditations*. See Chevalier and Breunig for details surrounding the publication of this volume; the authors remind us that the original version of the manuscript did not include the chapter on the Cubists, which was added by Apollinaire later, in September, 1912. It is well known also that Apollinaire expressed concern that the subtitle of “Peintres cubistes” had come to overshadow the more general, primary title of “Méditations esthétiques.” His study includes sections on several spe-

cific painters: Picasso, Braque, Metzinger, Gleizes, Laurencin, Rousseau, Gris, Léger, Picabia, Duchamp, and Duchamp-Villon.

5. In a stance that ironically echoes the *fin-de-siècle* notion of Decadent annoyance with all things natural, Apollinaire insists that artists must take on the cultural responsibility to keep aesthetics alive, for fear that the forces of nature, left untouched by the artist, would lead the human race into boredom: "It is the social function of great poets and artists to renew continually the appearance nature has for the eyes of man. Without poets, without artists, men would soon weary of nature's monotony" (CP 14).

6. See Debon, "L'Écriture cubiste d'Apollinaire." Breunig, for his part, makes an interesting point regarding Apollinaire's so-called Cubist style, and argues that not only does Apollinaire feel ambivalent about the term "Cubism," he also much prefers the later description of "Orphism" which he coins himself as a more evocative expression in speaking of both poets and painters. Moreover, Breunig argues in "Apollinaire et le cubisme" that the style of the Cubist painters, specifically a certain "intellectualism" present in much of their work, often implies an austere, even puritanical approach to the notions of composition and structure, and that Apollinaire, as a poet of the forces of hazard, energy, and spontaneity, cannot finally accept the severe Cubist aesthetic as his own.

7. Much interesting critical work has appeared on Apollinaire's innovative ideas in the relations of the form, structure, and purpose of imagery in French verse; see Décaudin, "La nouveauté de *Calligrammes* dans l'œuvre d'Apollinaire" and Grojnowski, "Apollinaire-Orphée: sur la poétique d'*Alcools*."

8. A posthumous 1925 collection entitled *Il y a* presents articles originally published in the periodical *Les Soirées de Paris*. Apollinaire himself had planned a project in 1918, interrupted by his death, to collect all his poems on painting into a volume he envisioned entitling *Le Marchand d'oiseaux. Méditations esthétiques: les peintres cubistes* was complemented by Breunig's 1960 edition of Apollinaire's collected art critical texts in *Chroniques d'art 1902-1918*, which in the present study will be referred to as *Apollinaire on Art*, a shortened version of the title of the text translated by Suleiman.

9. Apollinaire published literary and artistic criticism in an astonishing number of publications, including *Paris-Journal*, *L'Européen*, *La*

Revue Blanche, *La Revue des Lettres et des Arts*, *L'Action*, *Le Temps*, *Le Mercure de France*, *La Revue de Bourgogne*, *Le Petit Bleu*, *L'Intransigeant*, *Les Arts à Paris*, *La Phalange*, *Le Bulletin de la section d'or*, *Poésie*, *Je Dis Tout*, *Montjoie!*, *L'Intermédiaire des Chercheurs Curieux*, and *Der Sturm*. He founded and directed *Les Soirées de Paris*, *La Revue Immoraliste*, and *Le Festin d'Europe*. From 1910 to 1914, he published pieces almost daily in a column entitled "La Vie artistique" in *L'Intransigeant*; later, after the war, he wrote a column entitled "Anecdotes" for *Le Mercure de France*, and one entitled "Echos" for *L'Europe nouvelle*. Finally, alongside his annual Salon reviews, Apollinaire wrote the prefaces for thirteen separate exhibit catalogues.

10. On Apollinaire's relationship to the Cubist painters as a group, see the 1962 special issue of *La Revue des Lettres Modernes*, entitled *Guillaume Apollinaire: le cubisme et l'esprit nouveau*.

11. Quoted in Nash, 170 n4.

12. Translated in *Selected Writings of Guillaume Apollinaire* as "The New Spirit and the Poets" (227-37).

13. For an excellent study of Apollinaire's relationship to Surrealist aesthetics, see Eigeldinger, "Apollinaire et le surréalisme." See also the 1964 special issue of *La Revue des Lettres Modernes* entitled *Apollinaire et les surréalistes*. Regarding the artistic phenomenon of Orphism, see Lockerbie, "Qu'est-ce que l'orphisme d'Apollinaire?"

14. From the 1908 review, "Le Salon des indépendants," which appeared in the May 1 issue of *La Revue des lettres et des arts*. See *Apollinaire on Art* (41-46).

15. Even in October of 1911, Apollinaire was able to write in his review of "Le Salon d'automne" for *L'Intransigeant*: "I find myself practically alone among art critics in defending a group of artists whose effect I know about and whose works I like. The mockery that greeted the exhibition of their works at the Salon d'Automne, while indicating the importance of their undertaking, proves absolutely nothing about their art" (*Apollinaire on Art* 182).

16. Apollinaire makes an interesting cultural argument, linking him to the situation of the Symbolist and Decadent poetic circles of the 1880s, in the sense that those earlier poets were constantly attacked in the more conventional literary press, accused of acting as the orchestrators of a vast artistic hoax staged only to befuddle the public and

outrage academic critics. Apollinaire writes: "There has been a certain amount of suspicion, notably in the case of the most recent painters, of some collective hoax or error. But in all the history of art there is not a single instance of such general collaboration in artistic fraud or error. There are, indeed, isolated cases of mystification and blunderings. But the conventional elements of which works of art are to a great extent composed guarantee the impossibility of such instances becoming general. If the new school of painting were indeed an exception to this rule, it would be so extraordinary as to verge on the miraculous. . . . There are no collaborative errors or hoaxes in art; there are only various epochs and dissimilar schools" (CP 15-16).

17. From an article originally published as "Prenez garde à la peinture!" *L'Intransigeant* (March 8, 1910). Apollinaire writes: "Matisse is one of the rare artists who have completely freed themselves from Impressionism. He strives not to imitate nature but to express what he sees and what he feels through the very materials of painting, the way a poet uses the words of the dictionary to express the same nature and the same feelings" (*Apollinaire on Art* 67).

18. See Apollinaire on the modern transformation of seemingly banal elements of concrete reality into works of art in language or visual image: "There is no need, in undertaking discovery, to choose with the reassuring support of any rules, even those decreed by taste, a quality classified as sublime. One can begin with an everyday event: a dropped handkerchief can be for the poet the lever with which to move an entire universe. . . . That is why the poet today scorns no movement in nature, and his mind pursues discovery just as much in the most vast and evasive syntheses: crowds, nebulae, oceans, nations, as in apparently simple facts: a hand which searches a pocket, a match which lights by scratching, the cries of animals, the odor of gardens after rain, a flame which is born on the hearth" ("New Spirit" 234).

19. "Les Trois vertus plastiques" originally appeared as the introduction to the catalogue for "La Troisième exposition du Cercle de l'art moderne" in Le Havre in June, 1908; it was reworked by Apollinaire and included in *Méditations esthétiques: les peintres cubistes*. "Réalité, peinture pure" appeared in the December, 1912 issue of *Der Sturm*. Both articles are translated in *Apollinaire on Art*.

20. In the notes appended to *Chroniques*, Breunig refutes the details of Apollinaire's version of this legendary story, specifically his claim

Rather, Breunig traces the comment to a review by Louis Vauxcelles in *Gil Blas* (November 14, 1908). See also Apollinaire's "Art et curiosité—le commencement du cubisme" which first appeared in *Le Temps* (October 14, 1912), a text in which he credits Matisse directly with the invention of "the mocking word of cubism" (*Apollinaire on Art* 261).

21. On what Apollinaire describes as "the definitive downfall of Impressionism," see "Prenez garde à la peinture" (*Apollinaire on Art* 65), "Le Salon des femmes peintres et sculpteurs" (from *L'Intransigeant*, 1911), and "Vladislav Granzow" (from the preface to the 1909 *Catalogue de l'exposition Vladislav Granzow*).

22. On the more personal elements of the friendship and collaborative projects of Apollinaire and Picasso, see Read, *Picasso et Apollinaire: les métamorphoses de la mémoire* and Hubert, "Apollinaire et Picasso."

23. "Picasso: peintre et dessinateur" was originally published in *La Revue Immoraliste* (April 1905), "Les Jeunes: Picasso, peintre," in *La Plume* (May 15, 1905), and "De Michel-Ange à Picasso," in the February, 1912 issue of *Les Marches de Provence*. All three pieces are translated in the collection *Apollinaire on Art*. Of the 1912 essay, Breunig writes: "It typifies much of Apollinaire's art criticism, which seems too often to have been hastily written and loosely integrated, yet remains vigorous and provocative, abounding in flashes of profound insight and sure judgements" ("Apollinaire as an Early Apologist . . ." 368). "Les Jeunes: Picasso, peintre" was later reworked by Apollinaire into a chapter in *Méditations esthétiques: les peintres cubistes*.

24. In his 1912 "Reality, Pure Painting," Apollinaire speaks of Delaunay's work in similar terms, describing works of art in which reality is as "full of movement as living light" (*Apollinaire on Art* 262). Apollinaire also quotes Delaunay himself in that text on the nature of light, perceived from a modern perspective, traceable to Seurat, "the first theoretician of light." Delaunay remarks: "One of the major problems of modern painting today is still the way in which the light that is necessary to all vital expressions of beauty functions" (*Apollinaire on Art* 263). Of Matisse, Apollinaire writes in 1918 in a similar vein: "Like the orange, Matisse's work is a fruit bursting with light" (*Apollinaire on Art* 457).

25. See Balakian: "[Apollinaire] discovered in the works of the Cubists the fourth dimension of reality, which he deemed not only an act of creation but of divinity. This new dimension was conveyed by si-

multaneous representation in various perspectives, giving the impression of the immensity of space which pointed in all directions at the same time and suggested the infinite. The Cubists were thereby producing, according to Apollinaire, a fusion of science and metaphysics" (84).

26. In the same text, Apollinaire underscores the idea that the embodiment of surprise is primarily that which makes the Cubists modern: "It is by surprise, by the important position that has been given to surprise, that the new spirit distinguishes itself from all the literary and artistic movements which have preceded it" (233).

27. As in "La Peinture moderne." *Der Sturm* (February 1913). Again, to describe the visual art of Marie Laurencin, he compares her style to the grace and power of the sixteenth-century poets of la Pléiade; see "Chroniques-Peintresses," *Le Petit Bleu* (April 5, 1912).

28. See again Breunig's 1962 study, in which he argues that despite affinities with the Cubist painters, Apollinaire actually makes a clear distinction between visual and verbal art, as in his 1913 "Salon d'automne," in which he writes that while in painting the artwork presents itself entirely in a spontaneous moment, in literature and music, there is a temporal progression that dictates the reception of the work. This distinction, based on the typically classical element of the introduction of time, represents perhaps one of the most traditional and blandest moments of Apollinaire's art critical theory, and hardly can be said to negate the much more innovative work Apollinaire conducts through such notions as "plastic lyricism."

29. Reed points out (83) that the early "Les Jeunes: Picasso, peintre" represents an illustration of mixed genres, synthesizing poetry and prose, and embodies in fact one of the most original critical texts Apollinaire ever wrote. By aiming to evoke a complex impression in his reader's mind, simultaneously bringing to life the pictorial images created on Picasso's canvas, as well as the epiphanic feelings they inspire in the poet himself, Apollinaire's text reproduces the multidimensionality of Picasso's visual art.

30. Of "Pablo Picasso," Hubert argues that Apollinaire, by leaving blank spaces suggestive of objects in the middle of his block of writing, offers his readers an imaginative and literal space to be filled by the individual eye. The fragmentation implied in the interrupted lines of text is thus echoed in the unfinished shapes of the objects silhou-

31. Chevalier and Breunig make an interesting suggestion in their 1964 study, "Apollinaire et *Les Peintres cubistes*," focusing on the purely transformational value of Apollinaire's vision. Through his emphasis on the magical notion of "the fourth dimension," they argue that Apollinaire's prose moves from a discursive analysis of a pictorial phenomenon to a more spiritual, even mythic interpretation of the Cubist movement.

32. See Buckley: "Guillaume Apollinaire refuses to meet precisely [the] expectation of logical explanation. In fact, almost every aspect of his life beyond the company in which he moved inveigled against such a serious, analytical approach. His antagonism to this attitude was encouraged by his social atmosphere: the formulation and destruction of ideas in cafés, at *soirées*, in informal sessions in studios. The spontaneous, unpredictable quality of the environment in which artistic topics were discussed lent a fragmented, tentative air to statements on art, statements that always bordered on jokes even if they were not deliberate hoaxes" (14). Further, Georges Lemaître makes an interesting, ambivalent claim, suggesting that in his writings on art, Apollinaire "took an evident delight in tirelessly piling up ingenious theories on top of crazy, breathtaking paradoxes" (79).

33. See also the infamous attack on Apollinaire by Gaston Thiesson, in "Le Salon des indépendants et les critiques." *L'Effort libre* (April 1914): 445-51, pertinent excerpts of which are furnished in Breunig's notes to *Chroniques* (590-91). Thiesson remarks that Apollinaire's seemingly eclectic art criticism is the direct result of his "curious misunderstanding" of painting. Apollinaire responds to Thiesson in "La Critique des poètes." *Paris-Journal* (May 5, 1914), a text reprinted in *Chroniques* (451-54). He remarks ironically that he finds the accusation of eclecticism refreshing since it had been the habit of most critics to reproach him for having tastes too narrowly focused on a single artistic school.

34. See Samaltanos, who suggests that some writers felt that Apollinaire used in his writings "an unconventional manner full of metaphors, abstractions, generalizations, and disconcerting juxtapositions, in order to cover up his 'incompetence' in comprehending modern art. These opinions are based on later statements by artists and dealers, like Kahnweiler, Max Jacob, Picasso, Braque, Jacques Villon, and others, who suggested that the poet 'wrote whatever came into his head' or simply transcribed the artists' ideas" (xiii). The most well-known

condemnation of Apollinaire's style of art criticism comes from Steegmuller, who argues that the unpredictable nature of Apollinaire's work, baroque and ethereal, was put to use by the poet to mask his fundamental ignorance in questions of painting. See Steegmuller's 1963 *Apollinaire: Poet Among the Painters*.

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