

referent, thereby assimilating collage itself to a theater of the proper name: "EAU is really Beaujolais, and JOU is in fact Journal."

If we are really going to turn to structural linguistics for instruction about the operation of the sign we must bear in mind the two absolute conditions posited by Saussure for the functioning of the linguistic sign. The first is the analysis of signs into a relationship between signifier and signified ($\frac{s}{s}$) in which the signifier is a *material* constituent (written trace, phonic element) and the signified, an immaterial idea or concept. This opposition between the registers of the two halves of the sign stresses that status of the sign as substitute, proxy, stand-in, for an absent referent. It insists, that is, on the literal meaning of the prefix /re/ in the word *representation*, drawing attention to the way the sign works away from, or in the aftermath of, the thing to which it refers.

This grounding of the terms of representation on absence—the making of absence the very condition of the representability of the sign—alerts us to the way the notion of the sign-as-label is a perversion of the operations of the sign. For the label merely doubles an already material presence by giving it its name. But the sign, as a function of absence rather than presence, is a coupling of signifier and immaterial concept in relation to which (as in the Frege/Russell/Wittgenstein notion of the proper name) there may be no referent at all (and thus no *thing* on which to affix the label).

This structural condition of absence is essential to the operations of the sign within Picasso's collage. As just one from among the myriad possible examples, we can think of the appearance of the two *f*-shaped violin soundholes that are inscribed on the surface of work after work from 1912–14. The semantic interpretation of these *fs* is that they simply signify the presence of the musical instrument; that is, they label a given plane of the collage-assembly with the term "violin." But there is almost no case from among these collages in which the two *fs* mirror each other across the plane surface. Time and again their inscription involves a vast disparity between the two letters, one being bigger and often thicker than the other. With this simple, but very emphatic, size difference, Picasso composes the sign, not of violin, but of foreshortening: of the differential size within a single surface due to its rotation into depth. And because the inscription of the *fs* takes place within the collage assembly and thus on the most rigidly flattened and frontalized of planes, "depth" is thus written on the very place from which it is—within the presence of the collage—most absent. It is *this* experience of inscription that guarantees these forms the status of signs.

What Picasso does with these *fs* to compose a sign of space as the condition of physical rotation, he does with the application of newsprint to construct the sign of space as penetrable or transparent. It is the perceptual disintegration of the fine-type of the printed page into a sign for the broken color with which painting (from Rembrandt to Seurat) represents atmosphere, that Picasso continually exploits. In so doing, he inscribes transparency on the very element of the collage's fabric that is most reified and opaque: its planes of newspaper.