



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

Picasso and Truth, From Cubism to Guernica

Citation for published version:

Cox, N 2014, 'Picasso and Truth, From Cubism to Guernica', *Burlington magazine*, vol. 156, no. 1337, pp. 541-543.

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Published In:

Burlington magazine

Publisher Rights Statement:

Cox, N. (2014). Picasso and Truth, From Cubism to Guernica. *Burlington magazine*, CLVI, 541-543.

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



Robert Willis (1800–1875) and the Foundation of Architectural History. Volume 8, The History of the University of Cambridge: Text and Studies. By Alexandrina Buchanan. 470 pp. incl. numerous col. + b. & w. ills. (Boydell Press, Cambridge University Library, 2013), £60. ISBN 978-1-84383-800-5.

Reviewed by CHRIS MIELE

ON PAGE 163 of this meticulous, well-crafted intellectual biography we find the exact date of the invention of architectural history: 11th September 1844. It was then that Robert Willis, the Cambridge University polymath, presented a paper on Canterbury at the Cathedral, the first of his admired ‘cathedral series’. And so, Alex Buchanan, writes, was born ‘the first book ever to be defined by its author as an “architectural history”’. Buchanan is not one to speculate. What she says in this book she says only on the basis of the most careful consideration of all relevant sources, and then only after the proposition and every source relating to it has been thoroughly turned over. Buchanan’s temper and method are at one with her subject. If Willis had anything to say about the matter, then this is the intellectual biography he would have wanted.

But the question that constantly came back to the present reviewer was whether what Willis wrote really was ‘architectural history’, even if he himself named it so. Willis was more of a building archaeologist than a historian. The world he analysed was hermetic: here is this physical evidence in one part of a medieval church, here that in another, finally a third from a different place altogether. Put them together with whatever reliable manuscript source he could find (and there are not many) and so conclude the date of the building, what influenced it and what it influenced.

It was only when Willis looked at medieval monastic remains that he went beyond the world of features, style and fabric to think about how physical evidence could illuminate social or cultural history. Even then, when analysing the plan of St Gall or Castle Acre Priory, he dealt with strictly functional relationships and how ‘they shaped’, Buchanan writes, ‘the arrangement of surviving buildings’. Even here all things find their way back to the physical characteristics and the site. This was the approach he adopted in his posthumous four-volume opus (jointly written with his nephew, J.W. Clark), *The Architectural History of the University of Cambridge* of 1886. This book more than any other secured Willis’s reputation by sheer dint of the number of influential people who read for degrees there and so explored Willis and Clark.

Willis matured at a time when the historical study of buildings was seen as a branch of inductive science. The rigour he brought to his scholarship was born of an interest in

mechanics and mathematics. In that sense his contribution mirrors that of William Whewell, the other Cambridge polymath. His *Architectural Notes on German Churches* pioneered the structural explanation of Gothic. The pointed arch, the style’s defining feature, had evolved, Whewell thought, from the construction of rib vaulting, a German specialism. That Teutonic myth was shattered in the 1840s, when bit by bit the centrality of French Gothic came to be accepted by English scholars. Whewell (1794–1866) was Willis’s near contemporary but, unlike Willis, his contribution to architectural history was a youthful dalliance. Whewell went on to make a name for himself as a physicist and philosopher of science, and therein lies his principal contribution to the culture of nineteenth-century science.

Buchanan carefully charts the interchange between science and historical study. Along the way she takes the reader to surprising places. Willis, it turns out, investigated the operations of chess-playing automata and carried out early research into acoustics and the ‘mechanism of the larynx’. That empirical mindset collided with an antiquarian tradition that was, as often as not, intellectually thin or just muddled. Like Whewell, Willis defined a new way of looking at things by resorting to foreign examples, in his case Italian Gothic which forms the basis of his *Remarks on the Architecture of the Middle Ages* of 1835. It is interesting – and Buchanan does not mention this – that both these scientifically minded, numerate men relied on a ‘data set’ outside the United Kingdom. Perhaps there was too much cultural baggage associated with the cherished historical scene at home. Continental study freed their minds.

Willis refined his method on the amateur society lecture circuit, delivering a series of papers at various conferences organised by the British Archaeological Association. These were major cultural events, reported in the local press, attended by local dignitaries. Willis led large crowds around the country’s great medieval sites, and to make himself heard he often had to stand on a chair. He carried his audience with him by lively gestures and ‘that striking bodily activity which was so characteristic of the man, and for the display of which his lectures gave so many opportunities’. That was how the great historian, and one time architectural historian E.A. Freeman described Willis in his obituary. That image, of ‘sparkling and witty performance [. . .] particularly popular with his female listeners’ (as Buchanan writes), is at odds with the tone of what Buchanan accepts was the often ‘drily academic’ style of his publications.

One of the products of Buchanan’s tremendous research is the picture she is able to paint of the world of Victorian amateur archaeologists, their struggles to assert their authority, secure reputations and gain status. To the best of my knowledge no other study of this period even comes close to describing this network.

What of Willis’s legacy, which Buchanan handles in two thousand words? This is probably sufficient, but therein lies the quiet tragedy of this great intellectual. Willis is sometimes likened to Pevsner who relied on his predecessor’s cathedral series for his own marvellous entries in *The Buildings of England*. In fact, the two were very different writers, Pevsner quirky but also with a critical edge, Willis a man sticking strictly to the facts and avoiding aesthetics. It is telling that at a time when architecture stimulated the literary imagination, from Ruskin to Trollope, Willis set his mind on the evidence as had no one before. In another country, in Germany or France, Willis would have been an academic art historian and through the university network have created a new discipline. Instead he had to rely on a network of enthusiastic amateurs working through local societies and guidebooks.

Thus it is fitting that any study of Willis can only be an intellectual biography. There is no personal archive, regrettably because clearly Willis had charm and wit in person if not in his writings. We can be sure, beyond all reasonable doubt, that there is no personal information lurking out there, for if there was, Buchanan would have discovered it.

Picasso and Truth, From Cubism to Guernica. (The A.W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, Bollingen Series XXXV: 58). By T.J. Clark. 352 pp. incl. 95 col. + 80 b. & w. ills. (Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 2013), £29.95. ISBN 978-0-691-15741-2.

Reviewed by NEIL COX

SUPPOSE THAT TRUTH is a work by Picasso.¹ Such a thought experiment raises the highest hopes about the nature of the artist’s achievement in a particular work, but it also opens the question of truth itself, both philosophically and in terms of contemporary culture. ‘The question of truth’ implies the unravelling of the values of moral philosophy and epistemology, and is as much about a need for ‘untruths’ as it is about the function of the desire for truth, as well as for a distinction between good and evil, in Western culture. To recast the understanding of Picasso’s art against this extra-moral questioning is, I think, the ambition of T.J. Clark’s dazzling and sometimes troubling book.

Divided into six ‘lectures’, each with a single-word title, it retains the lyric feel and intensity of live performance that characterised the 2009 Mellon Lectures upon which it is based.² The ‘Introduction’ has to do a huge amount of work. For a start it sets out the author’s stall in very broad-brushed terms vis-à-vis the existing scholarship on the artist. No one is named, but the target is a hagiographic and biographically focused



42. *Mandolin and guitar*, by Pablo Picasso. 1924. Canvas, 140.7 by 200.3 cm. (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York).

literature dismissed as apotropaic, an ideological machine designed to protect us from exposure to the destabilising force of Picasso as Truth. Of course, Clark grants that the autobiographical question must in some way be at the centre of the artist's project; the question is who the 'I' that 'writes' might be? Arthur Rimbaud's dictum '*Je est un autre*', favoured by Picasso, is a touchstone in Clark's negotiation of the problem. This kind of argument has been made before.³ What is different about Clark's approach is his insistence that, first, 'the way to particularity in art is via absolute aesthetic generality' – here he means to insist on art, to hang onto the notion of sensuously embodied ideas – and, secondly, that what Picasso's 'autobiographical' project does is question the last remaining 'universal' left to our culture – the 'fiction of subjectivity' (pp.12–13). The first of these points underpins the value placed in the book on the sustained interrogation of single works; the truth (or 'untruth') will be got out of them no matter how long it takes, and no matter how many dialectical turns or ambivalences need to be embraced. The second opens up the broader historical argument: that Picasso's art carries with the world of the bourgeois, the nineteenth-century form of subjectivity that spread across all things and shaped them in its image. The art-historical politics of this argument have to do with the fact that only for a brief period in his career – the moment of Cubism, as John Berger once memorably called it – can Picasso count as a modernist, as a future-oriented artist willing to give up the humanist body of the classical tradition, the notion of the individual artist-genius, and the spaces and time of bourgeois culture.

In Clark's *Farewell to an Idea* of 1999, it was Cubism between 1909 and 1911 – and maybe even only in 1910 – that functioned as the zenith of Modernism and as the leitmotif of the book. In *Picasso and Truth*, intense pessimism over the twentieth-century landscape of destruction and pogroms leads Clark to

treat the 'retrogressive' tendency in modern art, everything from Chagall to de Chirico to Kahlo, as now almost preferable to year-zero radicalism, collectivism, abstraction and agit-prop, tainted as the latter are for him with complicity with dictatorships and tyrannies. The book thus offers an ethical defence of Picasso's apparently a-political and 'retrogressive' post-Cubist eroticism and mythopoeic universe. No matter how joyful or ludicrous the paintings become, Clark insists that we shall hear bass notes: of the crisis of the bourgeois order and, negatively, of the horrors of the century.

In making this stick, the focus is on the conjuring of space in Picasso's paintings. In one sense space here is that of the bourgeoisie: it is about things and about private life, about possessions and possession, closeness and domesticity; above all the centrality of space in the discussion is meant to signify a particular kind of world view that is a bedroom, a dining room, a hotel room. There is a real gain here; by attending to the room as the form of space being disturbed in Picasso's art, Clark wants to overturn our habitual ways of looking at major works: the peculiarly anthropomorphic character of the *Mandolin and guitar* (Fig.42) is read in the end as a kind of sardonic play in relation to the great tradition of still life and interiors in, for example, Dutch art; eyeing the fragments of blue sky in *The three dancers* (1925; Tate) brackets out repetitious readings of paroxysmal violence and makes the meeting of the monstrous and the mundane stand for a full exteriorisation of passions and values; stage-like space in *Guernica* (1937; Museum of Modern Art, New York) is brought to life in a discussion of the painting's grounded 'gigantism'.

There is much more to say along these lines in praise of the original readings of various works by the artist, even if the whole sometimes provokes. One peculiarity is Clark's hostility to Surrealism (especially noticeable in the 'Monster' and 'Monument' lectures; lectures 4 and 5); much of Picasso's

interwar achievement arguably makes best sense against a Surrealist discourse that is itself profoundly concerned with crises of truth, of the bourgeois subject, and of political modernism. It is after all for these reasons that Walter Benjamin, whose thinking to my mind often stalks the pages of *Picasso and Truth* (he is mentioned here and there), found in Surrealism potent, dangerous cultural politics and a reframing of historical consciousness.

But such art-historical cavilling misses the real challenge: what of that title, and the looming philosophical presence in the book: Friedrich Nietzsche? There have been numerous attempts in the past to associate Nietzsche with Picasso, but Clark's engagement is considerably richer and more sustained.⁴ This is a departure for him too – none of his previous books has been so explicitly marked by philosophy. Nietzsche functions as a guide or a provocateur at certain moments in the argument, and Clark draws freely on texts from what Nietzsche specialists call early, middle and late periods. For previous scholars, Nietzschean interpretations of Picasso revolved around his formation in the Wagnerism of the Barcelona period – that and his own Nietzschean-sounding discourse of truth and falsehood ('art is a lie that makes us realise truth', 'truth is a lie', etc.).⁵ Clark largely eschews this frame. Instead, Nietzsche functions as the prophet of the modernity that Picasso represents, one where the will to truth has faltered, where the pathological introjection or internalising of instincts is to be overcome, one where art in its 'untruth' both reflects and confronts life-denying nihilism. The argument about space in painting is about the twilight of the idol of certainty; the drama of Clark's book is to show how Picasso's loyalty to a world of things in rooms is made to coexist or merge with a world of pure spaces and structures, and beyond this – perhaps as a result – to make monstrosity and disorder in the everyday.⁶ In this book Nietzsche thus represents a profound voice somehow adequate to Picasso's remarkable painted worlds. To make a philosophical text illuminate painting so evocatively, to such wonderful degrees, is a signal achievement. The political despair and the will to confrontation with the amoral that motivate the equation Nietzsche/Picasso could itself, perhaps, be subjected to a kind of genealogical testing. What is the choice of Nietzsche as guide meant to produce for our sense not only of Picasso from the perspective of the present moment, but of a critical history of culture today? We should not miss the decision to make Nietzsche central – not Marx, not Benjamin, not Freud, not Adorno. What all-too-human need is fulfilled by the compelling force of Nietzsche as cultural origin?

¹ 'Suppose that truth is a woman'; F. Nietzsche: *Beyond Good and Evil*, eds. R.-P. Horstman and J. Norman, transl. J. Norman, Cambridge 2002, p.3.

² The Mellon Lectures remain available as podcasts at www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/audio-video/mellon.html.

³ Notably by R. Krauss: 'In the Name of Picasso', *October* 16 (Spring 1981), pp.5–22.

⁴ For early examples, see M. Rosenthal: 'The Nietzschean character of Picasso's Early Development', *Arts* 55/2 (1980), pp.87–91; and J.M. Nash: 'The Nature of Cubism: A Study in Conflicting Explanations', *Art History* 3/4 (1980), pp.435–47.

⁵ D. Ashton, ed.: *Picasso on Art: A Selection of Views*, New York 1972, pp.21–22.

⁶ This argument is first made with reference to Wittgenstein rather than Nietzsche, but its end point is a Nietzschean situation. At least some of what Clark argues could have been productively related to or contrasted with Christopher Green's important book *Picasso: Architecture and Vertigo* (London 2006), driven as it is by similar conceptual oppositions.

Publications Received

Miscellaneous

Family, Culture and Society in the Diary of Constantijn Huygens Jr, Secretary to Stadholder-King William of Orange. By Rudolf Dekker. 196 pp. incl. 37 col. + b. & w. ills. (Brill, Leiden and Boston, 2013), €98. ISBN 978-90-04-25094-9.

Constantijn Huygens the Younger (1628–97) kept a diary between 1649 and 1696. It has much in common with that of his contemporary Samuel Pepys and yet is much less well known and little used by historians and art historians. It certainly deserves far more attention, and in this short account of the diary, Rudolf Dekker, who heads the Centre for the study of Egodocuments and History in Amsterdam, stresses its importance and its breadth of interest. Huygens was, of course, the son of a famous father. Constantijn the Elder had been secretary to three successive Orange stadholders and was a remarkable humanist, poet, musician and scholar. His second son was the great scientist and astronomer Christiaan Huygens. Constantijn the Younger followed his father into the service of the Orange family and, most importantly, was secretary to William III during the Glorious Revolution. He accompanied the Stadholder-King on the invasion of England and was at his right hand during his first years as King.

For art historians the prime interest of Huygens's diary will be the references to art, particularly as William III's status as patron and connoisseur has never been entirely clear. In Huygens's account William comes across as seriously interested in art. Huygens tells us that, as he marched with his army towards London on the landing at Brixham, William III took the time (despite a heavy cold) to visit Wilton and admire the Van Dycks. Once in London, King and secretary viewed the paintings in the royal collection and spent time discussing and rearranging them. On 3rd May 1689 William sent for Huygens: 'This afternoon I was with the king, who talked to me about paintings, and in particular about Van Dyck's "King on Horseback", which he had removed from the gallery. He thought it had been put in the chamber behind his cabinet, here at Hampton Court, and he wanted to show it to me, but it wasn't there'. The Queen also asked his advice, on one occasion about a suitable restorer for Mantegna's *Triumphs of Caesar*. Huygens also played a significant part in the building and rebuilding of palaces in the Netherlands. On 9th October 1692 he records: 'The King called for me to see a design by Marot for the upper hall here at Het Loo'. Huygens was considered to be a connoisseur by his contemporaries at court. He formed his own collection of prints, drawings and paintings and advised others. He notes his purchases in the diary and comments on the taste of others. He went with Adriaan van Gent, a member of the States General, to a shop in Fleet Street where Van Gent's purchases

were described succinctly by Huygens as 'rubbish'. Huygens also formed a remarkable library – in the catalogue of the sale, published by the Leiden booksellers Van der Aa after his death, 5,689 books are listed – and in his chapter 'The Bibliotheca Zuylichemiana' (Zuilichem was the family estate in Gelderland), Dekker discusses its extraordinary range. The diary gives a fascinating picture of life at the court, which Dekker introduces in chapters on 'Quacks and Witches', 'Gossip and Sex', 'Servants and Maids' and 'The Court as a Microcosm'. He has done a great service in drawing attention to this valuable source for the study of the Netherlands and England in the second half of the seventeenth century, and, more particularly, the court of William and Mary. An English translation of the diary would, of course, increase its accessibility.

CHRISTOPHER BROWN

Found Sculpture and Photography from Surrealism to Contemporary Art. Edited by Anna Dezeuze and Julia Kelly. 200 pp. incl. 39 b. & w. ills. (Ashgate Publishing, Farnham, 2013), £55. ISBN 978-1-4094-0000-4.

In 1933 *Minotaur* published a set of six photographs of items of discarded minutiae of urban life – a rolled up bus ticket, a gob of toothpaste etc. Although these items differed from any existing understanding of sculpture, in that they were neither intentional nor preserved, they were dignified with the description, 'Involuntary Sculpture'. Their continuing presence has, however, been secured in the form of photography, and this set of images by Brassai forms the central reference point for this collection of essays that explore the diverse legacies of Surrealism, knowingly or otherwise, adopted by contemporary artists, in terms of the accidental, the impermanent and the role of photography in giving substance to their work. The photographic trace of a work or an 'act' of art is never neutral, and tensions between the pretence of its function as objective document and its capacity to make things strange emerge from within most of these case studies. Anna Dezeuze examines the photographic record by Richard Wentworth of the ingenious impromptu solutions that people come up with to solve everyday problems such as propping open a window through processes of fiddling or bricolage – but remains aware of the artist's ambivalence about the status of his photographs. The example of Allan Kaprow's *Happenings* is revealed by Martha Buskirk as a minefield of curatorial conflicts and paradoxes when events, conceived in flux, yet recorded in photographs, are restaged. Mike Kelley's practice was notable for its proliferation of media, but, John C. Welchman's richly analytical study argues for the centrality of black-and-white photography to his thinking, precisely in terms of its ambiguity of material, scale and reference and the psychic nuances of media imagery derived from the recent past.

Other contributions give greater focus to the original issues of Surrealism, and Julia Kelly notes the Dada artists' interest in the Inventors' Fair in Paris which preceded Breton's concentration on the unconscious properties of the flea-market discoveries. She also points out the argument of the nineteenth-century anthropologist Henry Balfour that the origins of art could be found in suggestive natural forms, such as the mandrake root – memorably explored in Man Ray's photograph *Aeneas carrying his father*. Steven Harris argues how Hans Arp's use of plaster as the basis of his 'concrete' forms was intended to maintain its 'involuntary' nature. Valuable contributions also come from Simon Baker, linking Breton's understanding of photography to the work of Melissa McGill; Margaret Iverson, who applies a semiotic approach to the 'involuntary' in photography and reflects on the photographic strategies of Christian Boltanski; Samantha Lackey on the close-up in avant-garde film; and Carrie Lambert-Beatty on Terry Fox's *Children's tapes* (1974).

ROBERT RADFORD

A History of Chromolithography: printed colour for all.

By Michael Twyman. 728 pp. incl. 850 col. ills. (British Library, London, and Oak Knoll Press, Newcastle, 2013), £75. For members of the Printing Historical Society 200 copies are available at £40. ISBN 978-0-7123-5710-4 (British Library); 978-1-58456-320-4 (Oak Knoll Press).

'I am aware', Michael Twyman states in his preface to this new book, 'that I am merely scratching the surface of an enormous subject'. This 'scratch' has resulted in a bible of 728 pages and over eight hundred illustrations. Deeply rooted in the ephemera tradition at the Department of Typography and Graphic Communication at Reading University, Twyman has devoted his life to the history of a technique that was developed in the nineteenth century, flourished in the second half of that century, and started its decline in the first decades of the twentieth. To art historians lithography is known by the many artists who used the technique as a printmaking tool, culminating in the coloured posters of the first half of the twentieth century. But art historians tend to neglect all commercial work, even if the poster industry was part of that. The production of these colourful and well-collected items was in no way different from the commercial practice of the day, as Twyman points out in his chapter on 'the chromolithographic artists'.

Printing historians are for the most part interested in letterpress and typography, rather than illustration. Book historians deal with the history of the book as a phenomenological object, publishing and the book trade.

Twyman starts off his bible with the development of colour printing in general, as old as printing itself. Lithography proved to be the best technique for printing in colour, although technical demands, such as registration and transparency of the inks had to be solved before the technique could develop into the vast industry that arose from it. The development, from the end of the nineteenth century, of photomechanical methods of reproduction, falls outside the scope of this book. Chromolithography had to give way to three- and four-colour reproduction from screened negatives, first in relief printing, then in offset and gravure – common practices today.

It is hard to understand the craftsmanship of the 'chromiste', the man determining the number of colours to be used, and the order in which they had to be printed to yield the intended result. We can hardly imagine the skill with which such a person could analyse colours of a work of art, by pure instinct and experience, and render them faithfully in the final result by using twelve, sixteen or whatever amount of colours were superimposed. Anyone familiar with the Arundel Society's huge chromolithographic reproductions will be astonished by the fact that colours were not separated using filters and photography, but by experience alone. All methods used in chromolithography – and there were many – are here extensively treated and well illustrated in a way we can all understand.

Inevitably there is some overlap with Twyman's earlier writings on lithography. His *Lithography 1800–1850* (1970), is now outdated by further research, but the publication of his Panizzi Lectures, held in 2000 (*Breaking the mould: the first hundred years of lithography*, published by the British Library in 2001), heralded the book here under review.

It is very well produced, designed and typeset by Rob Banham, who deserves full credit for the successful organisation of such a wealth of material. The volume opens easily, and, remarkably, the reproductions of original wood-engravings, like those of printing presses, taken from the original catalogue, are reproduced in line, not in half-tone. The typography is clear, set in two columns, and the numerous footnotes – in three columns – leave no doubts about the origin of the information in the text. Finally, a list of terms, an excellent index as well as a comprehensive bibliography complete the book.

JOHAN DE ZOETE