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Frames of Reference: “Table” and “Tableau” in Picasso’s Collages and Constructions

By Christine Poggi

In the spring of 1912, Picasso pasted a piece of oilcloth printed with a *trompe-l’oeil* chair-caning pattern to the surface of a small oval canvas representing a café still life (Fig. 1). This work, which he also framed with a coarse rope, has acquired legendary status in the history of art as the first deliberately executed collage; the first work of fine art, that is, in which materials appropriated from everyday life, relatively untransformed by the artist, intrude upon the traditionally privileged domain of painting.¹ Picasso’s *Still Life with Chair-Caning* challenged some of the most fundamental assumptions about the nature of painting inherited by Western artists from the time of the Renaissance, including our understanding of how works of art exist in the world. This paper will address the ways in which Picasso’s collages undermine both classical and “modernist” models for understanding the ontological status of works of art, by instituting an ambiguous play with frames and framing motifs, as well as with the relation of *table* (the plane of actuality) and *tableau* (the plane of illusion).

The two most frequently invoked paradigms for explaining how works of art should be regarded are the window (or mirror), a model most clearly articulated in the Renaissance theories of Alberti, and the self-sufficient object, a model that can be traced at least as far back as the eighteenth century to Kant’s early modernist aestheticism. Both of these apparently opposed models lay claim to realism: the window by providing a convincing view of reality, the object by exemplifying its own material reality. Not surprisingly, these models have been used to explain the formal

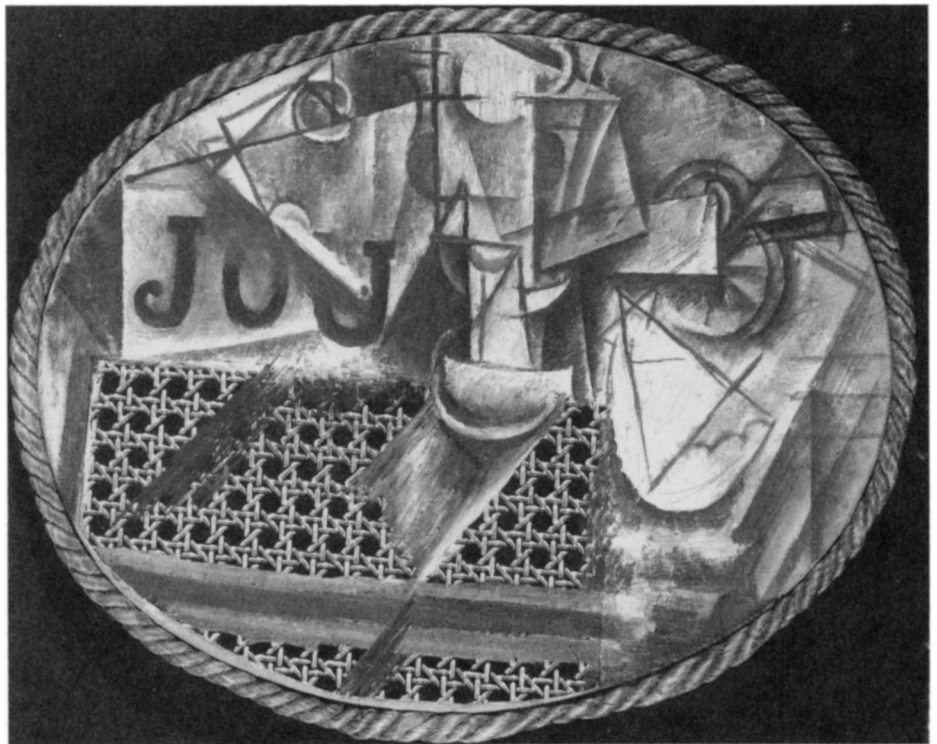


Fig. 1 Pablo Picasso, *Still Life with Chair-Caning*, spring 1912, oil and oilcloth stuck on oval canvas, framed with rope, 10½ x 13¾". Paris, Musée Picasso.

innovations of Cubism, especially by those claiming that Cubism represents a superior mode of realism, often called “conceptual realism.” Cubist works are frequently said to exemplify this new mode of realism by rejecting the window paradigm in favor of the conceptual representation of multiple views, or by emphasizing the material aspects of the work of art as a self-sufficient object. Yet this effort to see in Cubism a new mode of realism is ultimately a way of taming Cubism by recasting it in the mold of a traditional project.

Picasso’s collages, however, render the project of realism problematic by undermining the viewer’s ability to experience or read a work through the application of a single, compelling paradigm. Instead, his collages, beginning with the *Still Life with Chair-Caning*, often juxtapose the two prevailing paradigms—the window and the object—so that each is defined in relation to the other. Picasso refers to the model of painting as window through the vertical plane of the *tableau*. This is the plane that corresponds to normal upright

viewing posture, and therefore is the classical plane of pictorial illusion. Picasso refers to the self-sufficient object through the horizontal plane of the *table*, the plane of real objects that exist in three-dimensional space. The juxtaposition of *table* and *tableau*, and its implications for the realist interpretation of Picasso's collages, are the subjects of this essay.

One of the most frequent assertions made about the Cubist work of art is that it redefined the ontological status of the work of art. No longer modeled on the classical notion that a painting is like a transparent window onto the world, Cubist works are said to be conceived as autonomous, self-sufficient objects. Early critics in particular, and indeed some of the artists themselves, emphasized that in rejecting the norms of imitation the artist was liberated from the constraints of both tradition and nature. The Cubist artist thereby appeared to achieve an unprecedented godlike power of creation, adding to the world of things new "objects" whose material presence affirmed what was described as a new kind of "realism." Here, however, an essential, recurring paradox in the interpretation of Cubism arises. For insofar as the Cubist "object" is taken to exemplify concrete being or autonomous self-presence, it must refuse the function of representation.

This paradox has gone largely unnoticed by most critics and historians of Cubism. Typically, those who assert the objecthood of Cubist works also assert that Cubist formal innovations were intended to give the viewer more complete information about the essential nature of things in the everyday world. These critics and art historians claim that by rejecting the Renaissance single-point perspective system and accidental effects of light Cubist artists were able to combine different views of objects, thus presenting the spectator with what was known about those objects, rather than what might be immediately perceived. An example of this double invocation of realism occurs in John Golding's influential book, *Cubism: A History and an Analysis, 1907–1914*. In his discussion of Picasso's early Cubist works of 1909, Golding writes:

Picasso's dismissal of traditional perspective had been the result of his interest in investigating the nature of solid form and of a desire to express it in a new, more thorough and comprehensive, pictorial way. . . . Picasso was anxious to present in each image as much

essential information about the subject as he could. When he subdivides and facets form, it is in an attempt to break through to its inner structure. . . . One gets the impression that Picasso is striving for some ultimate pictorial truth, some absolute representation of reality.²

Elsewhere in his text, Golding asserts that "the Cubists saw their paintings as constructed objects having their own independent existence, as small, self-contained worlds, not reflecting the outside world but recreating it in a completely new form."³ Collage, a technique invented by Picasso and Braque in 1912, is for Golding "the logical outcome" of this conception of Cubist works as "self-contained, constructed objects," for the inclusion of different materials in collages "emphasized in a very concrete way their weight and solidity as material objects."⁴ Golding does not acknowledge any slippage or change in his definition of Cubist realism from 1909 to 1912, but emphasizes the continuity of the aesthetic intent of the movement before and after the invention of collage: ". . . while *papier collé* involved new methods of work and initiated almost at once a new phase in the art of Picasso and Braque, it did not involve any fundamental change of aesthetic. . . . Cubism continued to be an art of realism; its subject matter remained the same, as did the interests and intentions of the painters."⁵

Similar discussions of the realist intent of Cubist artists dominate much of the literature on Cubism without any reference to the contradictions inherent in this type of analysis. Yet a theory of realism based on the material presence of the object as a self-contained world does not coexist easily with a theory of realism based on the quantity of information conveyed about the world outside the frame.

An analysis of Picasso's representation and subversion of both traditional and contemporary theories of realism in his collages will be the subject of this essay. The invention and early practice of collage provide an excellent focal point for an analysis of Cubist "realism" because individual collage elements have been read both as "real" within the illusory context of painting or drawing and as signs for a reality not physically present. The double status of these elements recapitulates the essential paradox of the Cubist work itself, which appears to exist both as a material object (and to call attention to itself as such) and as a mode of representation.

In addition, Picasso's collage works dramatize the Cubist challenge to pre-

vailing standards of pictorial unity, both academic and avant-garde. The notion of pictorial unity was a crucial factor in the critical attempt to define the ontological status of the Cubist work. For the Cubist work to assert its material and formal self-sufficiency, it had to appear to be internally coherent, governed by laws derived from the medium itself. Yet, for the Cubist work to be interpreted as "conceptually" realist, the stability and actuality of the referent had to be posited. Pictorial unity then took the form of a creative "synthesis" of objectively known information. In either case, favorable early critics tended to see Cubist works, including the collages, as exemplifying the ideal of pictorial unity. Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, for example, described Cubism as taking on (and solving) problems that are "the basic tasks of painting: to represent three dimensions and color on a flat surface, and to comprehend them in the unity of that surface." And this was to be achieved with "no pleasant 'composition' but uncompromising, organically articulated structure."⁶ Kahnweiler insisted, however, that this "return to the unity of the work of art, in the desire to create not sketches, but finished and autonomous organisms,"⁷ be reconciled with the representational function of painting.

In so doing, Kahnweiler turned to his recent reading of Kant, which provided him with a model for the interpretation of Picasso's "great advance made at Cadaqués" in 1910. This advance—the piercing of the closed form—could then be seen as a means of combining different views of objects into a synthetic, perceptually unified, whole: "Instead of an analytical description, the painter can, if he prefers, also create in this way a synthesis of the object, or in the words of Kant, 'put together the various conceptions and comprehend their variety in one perception.'"⁸ For Kahnweiler, the resolution of the conflict between representation and structure was one of the great achievements of Cubist painting, yet his explanations are riddled with internal contradictions and fall short of doing justice to the self-conscious complexity and ironic wit of Cubist works. Nonetheless, the attention he gave to this problem in his writings reveals its importance for artists and their public in the Cubist period.

Picasso himself frequently called attention to the issue of pictorial unity through the motif of the frame, rendering problematic its place, form of appearance, and, ultimately, its meaning. His manipulations of the actual frames of his collages, and of framing motifs, however, suggest a challenge to,



Fig. 2 Georges Braque in Picasso's studio, c. 1909. New Haven, Yale University, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

rather than an exemplification of, the ideal of the unified work. In classical painting, the frame plays the important role of defining the boundary between the fictional, unified world of the painting or drawing and the real world outside. The frame thus plays a dual role: it establishes the difference of the fiction within the frame from the reality beyond it, but it does this in order to define this fictional world as a coherent, autonomous reality. Picasso's frames, however, frequently appear *within* his works, thereby disrupting their internal unity and the clear distinction between the worlds of reality and fiction.⁹ Picasso's frames are curiously similar to his collage elements—newspaper clippings, playing cards, wallpaper fragments, parts of musical scores—in that both frames and collage elements are familiar, everyday objects that are normally excluded from the field of pictorial illusion. Their eruption within that field represents a subversion of prevailing notions of artistic unity, and this in turn puts into question the “realist” interpretation of Picasso's collages.

It is best to begin the study of Picasso's manipulations of frames and framing motifs, and their relation to his collage practice with his first apparently deliberate collage, the *Still Life with Chair-Caning* (see Fig. 1) This work presents the viewer not only with the startling inclusion of a piece of oilcloth printed with imitation chair-caning, but also with a frame in the unusual form of a mariner's rope. The latter device may have been inspired by the use of rope or

hemp frames in popular chromolithographs, which Picasso is known to have collected,¹⁰ or by the use of rope to frame souvenir mirrors in port towns.¹¹ The rope, then, like the oilcloth, is a ready-made, mass-produced material associated with popular rather than fine art, and is used by Picasso to simulate artisanal skill. The rope, a “low”- or even “non”-art material, serves to parody the beveled wooden frames that traditionally signify “high art,” just as the inclusion of oilcloth parodies the value accorded the medium of oil painting itself. The prominent, gestural smears of oil paint across the smooth surface of the oilcloth further emphasize this ironic juxtaposition of means.

In calling attention to the frame, however, Picasso gave it a further paradoxical function. The rope, in marking the edge of the collage as a picture of a café table, also makes the oval canvas itself synonymous with that table, thus conflating the literal object with the table that it represents.¹² As early as in the spring of 1911, a year before the *Still Life with Chair-Caning*, Picasso had occasionally defined the edges of the tables in his still lifes with twisted ropes, at times including the fringe of a tablecloth, so that rope, sometimes with fringes or tassels, came to denote the presence of a table.¹³ This use of the rope motif would probably have been readily understood by Picasso's contemporaries, since fringes, tassels, and swags were frequently used to decorate furniture,

especially tables, chairs, and couches, in bourgeois homes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A photograph of Picasso's studio in 1909 shows Braque sitting next to a round table covered with a fringed tablecloth similar to those that could be seen in wealthier homes of the time (Fig. 2). The presence of a cheap version of such a decorative object in Picasso's studio is consistent with what we know of Picasso's “mania for collecting” objects that “would not have been out of place in the concierge's office.” This, Fernande Oliver tells us, “was part of their charm for him.”¹⁴

In one of several canvases to represent the still-life table with fragments of rope, *The Chess Pieces* (Fig. 3), the rope serves as a framing device in two competing senses. The fragments of rope, drawn illusionistically in the midst of an otherwise hermetic system of fractured pictorial forms, signify both the framing edges of the depicted still-life table and the curtain loop in the upper right corner of the work. As curtain loop and tassel, the rope refers to the Renaissance model of painting, in which the canvas is seemingly transformed into a transparent or open window. The curtain loop also suggests the traditional *repoussoir*, a framing element that creates the illusion of depth by appearing to lie in the forward plane of the canvas, so that other objects may appear pushed back behind it. Thus it is a motif associated with the idea of viewing as revelation, of seeing into depth as a mode of



Fig. 3 Pablo Picasso, *The Chess Pieces*, fall 1911, oil on canvas, 13 x 16 1/8". Private Collection.

knowledge. Artists have frequently used curtains for this purpose, and Picasso's appropriation of this conventional device is particularly significant in the Cubist context. Seeing the rope as a reference to traditional notions of transparency and illusion clarifies the irony of Picasso's depiction of the fragment of rope in what has been described as *trompe-l'oeil* realism, but which in its crudeness seems more like a deliberately naïve caricature of *trompe-l'oeil*. The "naturalism" of the style of drawing used to depict the rope is hardly eye-fooling, and can be called *trompe-l'oeil* only in comparison with the geometric drawing of the rest of the work. The curtain loop and tassel, therefore, stand rather as emblems or representations of *trompe-l'oeil* illusion and do not perform its traditional functions: the metaphorical curtain fails to reveal a coherent view into an illusory depth beyond. On the contrary, the objects and forms depicted here and in Picasso's other works of this period appear to hover in a shallow, ambiguously defined space.

Picasso's irony is not confined, however, to references to the illusionistic devices of the past. In *The Chess Pieces*, the rope motif serves also to establish the framing edge of the table. While the canvas is the literal support of Picasso's picture, the table is the figurative support of the still-life objects that rest upon it; by "framing" his table, Picasso drew a parallel between these two, equally metaphorical, supports or grounds of his art. The curtain loop and tassel, referring to the traditional notion of the canvas as transparent vertical plane, hovers like a discarded talisman in the upper corners of these opaque pictures. The table edge/frame, referring to the alternative, modernist concept of the work of art as material object, occupying a horizontal plane, also appears in fragmentary form.

In neither sense does the use of the rope motif as a framing device succeed in establishing a definitive metaphorical paradigm for how the work is to be received. The rope motif thus denotes, emblematically, two conflicting models for the relation of the viewer to the work of art without establishing the primacy of one over the other. In these explorations of 1911, however, the opposition of the vertical plane of the *tableau* to the horizontal plane of the *table* remains a matter of pictorial allusion. Nonetheless, Picasso's isolation of this theme in paintings such as *The Chess Pieces* demonstrates his early interest in analyzing the relation of illusion and objecthood as a function of the opposition of vertical and horizontal planes.¹⁵

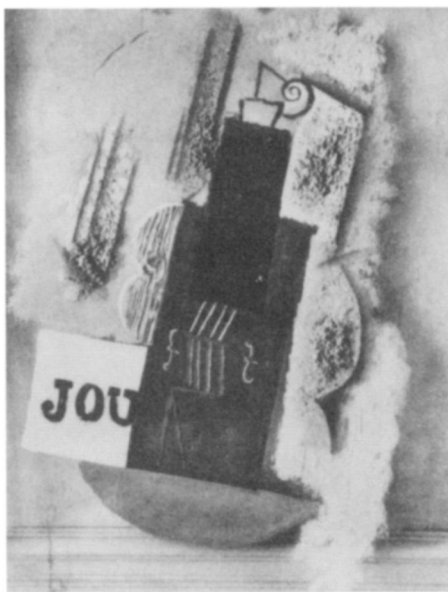


Fig. 4 Pablo Picasso, *Violin and Newspaper*, fall 1912, oil and sand on glass, 25¾ x 20". Private Collection.

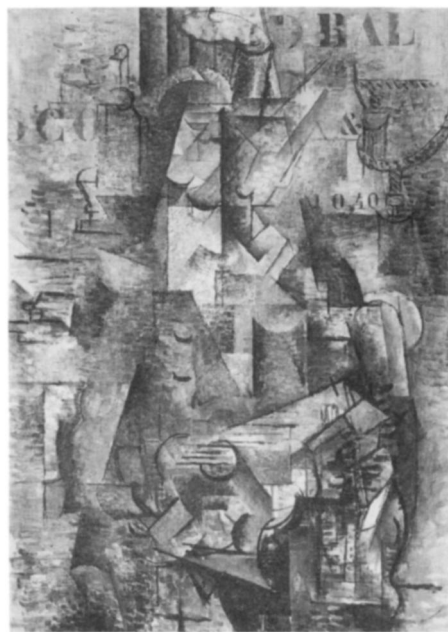


Fig. 5 Georges Braque, *The Portuguese*, 1911, oil on canvas, 46 x 32". Basel, Kunstmuseum.

It may have been partly as a means of heightening the possibility for a literal reading of the table as a concrete object, that Picasso eventually decided to frame *Still Life with Chair-Caning* with an actual rope. The ambiguous oval shape of the canvas/table, however, immediately undermines the possibility of a univocal, literal reading since the oval may represent a round table seen from an oblique angle, seen, in fact, somewhat as a person seated at a café table would see it. Moreover, Picasso has emphasized the divergence of his oval canvas as *object* from what it *represents*

by painting in the edges of a rectangular table, thickly across the horizontal lower edge and more thinly in a diagonal that implies recession at the right. Insofar as the edge of the table is construed as a frame, these alternate borders of the depicted table may be read as a further instance of Picasso's use of "inner frames." The edges of the table, in part synonymous with the enclosing border of canvas, reappear within that border, thus dismantling the traditional binary oppositions of inside/outside, work of art/exterior world. The intrusion of the cane-printed oilcloth operates similarly: it subverts the conventional role of the frame to define a coherent border within which the work should be compositionally and materially unified.

The *Still Life with Chair-Caning* of the spring of 1912 remained a relatively isolated experiment in Picasso's oeuvre until his collaboration with Georges Braque during the fall of that year led the two artists to explore a wide variety of collage techniques. At this time Picasso made an unusual collage, *Violin and Newspaper* (Fig. 4), as part of a series of works on the theme of a musical instrument hanging on a wall. Painted on glass, *Violin and Newspaper* again takes up the motif of the window, and is interesting to compare with an earlier work by Braque, *The Portuguese* of 1911 (Fig. 5). Braque's painting is usually described as representing a Portuguese guitarist, and, in fact, is sometimes said to have been inspired by a particular guitarist he had seen in Marseilles.¹⁶ But, as Jean Laude has argued, Braque represented this guitarist as if seen through a café window in such a way that the depicted scene seems to coincide with the very pane of the glass.¹⁷ That we are looking at the guitarist through a café window is suggested by the curtain loop and tassel at the right, and by the letters and words, which appear to be advertisements stenciled to a pane of glass. Yet these words, like the forms of the guitarist, are so arbitrarily fragmented that they deny the illusion of the window's transparency and of a clear, readable space beyond it. Rather, figure and ground seem to merge in the oscillating play of opaque and transparent forms.

Picasso's *Violin and Newspaper* demonstrates that once again he has literalized what in his own previous work, or in Braque's, had remained figurative. Here the canvas ground has given way to an actually transparent pane of glass, which in conventional terms barely functions as a ground at all. One of the things this work reveals is that the can-

vas must be opaque in order to operate convincingly as a figure of transparency. For in looking through the “unfinished” parts of the glass, we see a strip of wainscoting that is part of the wall behind the glass but that in this photograph, which was taken in Picasso’s studio, enters the composition of the work as a foreign element, thereby disrupting its internal unity and self-sufficiency. Yet this “reality” from outside the picture fails to remain completely foreign to Picasso’s composition since it resembles nothing so much as a frame and, moreover, resembles the painted fragment of a frame (also possibly displaced violin strings) above. And in the play of multiple substitutions—signaled by the word “JOU” (cropped from “journal”)—the wainscoting, which appears just beneath the painted violin, also denotes the edge of a supporting table. Despite its unusual mode of appearance, it is not surprising that

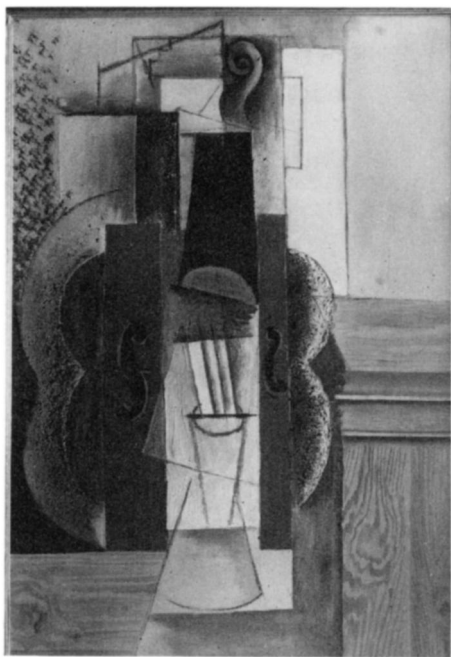


Fig. 6 Pablo Picasso, *Violin Hanging on a Wall*. 1912, oil on canvas, 25½ x 18⅞". Kunstmuseum Bern, Hermann and Margrit Rupf-Stiftung.

Picasso would choose to introduce the motif of wainscoting as a kind of “inner frame” in this painting of a violin. A related work of the autumn of 1912, *Violin Hanging on a Wall* (Fig. 6), represents a violin with painted woodgrain wainscoting and panel to the right. Another section of painted woodgrain, horizontal in format and placed just below the violin, suggests the presence of a supporting table.

It would be interesting to know whether Picasso intended *Violin and*

Newspaper to be framed in a conventional way, which would, of course, greatly diminish the ambiguity this work establishes between reality and illusion. One indication that he did not lies in a photograph of Gertrude Stein’s studio taken sometime in late 1912 or 1913 (Fig. 7). In the photograph, several of Picasso’s Cubist paintings and collages hang unframed on quite crowded walls, including a work titled *Violin*,¹⁸ which is very similar in composition to *Violin and Newspaper*. The unframed presentation of *Violin* and other works suggests that Picasso probably also intended *Violin and Newspaper* to remain unframed as part of his strategy to challenge the fictional coherence of the world contained within the picture. As Gertrude Stein declared in her 1938 essay on Picasso, with the creation of Cubism “the framing of life, the need that a picture exist in its frame, remain in its frame was over.”¹⁹

In a further effort to disrupt the pictorial unity of *Violin and Newspaper*, Picasso created actual relief in certain areas by adding sand to the glass surface, and by simulating woodgrain with thickly applied paint. These textured areas appeal to the viewer’s tactile sense, and the information they yield remains independent of the information yielded by the more purely optical or pictorial forms. As in Braque’s *The Portuguese*, the various parts of the objects depicted in this collage do not cohere in a conventionally organic way.

It has sometimes been argued by modernist critics such as Clement Greenberg that the Cubists pasted flat

pieces of paper to their canvas grounds in order to emphasize the flatness of the picture plane. This emphasis on flatness is taken as a confirmation of the necessary, originary flatness of the medium of painting itself. Yet such works as *Violin and Newspaper* call attention to the ground in order to render it problematic rather than secure. The actual relief of certain areas and the visibility of objects behind the picture plane negate the homogeneity and flatness of the ground as ideal features of the representational field. Any interpretation of Picasso’s collages that emphasizes the artist’s interest in calling attention to the medium in order to dramatize its integrity and primacy is blind to the radical disruptive force of Picasso’s Cubist works. These are not self-contained, unified works that can be easily assimilated to the modernist aspiration for a timeless, pure, and ideal realm through art.²⁰ Rather, collages such as *Violin and Newspaper* demonstrate the failure of the ground to hold, of the frame to enclose, and of the forms to signify a signal, unified reality.

Fragments of twined rope, sometimes with fringe, and molding patterns (both either drawn or cut out of wallpaper) continue to appear in Picasso’s collages for the next two years. In the spring of 1913, Picasso created a series of still lifes in which the interchangeability of these framing motifs is a major theme. Rope is used to signify the supporting table in *The Cup of Coffee* (Fig. 8) and in *Guitar, Wineglass, Bottle of Vieux Marc* (Fig. 9), whereas molding from the border of a wallpaper pattern sig-



Fig. 7 Gertrude Stein’s “Studio,” c. 1912–13. New Haven, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

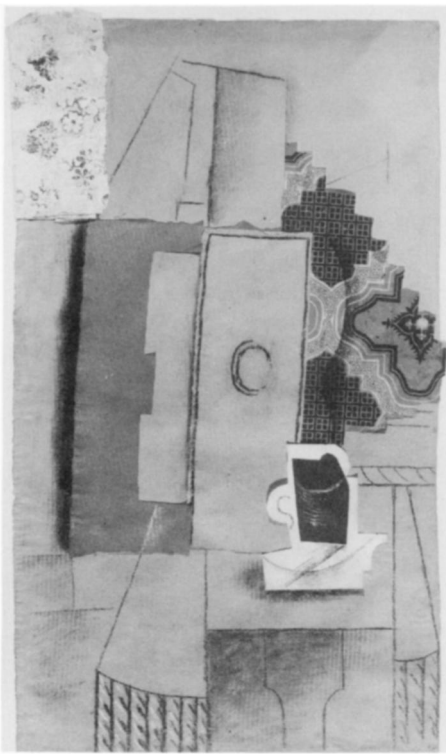


Fig. 8 Pablo Picasso, *The Cup of Coffee*, spring 1913, collage with paper, wallpaper, charcoal, and gouache, 23 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 13 $\frac{3}{4}$ ". Washington, National Gallery of Art, Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon.

nifies the table edge in *Bottle of Vieux Marc, Glass, and Newspaper* (Fig. 10), and in the greatly simplified collage,

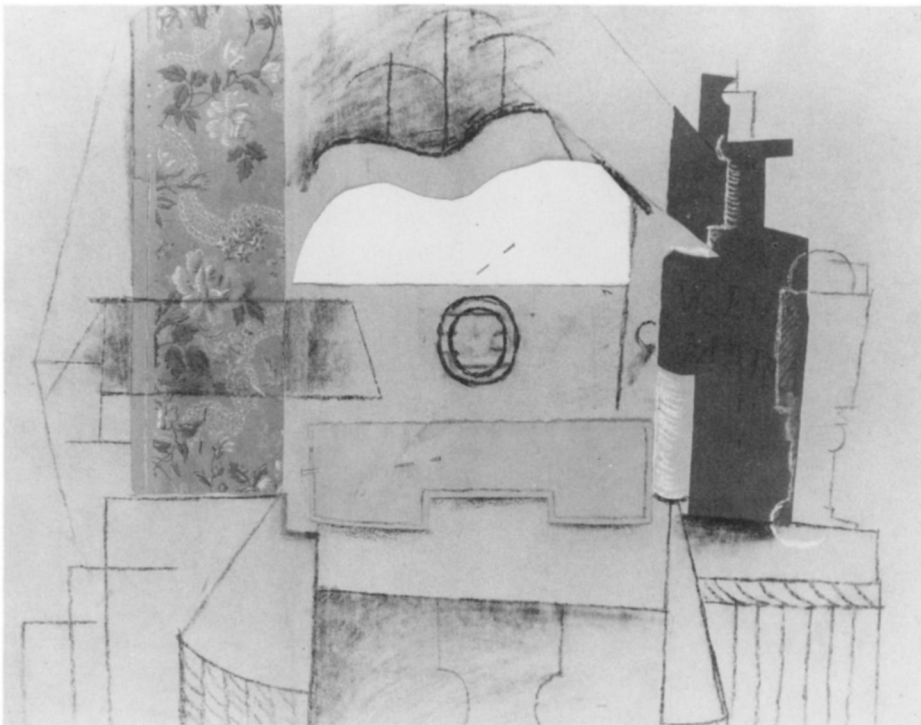


Fig. 9 Pablo Picasso, *Guitar, Wineglass, Bottle of Vieux Marc*, spring 1913, papers pasted and pinned on paper, 19 x 24 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". Paris, Musée Picasso.

Guitar on a Table (Fig. 11). In these examples, the wallpaper engenders a double reading analogous to that found in Picasso's *Still Life with Chair-Caning*: a single pictorial element (here the wallpaper, in the earlier collage the rope) refers to the flat vertical plane of the wall (and by implication, of the picture plane), as well as to the horizontal plane of the table.

A related duality appears in *Guitar, Wineglass, Bottle of Vieux Marc* and in *The Cup of Coffee*. In both works the wallpaper reinforces a sense of verticality in relation to the horizontality of the table, but the table itself is depicted as both straight-edged and round. The latter duplication of pictorial signifiers also recalls the doubly represented table in the *Still Life with Chair-Caning*, in which a straight-edged table was figured within the literal border of the oval table. In none of these examples, however, does the juxtaposition of signifiers represent an attempt to synthesize different "views" of a table into a single, synthetic whole; rather the signifiers remain in the opposition. And in both collages the same constructive principle occurs in the treatment of the guitar, which is composed of disjointed curved and straight halves, or in the display of a circular and squared, modeled and flat, neck of the bottle of *Vieux Marc* in *Guitar, Wineglass, Bottle of Vieux Marc*. The viewer does not acquire a wealth of information about these represented objects, but comes to realize that

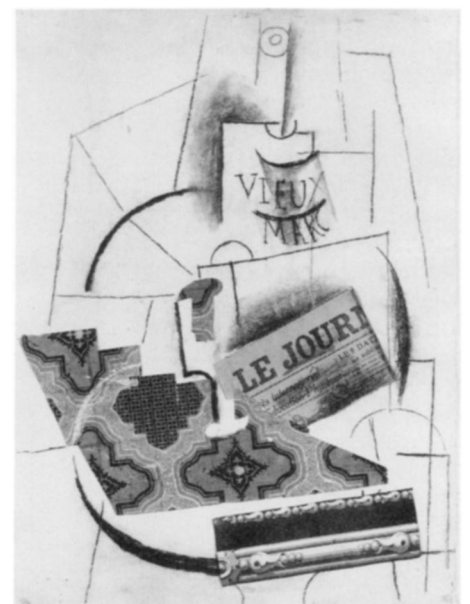


Fig. 10 Pablo Picasso, *Bottle of Vieux Marc, Glass, and Newspaper*, spring 1913, charcoal, papers pasted and pinned on paper, 24 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 19 $\frac{1}{4}$ ". Paris, Musée d'art moderne.

he or she knows very little about them. Is the table round or square? The image remains suspended between these two contradictory, yet simultaneously affirmed possibilities. Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger had warned their readers about the danger of equivalent formal oppositions in their treatise of 1912, *Du Cubisme*. In this didactic text they had argued that

the science of design consists in instituting relations between straight lines and curves. A picture which contained only straight lines or curves would not express existence.

It would be the same with a picture in which curves and straight lines exactly compensated one another, for equivalence is equal to zero.²¹

According to Gleizes and Metzinger, then, the structural equivalence of straight and curved lines in a work would result in a self-canceling composition, severing rather than affirming the tie to "existence." Ironically, this seems to be the path chosen by Picasso. His pictorial oppositions assert the artificiality of art, and the arbitrary, diacritical nature of its signs. From a number of contemporary accounts, we know that Picasso could be extremely caustic to those who insisted on seeking to establish an essential or true link between art and nature. André Salmon, one of Picasso's poet friends, reported the following humorous, but enlightening incident in

Paris-Journal in 1911: "To a younger man, who asks him whether one should draw feet round or square, Picasso replies with much authority: 'There are no feet in nature!' The young man fled, and is still running, to the great joy of his mystifier."²² According to Kahnweiler, the young man in question was Metzinger himself.²³

Yet perhaps in answer to all those who have observed the systematic arbitrariness of Picasso's forms during 1912–14, the artist's remark affirms the nonidentity of his art with what it represents. In an interview of 1923, Picasso reconfirmed this principle: "They speak of naturalism in opposition to modern painting. I would like to know if anyone has ever seen a natural work of art. Nature and art, being two different things, cannot be the same thing. Through art we express our conception of what nature is not."²⁴

Clearly Picasso's pictorial signifiers refer to everyday objects in the world; yet they do so without resembling those objects in the traditional (coherent) sense or even, as has been claimed, by resorting to a higher "conceptual" realism. If realism is understood as a mode of representation that is in some sense true, or adequate to the objects represented, Picasso's Cubist collages must fail. These works, in particular, are constructed through the play of differential signifiers: the straight-edged versus the curved, the modeled versus the flat, the transparent versus the opaque, the hand-crafted versus the machine-made, the literal versus the illusory. The principle of difference, already operative in the distinction between nature and art, thus becomes a principle governing the internal organization of the work of art as well. The formal oppositions Picasso employs are drawn from the history of art²⁵ and from contemporary aesthetic theories, such as those of Seurat or Léger, based on "laws of contrast," and in this sense are not arbitrary; they belong to a shared pictorial tradition and are already imbued with meaning. These oppositions do, however, point to their own arbitrariness in relation to the thing represented, even as they allow representation to occur.

The question that remains to be asked is whether the system of formal differences at play in Picasso's Cubist work describes a closed field—one that is circumscribed or "framed"—or one that is open to change and rupture, perhaps through the interpretative role of the spectator. The answer to this question can be approached only by turning again to Picasso's collages, and to the *leitmotif* of the frame as it is represented in those collages.

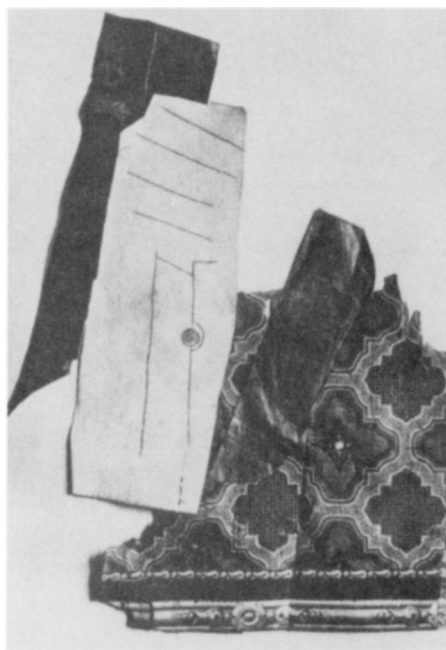


Fig. 11 Pablo Picasso, *Guitar on a Table*, 1913. Private Collection.

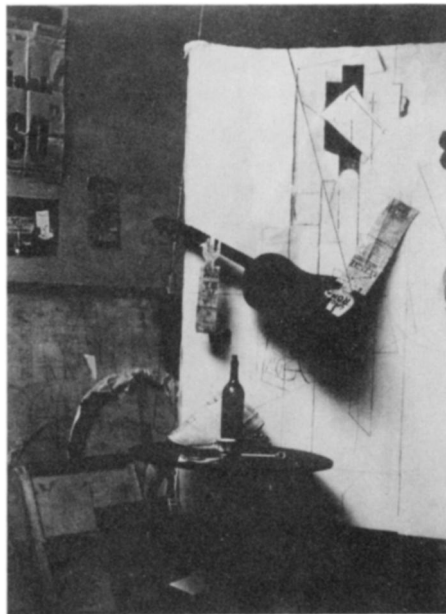


Fig. 12 Pablo Picasso, *Assemblage with Guitar Player*, 1913, no longer extant, photograph of Picasso's studio at 242 boulevard Raspail, Paris, February–March, 1913.

The tendency in Picasso's post-1912 work for collage elements to break through literal or figural frames became especially marked in his constructions. Most of these extremely fragile works, made of humble and unlikely materials, remained in Picasso's possession throughout his lifetime, and some are known only through photographs. Gertrude Stein recalled that she was "very much struck at this period, when cubism was a little more developed, with the way Picasso could put objects together

and make a photograph of them. I have kept one of them, and by the force of his vision it was not necessary that he paint the picture. To have brought the objects together already changed them to other things, not to another picture but to something else, to things as Picasso saw them."²⁶

An example of this is an assemblage from 1913 (*Fig. 12*), an invention of great irony and wit, that in its original form seems to have dispensed with the enclosing borders of a frame altogether. This work comprised a drawing on sized paper, hung like a backdrop against Picasso's studio wall, representing a partially masked harlequin, with arms and hands cut out of newspaper and attached with pins and string to a real guitar, suspended from the ceiling. There is also a real table, much like the tables in Picasso's still lifes of this period, with the familiar bottle, cup, pipe, and newspaper, all in close proximity to the wall. The guitar, in particular, seems remarkably whole and physically present compared with the fragmentary and, indeed, "unfinished" drawing, or with the constructed *Violin* also hanging from the wall. Yet Picasso inserted this familiar object into a representational system that forces us to recognize it, paradoxically, as both a real guitar and as a sign for a guitar. If the most fundamental definition of a sign is that it refers to something that is *absent*, or if, in other words, there must be a *difference* between the signifier and the referent, the status of the guitar is indeed problematic. For the guitar appears to be identical to itself, and therefore to exist, quite simply, as a real or literal object, much like the nearby table. The table itself might appear to be independent of this *tableau*, were it not for the newspaper lying on it, which is tipped up against the wall, drawing it into the realm of fictions, just as the harlequin's newspaper arms reach out and appropriate the guitar to itself. Once inserted into the stagelike context of Picasso's studio, the literalness of the guitar is put in question; it seems to resemble itself, to become a naturalistic mode of representation in opposition to the nearby Cubist geometric drawing, much like the naturalistic details that appeared in Picasso's and Braque's most hermetic paintings from 1910 to early 1912. The guitar is also reversed, a position that renders it nonfunctional and suggests that the guitar is a reflection or reproduction of itself,²⁷ rather than a uniquely existing object. Picasso's manipulation of the guitar, and other objects in this assemblage, drives a wedge between the literal identity of these objects, and our perception of

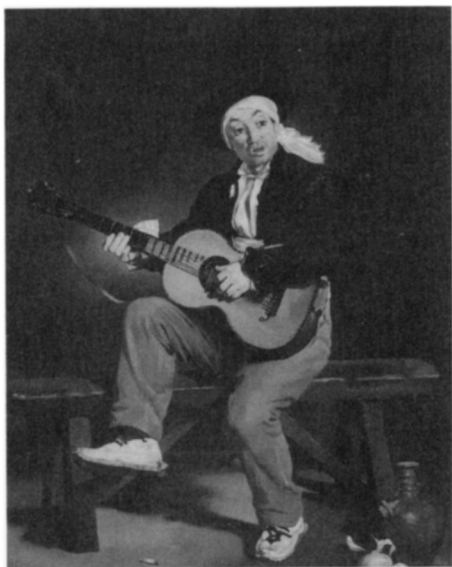


Fig. 13 Edouard Manet, *The Spanish Singer*, 1860, oil on canvas, 58 x 45". The Metropolitan Museum of Art, gift of William Church Osborn, 1949.

them, thus making things into signs. The guitar and table can be read then not only as representations of Picasso's own contemporary still lifes but also as an ironic comment on their aspiration to the status of the real.

The image of a guitarist holding a reversed guitar may also refer to prior representations in the history of art, particularly Manet's *The Spanish Singer* (Fig. 13). Manet's critics had observed that the guitar in *The Spanish Singer*, strung for a right-handed player, was reversed and, further, that the positions of the "guitarist's" hands indicated he did not know how to play this instrument. Picasso may have been initially attracted to Manet's painting because of its Spanish associations, but if it was a precedent for his assemblage, it seems to have been primarily for the "mistakes" noted by Manet's contemporaries. Given Picasso's own effort to disrupt spatial coherence, it is not surprising that he would have been interested in Manet, or that he might choose to refer to just those features of Manet's painting that critics had found most disturbing. What would those critics have said of the chords played by the three-fingered newspaper hands of Picasso's harlequin? And of the guitar and table, which are too small in relation to the larger-than-life size drawing on the backdrop? Or of the musician, who appears to have legs incapable of supporting him; made of paper and tacked to the support, they have been allowed to slide limply under the table? Finally, Picasso's guitarist, like Manet's, is depicted in costume. In Manet's painting, the guitarist's costume, something



Fig. 14 Pablo Picasso, *Glass, Die, and Newspaper*, spring 1914, construction: painted wood and tin, h. 8 1/4". Paris, Musée Picasso.

of a pastiche, calls attention to the fact that Manet painted a model "posed" in his studio.²⁸ In Picasso's assemblage the studio setting is an even more obvious feature of the work's presentation.²⁹

By transforming the objects in his assemblage into signs of prior representations, Picasso "reversed" the normal relation of representation to model, a relation he reversed once again by taking the photograph, thereby introducing a frame and subjecting these objects to "the force of his vision." The spectator's uncertainty regarding the status of these

objects arises only in the absence of this frame, with the merger of pictorial, stagelike, and real-life space that existed in the original studio setting. In that setting it might have been possible to regard the guitar and table as real, potentially functional objects. If, however, we introduce a kind of closure or frame, as the photograph does, these objects appear as elements of a predetermined system of formal oppositions, as figures of the real, rendered temporarily nonfunctional through Picasso's manipulations, and our own constitutive activity as spectators.

Most of Picasso's subsequent collages and constructions introduce the frame as a border to be parodied or transgressed. In *Glass, Die, and Newspaper*, of spring 1914 (Fig. 14), for example, cut and twisted sections of a milk tin, crudely painted to resemble a glass and fragment of newspaper, project from the bounded plane of the vertical *tableau*, as if to signal a desire to attain three-dimensional objecthood. Again the frame plays an integral role in establishing this play between illusory and real depth, which in turn threatens to elide the distinction between painting and sculpture.

In *Glass and Bottle of Bass*, also of spring 1914 (Fig. 15), Picasso created a mock frame by pasting a wallpaper border to the four sides of his picture. But this frame fails to function convincingly

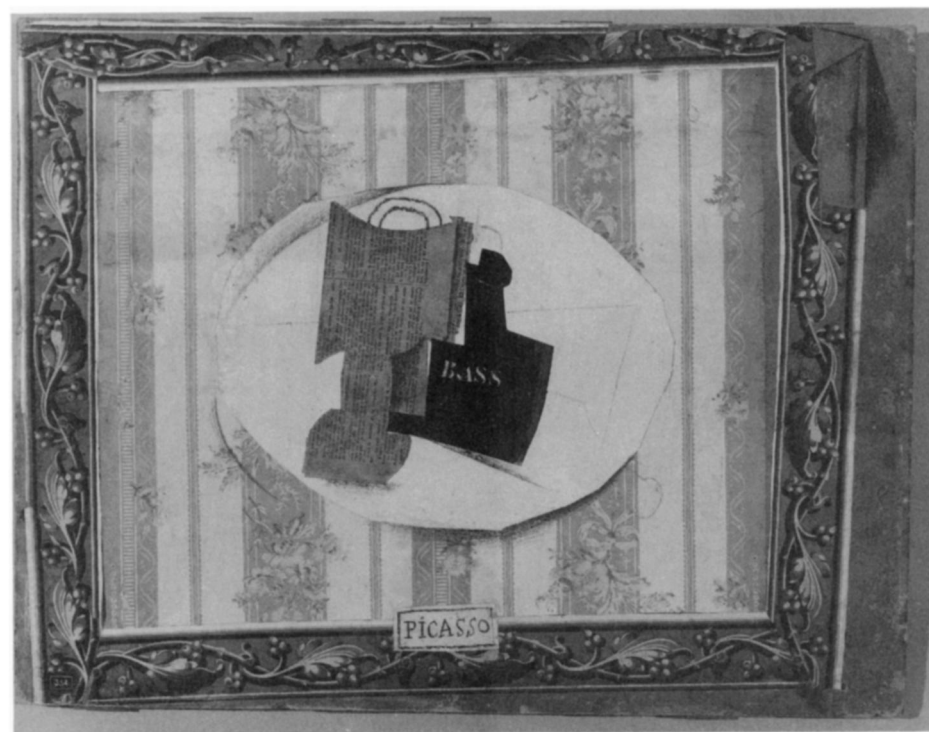


Fig. 15 Pablo Picasso, *Glass and Bottle of Bass*, spring 1914, charcoal, pencil, India ink, gouache, newspaper, and woodblock-printed papers pasted on wood-pulp board, 20 1/4 x 25 3/4". St. Louis, Collection Joseph Pulitzer.

because the paper has been very crudely cut and glued (scissor marks and overlapping are visible), the orientation of the pattern alternates around the four edges, and, most crucial, a section is missing from the upper right corner. Picasso filled this gap with a frame drawn in pencil directly onto the cardboard ground, without, however, making any attempt to imitate the wallpaper pattern. Further emphasizing the difference of this hand-drawn section from the wallpaper frame, Picasso made it cast an illusionistic shadow to the right, as if only the drawn frame had volumetric presence. Yet, because of its isolated and fragmentary character, the shadow cannot be confused with a real shadow, and thus calls attention to itself as an illusion. The function of the frame as an enclosing border is also negated by the extension of the cardboard ground beyond the perimeter marked by the (inner) frame, causing the literal and framed edges of the collage to diverge. The wallpaper border thus appears as a (badly rendered) picture of a frame. The small bit of paper bearing Picasso's name is similarly paradoxical. It functions in relation to this picture both as a literal name plate, of the type (if not the material) frequently found in museums, and as an ironic imitation of such identifying labels.

Within the wallpaper frame of *Glass and Bottle of Bass*, Picasso created a picture of a still-life *table/tableau* hanging on a wallpapered wall. A photograph of the apartment of Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, taken about this time, provides evidence that the Cubist dealer hung works by Picasso and other artists on walls covered with striped wallpaper that closely resembles the wallpaper background of this collage (Fig. 16). Thus Picasso's "picturing" of the prevailing modes of presentation of works of art (including his collages) includes label, frame, and wall. Ironically, a later reference to how works of art are sold was added to *Glass and Bottle of Bass* in the form of the small blue sticker with the numeral 354 from one of the Kahnweiler sales of the early 1920s.

In *Still Life (The Snack)* (Fig. 17), again from the spring of 1914, two alternate frames are introduced: the beveled fragment of wood suggesting both picture frame and wainscoting and the decorative golden fringe denoting the table edge. Neither frame succeeds in establishing a definitive boundary for the work, or even in claiming precedence as its governing paradigm. Yet the movement away from a framed, literally flat and figuratively transparent field is restricted, the context paradoxical but



Fig. 16 Daniel-Henry and Lucie Kahnweiler in their apartment, rue George Sand, Paris, 1912–13.

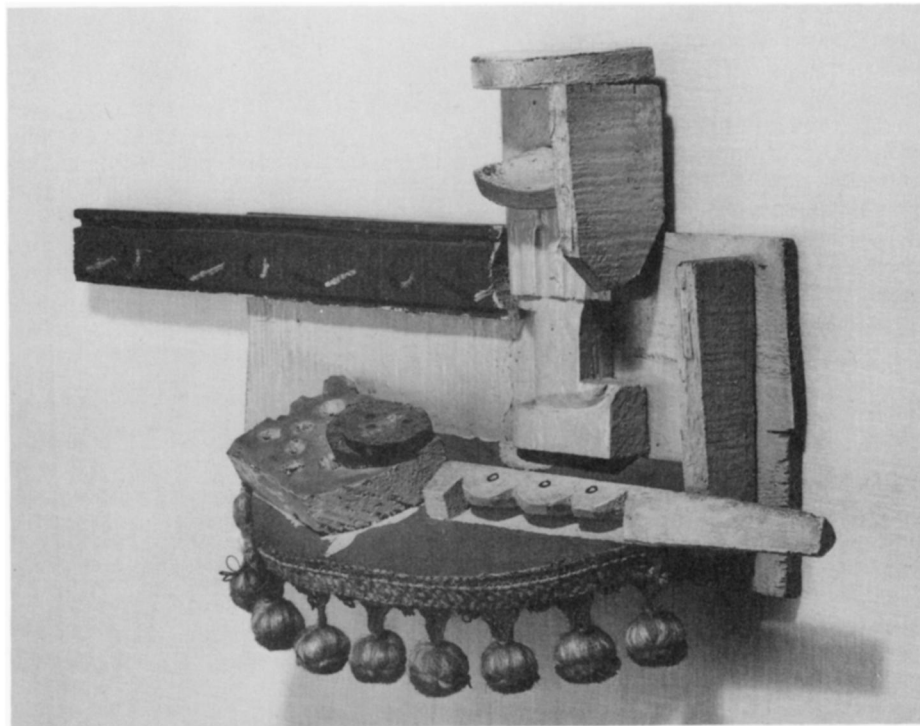


Fig. 17 Pablo Picasso, *Still Life (The Snack)*, spring 1914, construction: painted wood with upholstery fringe, 3½ x 10 x 18". London, The Tate Gallery.

clearly defined. The literal is consistently signified as such within a representational system in which it opposes the figurative. The naturalistic treatment of the cheese and sausage, which rest on the "table" surface, for example, contrasts with the formal and partially fragmented construction of the glass. The glass, moreover, is nailed to the vertical "picture" plane and hovers, ironically, just above the table. Through this inventive device, Picasso established

an opposition between the cheese and sausage, which behave like literal objects subject to gravity and thus belong to the real world of the café table, and the glass, which is suspended (hung like a picture) from the alternate ground of the *tableau*. These two apparently exclusive worlds collide to form a single, compelling scene that once again undermines as it establishes the opposition of *table* and *tableau*: with a shift of focus, the glass appears as a "literal" pro-

jection from the flat plane of the *tableau*, while the cheese and sausage are revealed as made of rather sloppily painted wood. Moreover, the table top itself is tilted upwards, so that it, too, proves to be subject to the deformations of perspective.³⁰ And this means that the cheese and sausage (like the glass) must be nailed in place. In the end, what is affirmed is the interchangeability of the terms “literal” and “figurative”—that is, the way in which, in a system in which individual terms have no essential meaning but only differential values, the functional identity of opposed terms can be revealed.

No interpretation can be regarded as stable or fixed, and Picasso plays out the consequences of this notion in his collages and constructions with great wit. Binary oppositions are continually asserted, then negated, only to reappear in displaced form. Yet Picasso never displaces the system of oppositions itself. This play of oppositions eventually assumes the traditional role of the frame itself, to determine which elements belong to the work and which do not. In Picasso’s Cubist collages, constructions, and assemblages, unity is no longer primarily a question of subject matter, material, or style—although these continue to be important factors in the game. Rather, unity has become a question of oppositional formal structures perceived by the artist/spectator, and is therefore context-dependent and subject to change.

The relation of the *table*, as a sign of the modernist aspiration for the literal object, to the *tableau*, as a sign of traditional illusion, is, in my view, fundamental. André Lhôte tells us that “on this new theme, Picasso and Braque embroidered the most delicate and the most clever arabesques. They strove to assimilate the table to the tableau.”³¹ And according to Kahnweiler, the painters themselves discussed the notion of the *tableau-objet* a great deal: “The Cubists, following in the footsteps of Cézanne, always insisted on the independent existence of the work of art. They talked about ‘le tableau-objet,’ an object which could be put anywhere. . . . The Cubist poets used also to talk of ‘le poème-objet.’”³²

Given the well-known enjoyment of puns and other paradoxes (both linguistic and pictorial) in the circle of painters and poets sometimes called “la bande à Picasso,” these discussions may have led to an interest in the semantic possibilities contained in the word “*tableau*.” This word, which derives from the Latin “*tabula*,”³³ for wooden board or plank,

refers, by extension, to “*table*,” as well as to other smooth, flat surfaces available for inscription. By the thirteenth century in France, a *tableau* signified a painting on a panel of wood, and eventually, with the rise of the “aesthetic” view of art in the eighteenth century, the self-sufficient, portable easel painting.³⁴ Thus the *tabula* has historically denoted both tables and paintings. Perhaps the common origin of *table* and *tableau* in the *tabula* became an enabling insight for Picasso, one that inspired him to seek a reciprocity or hidden identity in objects that had previously seemed to be contradictory in nature. It is this view of the paradoxical identity of the work of art as potentially both *table* and *tableau* (whether derived from visual or verbal analysis, or both) that allowed Picasso to play a game of infinite substitution and reversal within the opposition of these terms/objects, as it had been constructed by his contemporaries. This formal play reveals a critique of the call for the *tableau-objet*, insofar as it might be construed as making a new claim for the transparency of the signifier, or “realism,” as Picasso’s contemporaries often called it.

In inventing the Cubist collage, Picasso put into question many of the fundamental assumptions of his Symbolist predecessors and, indeed, contemporaries. His collage works, in particular, undermined not only the conventional fictions of the classical *tableau*, but also those of the new, avant-garde *tableau-objet*. By inscribing both paradigms in a paradoxical play of identity and difference, Picasso demonstrated that the material literalness of the “object” itself was constituted within a system of oppositions, just as the by-then discredited “transparency” of the picture plane had been constituted as a fiction in opposition to the world outside the frame. As if motivated by a Nietzschean project of radical doubt, Picasso seemed to test each new claim for artistic authenticity, or “realism,” in order to reveal its conventional basis.

Picasso’s strategy for accomplishing this was to displace the prevailing opposition of the *tableau* and the *tableau-objet*, by turning to a new paradigm, which, not surprisingly, may also be derived from the *tabula*. This was the notion of the work of art as a *table à jouer*, a gaming table. Thus conceived, the work of art became a “conventionalized” field of representation, open to the play of paradox, conflicting interpretations, and the collision of multiple (“high” and “low,” pictorial and verbal) cultural codes. The fragmentation and dispersal of forms in Picasso’s Cubism

issued from this view of artistic language as essentially constructed and arbitrary, like the rules of a game. Once a motivated relation of pictorial form to referent had been rejected, Picasso was able to abandon the related fictions of univocal, transparent meaning (realism) and an organic or perceptual form of pictorial unity. Nor do Picasso’s collages and constructions affirm an experience of unified selfhood for the viewer who becomes engaged in the game of interpretation. The viewer (player) cannot “hold” the perceptually alternating planes of the *table* and *tableau* in mind at once, just as he or she cannot “read” the pictorial forms and the texts of the newspaper clippings at once.

Picasso’s collages call for a continuously shifting interpretative strategy as well as for a shifting visual focus, and this must take place over time. This process leads to an accretion of meanings, but rarely to the sense that one has resolved the contradictions or paradoxes presented by the work. The question of pictorial unity itself is thus displaced from the collage to the experience of the viewer, where it is suspended and dispersed in the time of interpretative analysis, like a series of moves in a board game. Picasso himself assumes the role of the master player/dissembler who invites the viewer into the scene of play. Like Picasso’s many Blue and Rose period self-portraits in the guise of a harlequin, the harlequin in the *Assemblage with Guitar Player* (Fig. 18)—which the artist preserved as an independent work after dismantling his assemblage—may be interpreted as a self-portrait.³⁵ Ironically, however, the harlequin is partially unmasked; two planes bearing the schematic marking of the ear (a double curve) and the tangential lines of the eyebrows and nose fan out to the left. But the “self” thereby revealed is shown to consist only in another schematic representation (a vertical line for a nose and two dots for eyes), as if the “self” for Picasso were a layering of masks, of paper-like surfaces without interiority or depth.

The work of art considered as a *table à jouer* contributes also to our understanding of the role of Picasso’s subject matter during this period. Picasso repeatedly turned to still lifes, and especially the café table, not because the subject could be regarded as a “mere pretext” for formal innovation but in part because of its traditional association with realism, including *trompe-l’oeil* painting. Thus Picasso was able to subvert the notion of realism from within the very genre most frequently concerned with visual description and the actuality of the referent. Additional-

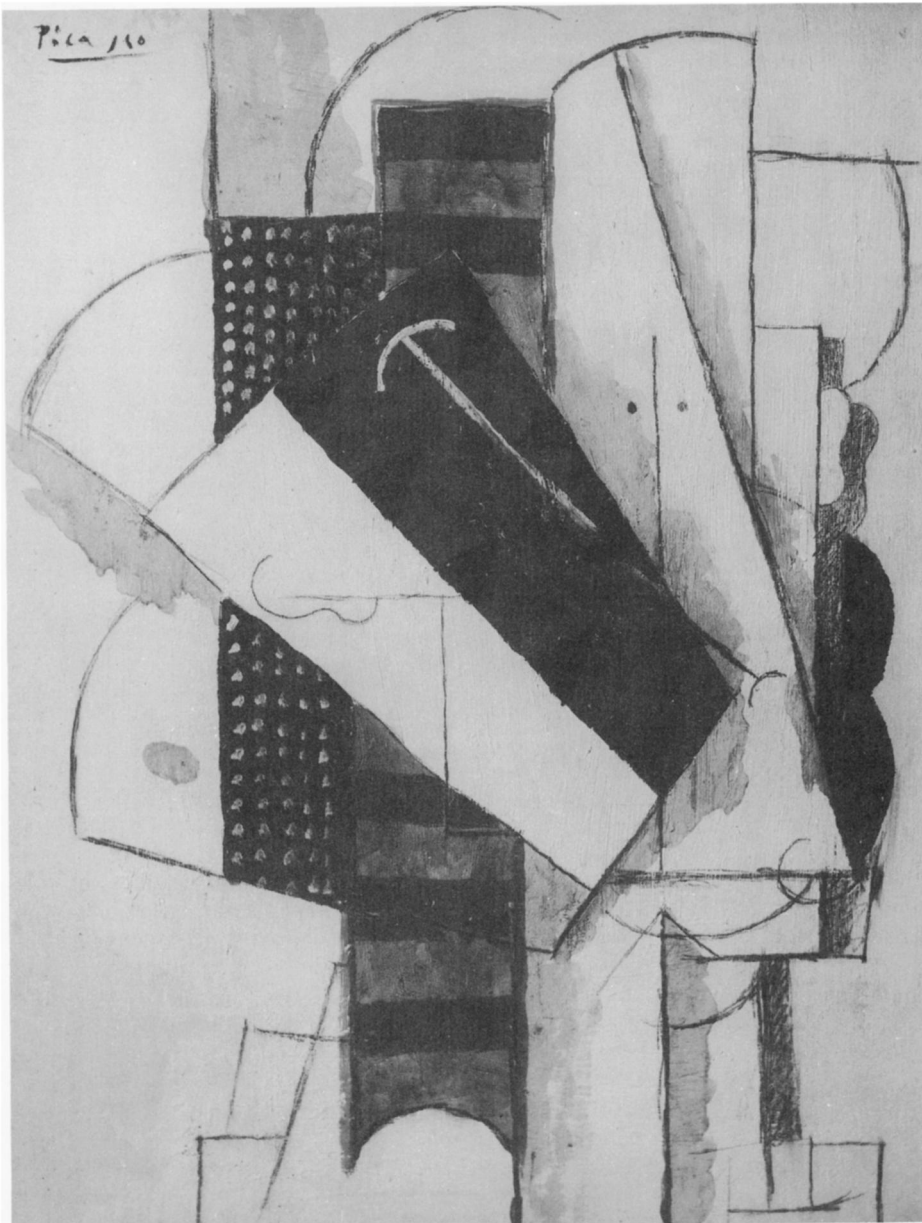


Fig. 18 Pablo Picasso, *Head of a Man*, 1913, oil, charcoal, ink, pencil on sized paper, 24 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 18 $\frac{1}{4}$ ". New York, Richard S. Zeisler Collection.

ly, many of the objects familiar to Picasso's café tables—musical instruments, cards, dice, wine, cigarettes, even the fragmented word "JOU"—evoke popular scenes of play and light-hearted enjoyment.³⁶ As Picasso told his friend from the Bateau-Lavoir days, the poet and painter André Warnod in 1945: "The studio of a painter should be a laboratory. There, one does not make art in the manner of an ape, one invents. Painting is a play of the spirit."³⁷

Notes

A version of this paper was delivered in November 1985 at the Whitney Humanities Center, Yale University. I should like to thank the Whitney Humanities Center and the Georges Lurcy Foundation for providing me with a grant for the year 1985–86, enabling me to carry out the research

and writing of this paper. The ideas presented here form a part of my dissertation, "In Defiance of Painting: The Invention and Early Practice of Collage, 1912–1919" (Yale University, May 1988).

1 This collage was executed some time before May 18, 1912, the date of Picasso's departure for Sorgues with his new mistress, Eva Gouel (Marcelle Humbert). In a letter to Kahnweiler dated June 5, 1912, Picasso provided his dealer with a list of the works that he might remove from his apartment in Paris. He specifically excluded the *Still Life with Chair-Caning* and a related work that also has a rope frame, *Notre avenir est dans l'air*. For a partial reproduction of this letter, see: *Donation Louise et Michel Leiris, Collection Kahnweiler-Leiris*, exh. cat., Paris, Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée national d'art moderne, 1984, November 22–January 28, 1985, pp. 166–68.

2 John Golding, *Cubism: A History and an Analysis, 1907–1914*, New York, 1968, p. 81.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 94.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 105.

5 *Ibid.*, pp. 117–18.

6 Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, *The Rise of Cubism*, trans. Henry Aronson, New York, 1949, p. 7.

7 Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, "Accomplissement classique du cubisme Juan Gris [1928]," in *Confessions esthétiques*, Paris, 1963, p. 51: "le retour à l'unité de l'oeuvre d'art, dans la volonté de créer non des esquisses, mais des organismes autonomes et accomplis."

8 Kahnweiler (cited n. 6), p. 12.

9 Guillaume Apollinaire describes the function of "the object, real or in trompe-l'oeil" as a kind of "inner frame," in *Méditations esthétiques: Les Peintres Cubistes*, Paris, 1980 [1913], p. 77. While retaining Apollinaire's concept of the "inner frame," this essay will explore the oppositional structure of the real and the represented in Picasso's collages.

10 Fernande Olivier, *Picasso et ses amis*, Paris, 1933, p. 171, recounts Picasso's love for "ordinary objects" in her memoirs of this period: "En matière de décoration, Picasso avait un goût qui le portait à acheter, souvent par ironie, les objets les plus ordinaires; il avait des manies de collectionneur pour toutes sortes de petites choses. . . . Il aimait les vieux morceaux de tapisserie, Verdures, Aubussons, Beauvais dont il était parfois difficile de reconnaître le sujet à cause de leur mauvais état. Des instruments de musique, des boîtes, des vieux cadres dédorés. De frais chromos encadrés de paille ornaient les murs de la salle à manger. Ils eussent été à leur aise dans une loge de concierge. Lui-même riait de cela."

11 Robert Rosenblum has suggested that Picasso may have seen such a mirror during his trip to Le Havre, which preceded his making of this collage. Rosenblum reproduces a mirror of this type in "Still Life with Chair Caning," *Picasso, from the Musée Picasso*, Paris, exh. cat., Minneapolis, Walker Art Center, 1980, p. 43.

12 Rosenblum (cited n. 11), p. 42, noted that the frame in this collage can be read as both a picture frame and a reference to the carved edge of a table.

13 William Rubin, "Primitivism" in *Twentieth-Century Art*, vol. I, exh. cat., New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 1984, p. 316, cites a lengthy discussion he once had with Picasso about the tasseled furniture fringes he often used in his Cubist collages and constructions as evidence for Rubin's assertion that materials had a "secret metaphoric value" for the artist. My analysis of Picasso's use of these fringes suggests that he was interested in them because of their function as frames. A photograph taken of Picasso at the age of seven with his sister Lola, in which he is shown sitting on a chair decorated with long fringe, suggests that such objects may also have had personal associations

- for him; see: Josep Palau i Fabre, Picasso, *The Early Years 1881–1907*, Barcelona, 1985, p. 34. Picasso evidently also enjoyed the use of such fringes, especially when they imitated architectural motifs, precisely because they were considered by some to be in bad taste. See the review of an exhibition of decorative art in Stuttgart chosen by the curator precisely to demonstrate faults in taste: C. S., “Aberrations du Goût en Matière d’ Art Décoratif,” *Art et Industrie* (October 1909), n.p. According to the author, the problem with such “trucs employés par les faussaires” is that “ils sortent un peu du cadre du musée.”
- 14 Olivier (cited n. 10).
- 15 One can even trace this interest in conflating vertical and horizontal orientations to Picasso’s *Demaiselles d’ Avignon*, in which the demoiselle second from the left appears as a reclining figure catapulted into an upright position. Leo Steinberg, “The Philosophical Brothel,” *Art News*, Part 1, 71:5 (September 1972), pp. 20–29; Part 2, 71:6 (October 1972), pp. 38–47, discusses this phenomenon and its relation to similarly “reclining” nudes in Matisse. Steinberg also discusses the relation of vertical and horizontal planes in the combine paintings of Robert Rauschenberg in, “Other Criteria,” *Other Criteria*, New York, 1975, [1972].
- 16 See, for example, the catalogue entry for *The Portuguese* in, *George Braque: “An Exhibition of Paintings*, exh. cat., London, The Tate Gallery, September 28–November 11, 1956, p. 32.
- 17 Nicole Worms de Romilly and Jean Laude, *Braque, le Cubisme fin 1907–1914*, Paris, 1982, p. 48.
- 18 *Violin* hangs on the lower portion of the right wall, the second work in from the corner.
- 19 Gertrude Stein, *Picasso*, Boston, 1959, [1938] p. 12.
- 20 Thomas Crow has made a related critique of the “modernist” interpretation of collage in, “Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts,” *Modernism and Modernity: The Vancouver Conference Papers*, ed. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, Halifax, N.S., 1983. For a view of Picasso’s collages as initiating an important break with modernism, see: Rosalind Krauss, “Re-Presenting Picasso,” *Art in America* 68:10 (December 1980), pp. 90–96, and idem, “In the Name of Picasso,” *October* 16 (Spring 1981), pp. 5–22.
- 21 Quoted in translation in Edward Fry, *Cubism*, New York, 1966, p. 108.
- 22 “Pablo Picasso,” *Paris-Journal* (September 21, 1911), quoted in translation in *ibid.*, p. 68.
- 23 Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, with Francis Crémieux, *My Galleries and Painters*, trans. Helen Weaver, New York, 1971, p. 43.
- 24 “Picasso Speaks,” *The Arts*, 3:5 (May 1923), p. 319.
- 25 Krauss, “Re-presenting Picasso” (cited n. 20), p. 96, compares Picasso’s formal oppositions to those established in the “modernist” writing of the history of art and finds that they are based on the very same bipolar system that structures Wölfflin’s *Principles of Art History*: “The predicates fixed by the Cubist collage bits operate as the integers of such a system, the very same formal system as Wölfflin’s set of master terms: closed/open, line/color, planarity/recession. . . . In the great, complex Cubist collages, each element yields a matched pair of formal signifieds: line *and* color, closure *and* openness, planarity *and* recession.” Picasso’s matched pairs of formal signifieds, however, do not draw directly on Wölfflin’s historical schema, and to the extent that there are parallels, this reflects a parallel historical perception. Many of Picasso’s formal oppositions derive from contemporary aesthetic antinomies, such as the distinction between popular and fine art, or that between curved and straight lines.
- 26 Stein (cited n. 19), p. 18.
- 27 I am grateful to Celeste Brusati for the observation that the reversal of the guitar recalls the reversal of objects in prints and certain other kinds of reproductive mediums.
- 28 I should like to thank Anne Coffin Hanson for calling my attention to the proplike character of the costume worn by Manet’s guitarist.
- 29 I do not wish to claim that Picasso’s assemblage necessarily makes a conscious reference to Manet’s *The Spanish Singer*, although there is ample evidence that Picasso was fascinated by the work of Manet both prior to and after his execution of *Assemblage with Guitar Player*. I merely wish to suggest this reference as a tantalizing possibility. Picasso’s reversal of the guitar, however, is meaningful even without specifically invoking Manet’s *The Spanish Singer*.
- 30 I am grateful to John McCoubrey for calling the angle of this table top to my attention.
- 31 André Lhôte, “Naissance du Cubisme,” in *Histoire de l’art contemporain*, ed. René Huyghe, New York, 1968, p. 216: “Sur ce thème nouveau, Picasso et Braque brodent les plus délicates et les plus sages arabesques. Ils imaginèrent d’assimiler la table au tableau.”
- 32 Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, *Juan Gris, His Life and Work*, trans. Douglas Cooper, New York, n.d. [1977], p. 68.
- 33 For the etymology of *tabula*, see: Eugène Benoist and Henri Goelzer, *Nouveau Dictionnaire Latin-Français*, 10th ed., Paris, 1922, p. 1550; and P. G. W. Glare, ed., *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, Oxford, 1982, pp. 1898–99.
- 34 For a discussion of the meaning of *tableau* in the eighteenth century, particularly in the criticism of Diderot, see: Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*, Berkeley, 1980, pp. 89–96.
- 35 I am convinced that this work, now titled *Head of a Man*, which is executed on sized paper, is the surviving portion of the backdrop of *Assemblage with Guitar Player*. Picasso evidently cropped the backdrop to its present size and elaborated upon his depiction of the harlequin’s head (adding some ornamental detail but not altering its underlying structure) before selling it to Roger Fry in 1913.
- 36 It should be noted that Picasso did not himself play the musical instruments or cards he so frequently represented. He tended to regard these objects as props, and has stated that his interest in the guitar was primarily symbolic. See: Werner Spies, *Sculpture by Picasso*, New York, 1971, p. 71.
- 37 “En peinture tout n’est que signe,” *Arts* (June 29, 1945): “Un atelier de peintre doit être un laboratoire. On n’y fait pas un métier de singe, on invente. La peinture est un jeu d’esprit.”

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