

MODERN ART
PRACTICES AND DEBATES

*Primitivism, Cubism, Abstraction
The Early Twentieth Century*

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Plate 77 Pablo Picasso, *La Suze (Glass and Bottle of Suze)*, November 1912, pasted papers, gouache, and charcoal on paper, 65 x 81 cm. Washington University Gallery of Art, St. Louis. © DACS 1993.

CHAPTER 2

REALISM AND IDEOLOGY: AN INTRODUCTION TO SEMIOTICS AND CUBISM

by Francis Frascina

Introduction

Raising questions

Between the autumn of 1912 and spring 1913, Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque produced a series of works that raised several questions about the status of the art object. Some of these, like *La Suze* and *Still-life 'Au Bon Marché'* (Plates 77 and 78), are made out of 'scrap' materials, such as newspaper, labels and cardboard. Words, letters and typeface are also constituent parts. As these works could not be categorized as conventional art objects, a 'new' category was coined: *papiers collés*, 'pasted papers', or 'collages'.

In conventional artistic terms the materials were worthless items of a kind often associated with 'mass culture'. References to 'mass culture' in avant-garde art were not new. In the nineteenth century, artists from Courbet and Manet onwards had engaged with a wide range of sources, especially in so far as they were indebted to Baudelairean notions of 'modernity'; mostly though, they worked in the media of 'high' art, such as oil on canvas. While many of Picasso's and Braque's Cubist paintings of this time included references to contemporary 'mass culture', and were thus within the tradition of such an engagement, their collages introduced a new dimension by the use of common everyday materials, like newspaper and advertisements, usually extraneous to 'high art'. The accepted criteria for artistic media were being questioned if not revised. So too, it seemed, were conventional notions of 'representation'.

If we consider the ostensible genre of many of the collages, the still-life, the relationship between the material 'art' object and the viewer is different from that established by the traditional still-life, say, Chardin's *Rayfish* (Plate 79). The 'form' of the art object is different: actual collaged elements replace the illusionism of oil on canvas. In the Chardin, resemblance to the depicted objects – a jug, a cat, a rayfish – is accorded a high priority. The painting offers a paradigm of representation in which the image could be read by spectators used to the conventions associated with resemblance to 'things' in the world. An image with a high degree of illusionistic likeness to, or identity with, the world of 'things' is often referred to as *iconic*. Examples of the iconic from other systems of representation are the *straight* line on a map signifying 'straight road' by virtue of a shared property, or the curve on a traffic sign, signifying 'bend in the road'.

Chardin's painted marks and shapes signify specific objects. But just as a 'curve' on a traffic-sign signifies not only 'bend in the road', but also 'potentially dangerous', so too *The Rayfish* conveys a particular meaning within a set of conventions. Traditionally, many still-life paintings were *symbolic* compositions designed to signify *vanitas* (the emptiness of

iconic
symbolic



Plate 78 Pablo Picasso, *Nature morte 'Au Bon Marché'* (Still-life 'Au Bon Marché'), spring 1913, oil and pasted paper on cardboard, 24 x 36 cm. Ludwig Collection, Aachen. © DACS 1993.

possessions and the frailty of human life). Often this was indicated by a skull as a symbol linked by convention to 'death', a *memento mori* reminding us that we must die. Here, a similar symbolic meaning is signified by the gutted rayfish with its mocking grin. There is also a sexual significance. The gonads of the rayfish extend nearly the full length of the body trunk – such is the explicitness of its sexual organs, that it was frequently displayed in the rear of fishmongers' shops on grounds of moral decorum. To the right of the composition are marks signifying a particular type of jug, which is also a traditional symbol of the uterus (when broken or cracked it signified loss of virginity), and on the left a cat is depicted, with its hackles raised as a symbol of licentiousness. The relationship between these elements within an illusionistic composition evokes *vanitas* and signifies the supposed emptiness of venal passion; these ideas are rooted in Dutch and Flemish secular symbolism and in bourgeois ideals and values.¹ It's clear, therefore, that paintings like *The Rayfish* can be read in iconic ('jug', 'cat', 'rayfish') and symbolic (*vanitas*, sexual desire) terms. In fact, there is a powerful relationship between both readings.

Let's consider a work in the same genre, this time by a modernist artist with whom Picasso's Cubism is often associated. At first sight, Cézanne's *Still-life with Plaster Cast of Amour* (Plate 80) appears to be concerned with resemblance, with the iconic, in the same way as Chardin's painting is. *The Rayfish*, however, has a higher degree of painterly 'finish' and a centralized perspectival viewpoint – qualities that, to many modernists, signified the Academic approach. Cézanne's painting is characterized by paradoxes of viewpoint and pictorial scale: consider the effect of the similar scale given to both the round object in the 'background', and the apples and onions on the table, supporting the

¹ See E. Snoep-Reitsma, 'Chardin and the bourgeois ideals of his time'.

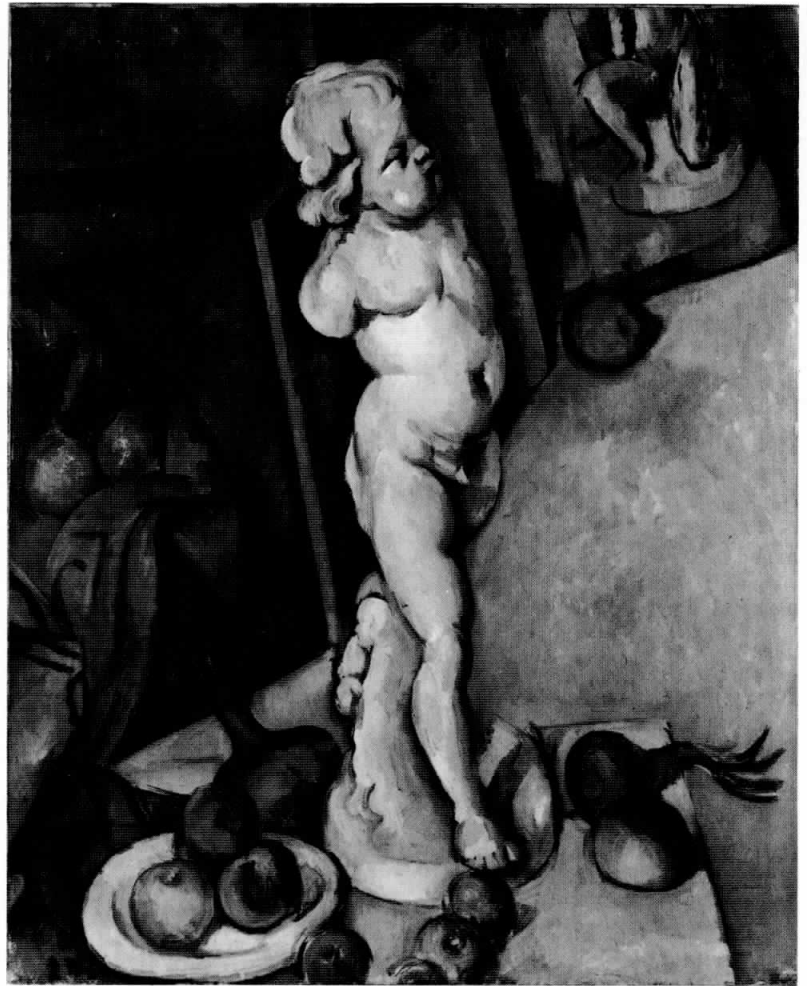


Plate 79 Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin, *La Raie* (*The Rayfish*), 1728, oil on canvas, 114 x 146 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux Documentation Photographique.

plaster figure. These depicted objects, too, can be read symbolically: the plaster cast of the seventeenth-century sculptor Puget's *Amour*, for instance, as a symbol of the 'god of love'. The art historian Meyer Schapiro has shown, too, that apples were associated in Classical poetry and images with an offering of love and were used as a metaphor for women's breasts. In the Cézanne 'the apples are grouped with onions – contrasted forms as well as savours, that suggest the polarity of the sexes' ('The apples of Cézanne', p.11).

Despite significant differences, the Chardin and Cézanne paintings adhere to a paradigm of resemblance and maintain a relationship between the iconic and symbolic which Picasso's Cubist collages do not. If the former are regarded as exemplary works, it's clear why many doubted whether the collages counted as 'art' at all. However, there is an approach to representation which can shed light on all these works. By examining this approach, which considers the *way* that meaning is conveyed in images and the role of the viewer in this process, we should be able to assess whether collage was some sort of *critique* of the kind of 'art' object represented by the Cézanne or the Chardin. We have already begun to use the terminology of this approach, which is based on the relationship between *sign*, *signifier* and *signified*.

Plate 80 Paul Cézanne, *Nature morte avec l'Amour en pâte* (Still-life with Plaster Cast of Amour), c.1895, paper mounted on panel, 70 x 57 cm. Courtauld Institute Galleries, London.



A visual *signifier* can be both the material object itself and the material marks and shapes upon its surface. In the Chardin, it's the oil painting itself and the painted marks which constitute the depictions of individual objects and things, as well as the relationship between these depictions, such as between jug, cat and rayfish. In the Picassos, it's not only the individual elements, the cut-out advertisement, the newspaper and schematic pencil lines, but also the relationship between these elements that constitutes a whole collage. The *signified* is the meaning, what the signifier stands for. In the Chardin the signified is both iconic (paint and shapes signifying a type of 'jug', etc.) and symbolic ('jug' signifying uterus). Thus the signified is (i) 'a collection of objects', (ii) their individual symbolism and – more importantly – (iii) the effect of their combination, the particular moral and social meaning of the whole picture. While we can distinguish between signifier and signified for the process of analysis, in practice they act together, they are materially inseparable. Together they constitute the *sign* as a whole, which has a particular meaning for an audience or community. In Chardin's painting as a *sign*, a moral symbolic message is read *at the same time* as the iconic resemblance, as though the moral message is as 'natural' as the depicted objects. This raises the question of its audience, the class and gender of its community of 'readers', a question also relevant to Cézanne's and Picasso's works as 'signs'.

Analysis in terms of signs, signifiers and signifieds is known as *semiotics*. This form of analysis has been applied to language and works of literature as well as to visual representations such as paintings, films and advertisements. Through semiotics, theorists in different areas of culture have had (and still do have) much to say of significance to each other. In exploring semiotics and assessing its potential for 'decoding' Cubist works, we will consider whether visual representation in general can usefully be analysed as a system of codes and assess the sort of social and cultural values encoded in such signifying systems.

Introductory readings of two Cubist collages

La Suze

The materials used in this collage are clearly identifiable. In the centre is a label from a bottle of the common aperitif, Suze; at bottom left and right the same wallpaper is used as in *Guitar, Sheet Music and Glass* (Plate 81); there are various cut-out pieces of coloured paper, notably the blue oval in the middle and printed columns cut from newspaper. All

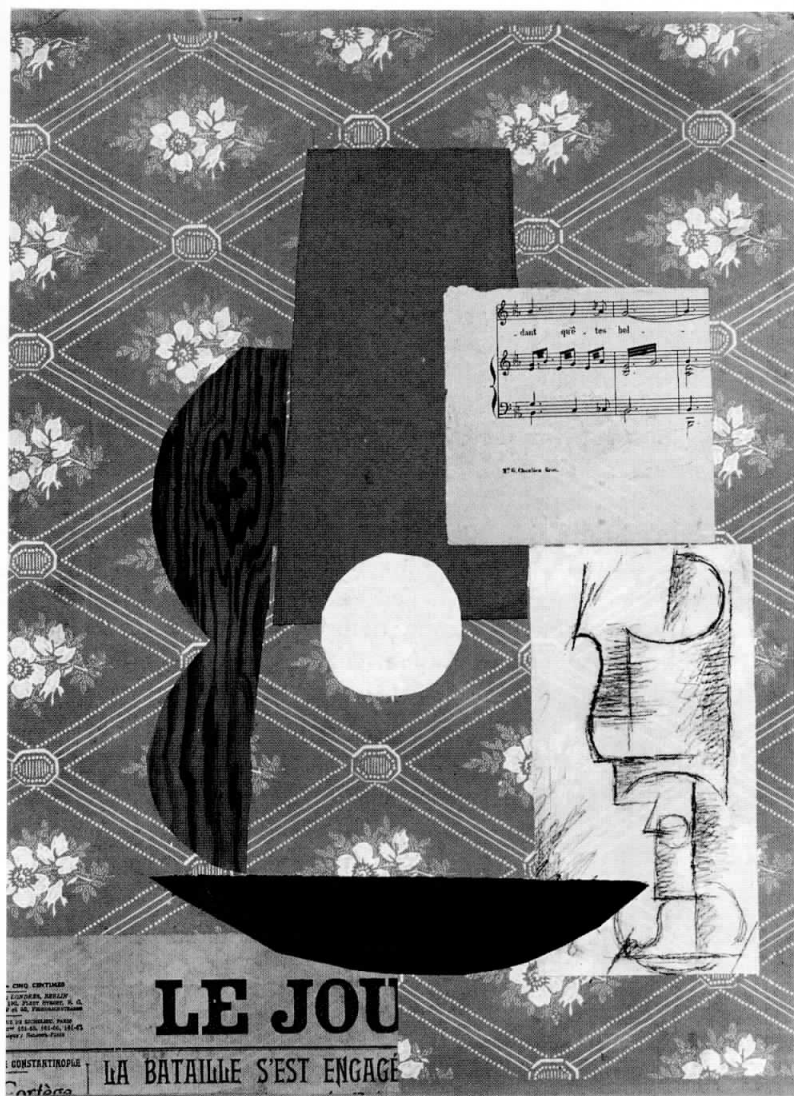


Plate 81 Pablo Picasso, *Guitare, feuille de musique et verre* (Guitar, Sheet-music and Wineglass), autumn 1912, pasted papers, gouache and charcoal on paper, 48 x 37 cm. Marion Koogler-McNay Art Museum; bequest of Marion Koogler-McNay 1950.112. Photo: Michael Smith. © DACS 1993.

these elements have been glued to a paper base with the addition of charcoal drawing and gouache paint.

We cannot rely on a likeness to a 'glass' or a 'bottle', the objects mentioned in the title. Rather we infer 'bottle' by identifying an actual label as *part* of the object, which is pictorially constructed by the tapering, almost triangular, white shape, the curve of the top of the bottle's neck and its 'stopper'. We can infer a *whole* bottle from a contiguity between its depicted parts. The 'glass' too, to the left, is highly schematic. Such pictorial shapes (which are signifiers) and the use of newspaper and charcoal (also signifiers) relate the pictorial *sign* for a glass to the actual object by bonds of Cubist convention, established in Cubist paintings. Once we 'identify' a glass, we might go on to infer that the blue oval is a round table top in elliptical perspective.

But what of the newspaper? In three places it is used as part of the sign for 'glass' (its upper section) and part of the sign for 'bottle' (its fluted shape), but elsewhere it's used cut into columns. Here, it seems to signify different things: perhaps a pictorial 'texture' and tone; perhaps shallow space, particularly where shading is added, or where the type goes in different directions; possibly a table-cloth at the bottom falling from the edge of the blue 'table'; perhaps the refraction of light through a glass, indicated by a change in the direction of the typeface. It can, of course also be literally *read* – reading the newsprint is an activity with which any half-curious spectator might engage.² These extracts are from a specific newspaper, *Le Journal*, dated 18 November 1912 (Plate 82). Picasso cut pieces from the front page and page two, all with references to the Balkan War. There are war reports by Paul Erio, dated 12 and 17 November, and by Henri Barbi, dated 16 November. Several extracts from the latter are pasted across the top, detailing the Serbian advance toward Monastir in Macedonia. Here we can read about the wounded, about battle movements, and the threat of famine in besieged Adrianople. On the far right, pasted *upside down* is Paul Erio's account of a devastating cholera epidemic – an effect of inhuman war conditions – which had killed thousands of Turkish soldiers.

The gruesome account of death and the automaton response of marching soldiers is counterposed on the far left by the column containing a very different report, pasted the right way up. Next to it, the shading schematically signifying 'glass' is underneath a curve for its rim and a sharp angle signifying both the meeting of side and rim, and an 'arrow' pointing to a sub-heading '*L'ordre du jour*' ('the day's agenda') half way down the column. The report is the continuation of one started at the bottom right of the front page of *Le Journal*. In contrast to the report of a furious battle, this details 'The Meeting at Pré-Saint-Gervais Against the War', and illustrates a very different crowd, a demonstration of '40,000–50,000' pacifists, syndicalists, trade unionists and socialists, which took place on the afternoon of 17 November, in a working-class community near Belleville, in the nineteenth *arrondissement* of Paris. It describes the numerous chantings of 'down with war', 'long live the social revolution' and several speeches including one by the Socialist Deputy Sembat, who ended 'asserting that workers ought not kill "for capitalists and manufacturers of arms and munitions" ... they must "conserve their forces and also their arms for the great interior war which will bring down the capitalist regime"'.

² Art historians began to do this in the 1960s. See, for example, the unpublished M.A. thesis by J. Charlat Murray, *Picasso's Use of Newspaper Clippings in his Early Collages* and R. Rosenblum, 'Picasso and the typography of Cubism'. The following discussion of the *Suze* collage is based on a close examination of the work itself and an elaboration of readings to be found in P. Daix and J. Rosselet, *Picasso: The Cubist Years 1907–16*, p.289; The Open University, A315 *Cubism: Picasso and Braque*, pp. 75–6 (written for the course team by F. Frascina); R. Cranshaw, 'Notes on Cubism, war and labour', p.3; P. Leighton, 'Picasso's collages and the threat of war 1912–13', p.665, and her *Re-Ordering the Universe: Picasso and Anarchism, 1897–1914*, pp.126–7.

AUX PORTES DE CONSTANTINOPLE
Un Cortège de Cholériques
UN AFFREUX CHARNIER

La situation est devenue si grave que les cholériques commencent à mourir par milliers. Les cadavres sont entassés par milliers dans les rues, et les habitants fuient en tous sens.

Depuis le début de la guerre, on avait constaté dans plusieurs villages de la région de Constantinople, l'apparition de la peste. Les habitants ont fui en tous sens, et les cadavres sont entassés par milliers.

Les cholériques commencent à mourir par milliers. Les cadavres sont entassés par milliers dans les rues, et les habitants fuient en tous sens.

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LA BATAILLE S'EST ENGAGÉE FURIEUSE sur les lignes de Tchataldja

UNE SOUDAINE OFFENSIVE DES BULGARES EST VIGOUREUSEMENT REPOULSEE
Monastir est serrée de près par les Serbes et les Grecs



UN CAMP BULGARE SUR UNE HAUTEUR ENVOYANT MONASTIR (Photo de notre correspondant Henry BARRY)

L'ENVOYÉ SPÉCIAL DU "JOURNAL" aux Avant-Postes Turcs

Henri BARRY, 12 novembre. On ne s'attendait pas à ce que la bataille de Tchataldja se terminât si vite. Les Bulgares ont été repoussés sur leurs positions initiales.

Les Bulgares ont été repoussés sur leurs positions initiales. Les Serbes et les Grecs ont avancé vers Monastir.

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LA SITUATION

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EN ÉTRANGE DRAPEAU LES LILAS Pourquoi l'Horloger a-t-il coupé le cou à sa Femme?

Un étrange drame s'est joué à Paris. Un horloger a tué sa femme. Les raisons de ce crime sont très étranges.

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The use of text does not end there. While Picasso might have chosen for the 'bottle' a 'Bass' label or one from *Vieux Marc* (a kind of brandy), as he did in other works, in this one he placed *Suze* at the centre of the collage. As the label makes clear, this is an aperitif made from the herb gentian, often used at a tonic and stomachic. But it signifies more than this. The herb was named after Gentius, an Illyrian king of the second century before Christ, who is said to have discovered the herb's virtues. Illyria, the centre of Slavic languages, was on the eastern shore of the Adriatic, precisely the area which, at the time of Picasso's collage, made up the Balkan League (an alliance of Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece and Montenegro which fought the first Balkan War against Turkey, from 1912 to 1913). In the process of selecting, cutting and combining pieces of paper, Picasso alludes to contemporary political and moral issues in a form which suggests the custom or ritual of café talk, references and connections understood by a particular social group.

I'm suggesting that this work signifies in a social way. Artists, like other individuals, relate and react to each other and the material world through forms of social intercourse. This is the basis and source of their 'consciousness', their active awareness and engagement with the forces and relations in society, as they are manifested in representations – political, juridical, philosophical, religious, literary, artistic, etc. The means of communication and visual systems – the forms of intercourse – with which they engage, including visual ones (art, newspapers, adverts, books, rituals, etc.) correspond to particular forms of social organization and are necessary to their existence. For instance, mass advertising is a product of a market-driven economic system which can exploit modern technology. Advertisements seek to sell products and values by feeding on and establishing desires, expectations and consumerism. Words and images often encode past and present values to ensure the maintenance not only of the economic system but also of the values and beliefs which encourage a passive consumer audience.

The above assumptions about society and meaning derive from Marx and Engels. They often described 'ideology' as those ideas, values and beliefs about society and social life that we (wrongly) take for granted. They sometimes treated ideology as an *inversion* of the reality of social relations. In this explanation, inequalities in the distribution of power, goods and wealth in society, between classes, ethnic groups and genders, are sustained by dominant groups – ruling classes. Dominant groups construct 'representations' of the real world (i.e. descriptions, which might be encoded in law, or literature, as much as in images) that maintain the interests of their power by making these inequalities seem somehow 'natural'. Two examples might be the representation of the working class as a dangerous rabble or as grateful recipients of 'aristocratic' wealth and value; of women as idealized sexual objects or as maternal domestics. In both cases, power over others is invested in particular inheritors. Marxists claim that such a process is an 'inversion' of the truth of real relations:

If in all ideology men [sic] and their relations appear upside down as in a *camera obscura*, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from physical life-process.

(*The German Ideology*, p.42)

One traditional way to signal a resistance to the effects of domination is to represent the 'world turned upside down'; to signal ideology as 'false consciousness', as an inversion or refraction of 'truth'. Representing the world as 'upside down' is also an anarchist strategy and one that Picasso would have known from his familiarity with anarchist groups. In this collage, several of the newspaper cuttings of the horror of the Balkan war, seen by many at the time and since as serving the interests and power of capitalism and imperialism, are inverted. This inversion is, as we have seen, in contrast to the report of the pacifist demonstration pasted the right way up for reading and indicated by the 'arrow/glass'.

Clearly, Picasso's selection and use of newspaper, wasn't arbitrary. Nor was his use of the Suze label as a signifier both of 'an aperitif', with all its social connotations, and of 'the Balkans' with all its socio-political significance. Importantly, too, not only may parts of the collage act as signifiers but also the particular *relationships* between them, as with the case of inversion, is crucial for an understanding of what is signified by the work as a whole.

Some important questions arise here. Is the way that we 'read' Picasso's collage distinctly different from the way that we 'read' the Chardin or Cézanne examples; and what does this tell us about the signifying systems in which they worked? Was *Still-life with Bottle of Suze* a 'one-off' or are there other examples which reveal a similar complexity of potential 'signs' and a particular structural relationship between them? The first question is a larger one for the chapter as whole, but the second can be considered by looking at another collage, *Still Life 'Au Bon Marché'* (Plate 78).

Still-life 'Au Bon Marché'

We can see Cubist 'signs' for a glass, on the right, and for a decanter, on the left, with what appears to be a labelled box in the centre. Many of the other elements refer to the work's specific contemporary context. One is the small newspaper cutting, underneath the 'decanter', which is of a dispatch from Constantinople, giving an account of the assassination of the Minister Nazim Pasha on 23 January, 1913 – another Balkan War reference. A second example is the centrally placed label from the Au Bon Marché department store in Paris, which not only signifies the contemporary merchandise of such a modern institution, but also serves to play 'games' with the relationship of perceiver to perceived, and with notions of 'the real' and of 'illusion'. The real label is positioned illusionistically so as to appear to recede like the top of a box, with a patterned front and one side in shadow. Yet the same patterned paper is used throughout the work to suggest a vertical pictorial plane. This contradicts the illusion by prompting the viewer to read the label as another vertical plane.

Above the *Au Bon Marché* label there is an extract from page nine of *Le Journal*, dated 25 January 1913 (Plate 83). It is cut so that selected parts of three *different* advertisements are combined to form a new and particular relationship in the collage. The first is the top left-hand corner of an illustrated advertisement for a lingerie sale at Samaritaine, another Parisian department store. Above it is the bottom-right part of an advertisement for a typewriter, the 'Torpedo', advertised in *Le Journal* as a 'MACHINE FOR MODERN WRITING'. And to its right, the left-hand side of an advertisement for 'MASSAGE', 'medical' and 'aesthetic'.

In addition to combining these advertisements, Picasso alters some. He has painted over areas of the one for a lingerie sale, leaving just the upper torso of the woman, the price '2 francs 85 centimes' and the letters SAMA. The latter could signify a part of the word SAMA[RITAINE], which the viewer is expected to complete. Picasso often used nicknames, for instance, 'Ma Jolie' ('my pretty one', for the woman he lived with) is inscribed in many of his works at this time. Is SAMA also a nickname for a person or for the department store, or some private pun? Right at the top he has cut off the 'A' of 'agents', so the letters now read 'gents'. 'Gent' means 'tribe' or 'race'; at this time it was still used humorously to refer to women, after the manner of La Fontaine, the seventeenth-century writer of fables and verses (often licentious ones) – 'gent féminine' means 'the fair sex'. In the context of the other words and the image of the woman advertising lingerie, the words 'gents sérieux demandés Partout' could be read 'serious women (the 'fair sex') needed everywhere'. If so, it wouldn't have been the first time Picasso expected viewers to enter into word play, to complete sexual 'jokes' or to notice innuendoes in his works.

MELANOGENE
 Teinture pour la Nature
 des CHEVEUX
 Jambes et la main
 DICOUEMARE, C.A. ROUEN
 Chez tous les Coiffeurs
 Distributeur général PARIS 8 ET LA SEINE

MASSAGE BAINS. PÉDICURE
14, Rue de Valenciennes

MASSAGE MANUCURE-PÉDICURE. M^{lle} C^{te}
Vichy, 23, bd des Capucines. C^{te} 14

S A M A R I T A I N E



2.85

MARDI - MERCREDI
et Jours suivants

Lundi 27 Janvier



3.75

B L A N C

TROUSSEAU - LINGERIE - CHEMISES

TAIE D'OREILLER shirting blanc, sans couture, volant profond festonné et à jours. La taie 1 35

TORCHONS toile à blanc et à jours, grande taille. 4 85

SERVIETTES de table, 40x40, en toile à jours. La douzaine 4 75

Wapette, large 180. La douzaine 1 45

SERVIETTES 3 THE 40x40, en toile à jours, volant profond festonné et à jours. La douzaine 3 25

Le Wapette 150x150. La douzaine 4 80

SERVIETTES de TOILETTE 40x40, en toile à jours, volant profond festonné et à jours. La douzaine 2 95

VITRAGES valpurga violacée, 10x10, en toile à jours. Le mètre 1 75

STORES-VITRAGES toile application et broderie fine. Large 150x140. La paire 2 25

Le Store 150x140. La paire 1 89

STORES-VITRAGES toile application et broderie fine. Large 150x140. La paire 2 25

Le Store 150x140. La paire 1 89

MADAPOLAM mouge pour lingerie. La coupe de 10 mètre 5 75

MOUCHOIRS blanc toile. Châlet pur laine. Riguettes diagonales. 10x10. La douzaine 3 95

MOUCHOIRS blanche batiste pur laine. Quatre à jours. 10x10. La douzaine 5 25

Le Mouchoir 10x10. La douzaine 3 95

CHEMISE pour hommes, shirting grandeur, parete dos. 2 15

Le Chemise 150x140. La paire 1 89

CHEMISE pour hommes, shirting grandeur, parete dos. 2 15

Le Chemise 150x140. La paire 1 89

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Le Chemise 150x140. La paire 1 89

CHEMISE pour hommes, shirting grandeur, parete dos. 2 15

Le Chemise 150x140. La paire 1 89

CHEMISE pour hommes, shirting grandeur, parete dos. 2 15

Le Chemise 150x140. La paire 1 89

DRAP pour enfant, en toile à jours, volant profond festonné et à jours. 1 50

Le Drap 150x140. La paire 1 89

DRAP pour enfant, en toile à jours, volant profond festonné et à jours. 1 50

Le Drap 150x140. La paire 1 89

DRAP pour enfant, en toile à jours, volant profond festonné et à jours. 1 50

Le Drap 150x140. La paire 1 89

DRAP pour enfant, en toile à jours, volant profond festonné et à jours. 1 50

Le Drap 150x140. La paire 1 89

DRAP pour enfant, en toile à jours, volant profond festonné et à jours. 1 50

Le Drap 150x140. La paire 1 89

DRAP pour enfant, en toile à jours, volant profond festonné et à jours. 1 50

Le Drap 150x140. La paire 1 89

PANTALON pour homme, shirting grandeur, parete dos. 2 15

Le Pantalon 150x140. La paire 1 89

PANTALON pour homme, shirting grandeur, parete dos. 2 15

Le Pantalon 150x140. La paire 1 89

PANTALON pour homme, shirting grandeur, parete dos. 2 15

Le Pantalon 150x140. La paire 1 89

PANTALON pour homme, shirting grandeur, parete dos. 2 15

Le Pantalon 150x140. La paire 1 89

PANTALON pour homme, shirting grandeur, parete dos. 2 15

Le Pantalon 150x140. La paire 1 89

PANTALON pour homme, shirting grandeur, parete dos. 2 15

Le Pantalon 150x140. La paire 1 89

DRAP pour enfant, en toile à jours, volant profond festonné et à jours. 1 50

Le Drap 150x140. La paire 1 89

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Le Drap 150x140. La paire 1 89

DRAP

Le grand Capitaliste
est Spéculateur

est **LIRE**
APPRENDRE
et **RETENIR**

Méthodes Inédites
Tableaux Graphiques

Voici un nouveau livre
clair, net, instructif, qui a le
don de lier les théories de Bourse
travaux que les professeurs les plus
éminents ont pu expérimentés
Prix 250 — Fo 275.

La Bourse
CLASSIQUE
MODERNISÉE

L. PAGE
33 (Rue de Clugnot)
PARIS

La Vieillesse
150 pages.

[illegible][illegible]

Plate 83 *Le Journal*, 25 January 1913, page 9 (top half of page). Bibliothèque Nationale.

The collage engages the viewer actively in other ways. Below the *Au Bon Marché* label a patch of ripolin (commercial) paint appears to be a white gap, as does the 'glass' to the right with its gouged 'detailing'. But, like the 'glass', it is a *positive* textured shape, a fact contradicting the visual expectation of seeing the white as a gap or illusionistic 'hole' and contradicting also the words 'TROU' (hole) and 'ICI' (here), in black typeface. Further, the illusionistic effect of white on black (the letters SAMA) or black on white ('TROU', 'ICI') is an element of the 'language' of newspaper typography –this is another case of mixing signs from 'mass culture' with those from 'high art'.

Au Bon Marché: 'Reading' Cubism

Picasso's collages play with existing conventions and invite speculation and debate. Is there a particular meaning to Picasso's use of words and texts; is one reference more likely than another? Do we just read the words emphasized in a literal way or is it appropriate to invoke either the original context of the news report, the advertisement or the label, or the *new* structural relationship between parts of the collage, the new 'text'? The original context is dislocated, transformed, worked over in the making of the collage; the new relationship produces various meanings in terms both of the conventions of 'high art' and the conventions of the original sources – the modern 'mass-produced' commodity.

One reading of the innovative combination of elements in *Au Bon Marché* is that they signify the powerful, consumption-orientated socialization of the department store. The decade after 1900 had seen important innovations – the Métro, telephones, electric light

the cash register and the escalator – which facilitated shopping in the department store. The product range was wide, from the bicycle to the cinematograph; expensive individual objects or mass produced items could be bought, including the wallpaper, wrapping paper, decorator's wood-grain paper and oil-cloth used by Picasso and Braque in their collages. Bon Marché was the first department store to open in France (its cornerstone was laid in 1869). In 1912 it opened a major extension, and at the time of Picasso's collage it was enjoying its golden years. In 1910 it sold merchandise worth 227 million francs, while its nearest competitor, the Louvre store, sold about 152 million francs worth, and Samaritaine (founded in 1870), had a turnover of 110 million francs. It had its own illustration industry with catalogues, agendas and illustrated cards depicting adults and children. It provided a picture of the 'proper household, the correct attire, the bourgeois good life' and a vision of bourgeois culture, persuading middle-class people that this was the way they *should* live their lives in a modern society:

The Bon Marché opened its doors to everyone, but most often it was the bourgeoisie who passed through them. A working-class clientele undoubtedly existed, but its numbers were limited by the cash-only policy ... There was, in fact, something distinctively *respectable* about the Bon Marché that could make it forbidding to those who lacked middle-class pretensions, let alone middle-class means. The store drew its tone from the quarter that enveloped it, one that was known for its affluence, its Catholic orders, and its *bienpensant* ways ...

(M. Miller, *The Bon Marché*, pp.178–9)

Picasso's '*Au Bon Marché*', combines a 'SAMA[RITAINE]' sale advertisement with one for credit facilities over twenty months. The latter was actually for the 'Torpedo' typewriter, but in the context of the collage it apparently signifies the possibility of credit at Samaritaine. Yet it is the label for 'Lingerie, Broderie' from the cash-only Bon Marché store that accompanies it thus setting up a social and economic contrast.

A different reading of the collage centres around possible sexual punning and what may be signified by the image of the female. Edward Fry has claimed that:

... the scene may be understood as a café with a bottle and glass on a table. Seated behind the table is a woman of apparently easy virtue, whose head is indicated by a newspaper advertisement, body (conflated with the table) by a clothing store label and legs beneath the table by clippings with the pun 'LUN B TROU ICI'. The full pun thus read, 'AU BON MARCHÉ LUN B TROU ICI', which may be translated as 'One may make a hole here inexpensively'. This sexual, verbal and visual *double entendre* is also particularly notable for its nonillusionistic indication of pictorial depth and space relations ...

('Picasso, Cubism and reflexivity', p.301)

Christine Poggi, on the other hand, draws attention to irony and ambiguity, a difference which suggests that the collage as sign does not have a fixed private or public meaning. Allusions are made in the collage, she argues, to the 'promiscuity of the commodity' both by the materials used and by the references to department stores:

... Picasso constructs an image of the bourgeois female which ironically conforms to that of the mass media. She appears in this collage in her exemplary dual role as both consumer of goods and as object of desire, that is, as intimately involved in the world of commodities.

('Mallarmé, Picasso and the newspaper as commodity', p.140)

Poggi argues that Picasso may be making a private reference to the first pornographic novel, *Mirely, ou le petit trou pas cher* ('Mirely, or the inexpensive little hole'), of his friend Guillaume Apollinaire, a poet and critic who supported the Cubists, but that the erotic

allusions more probably refer to an obsessive contemporary fascination with, and low humour about, the sexuality of the department-store sales 'girls'. Writers fantasized that such 'naïve girls' might succumb to the depraved life of inner cities; some hinted that the girls were ready to seduce 'respectable' men, others protested that they 'could not be easily distinguished from the *bonne bourgeoisie* and this threatened to lead to undesirable social and moral confusion' (Poggi, p.40). Picasso's inclusion of a glass and a decanter with a stopper may add to this reading in so far as such objects were read as gendered receptacles, like the breakable jug in *The Rayfish*. Does the patterned paper, signifying both background 'wallpaper' and decorated 'box', and the lingerie advertisement, establish this as a private feminine space? Depending upon the gender of the viewer is this a voyeuristic invasion of that space? Or, by contrast, do the wineglass and decanter evoke a more public café scene, with the sexual interchange suggested by Fry? A further reading might associate the gluing of a label and advertisements with billposting, with a public Parisian wall covered in posters, advertisements and announcements as photographed by Atget, or as in Picasso's *Landscape with Posters* (Plates 84, 85).



Plate 84 Eugène Atget, photograph of Rue St Jacques, Paris, 1906, Musée Carnavalet. Photo: Habouzit/Photothèque des Musées de la Ville du Paris © DACS 1993.

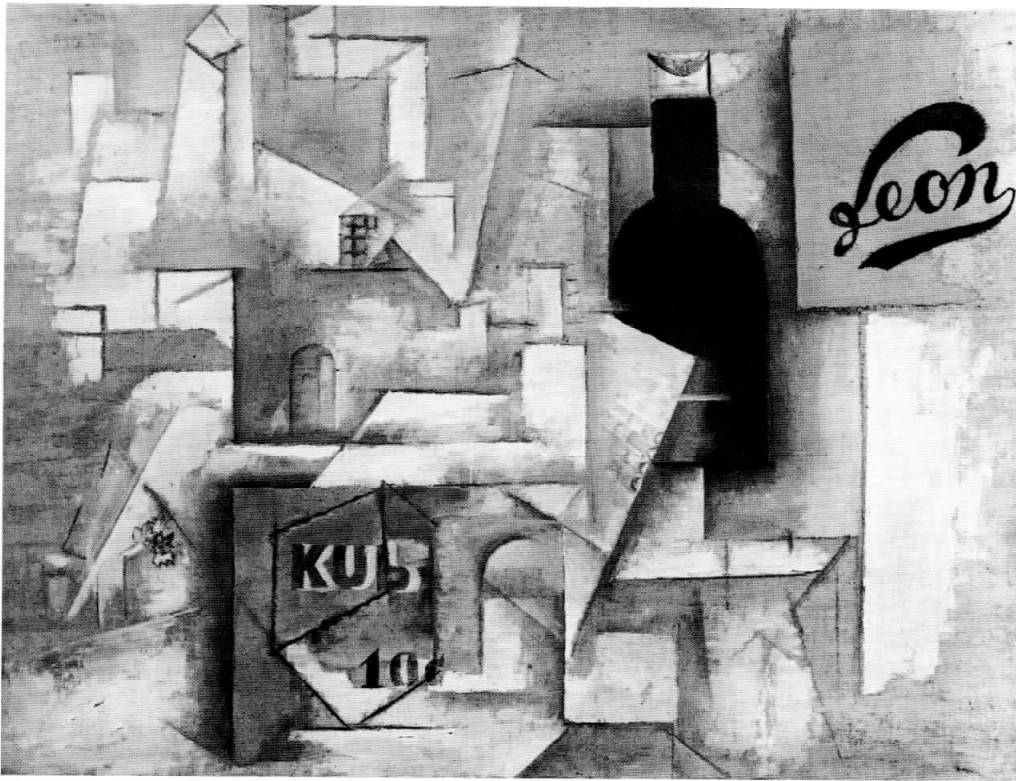


Plate 85 Pablo Picasso, *Le Paysage aux affiches* (Landscape with Posters), summer 1912, oil on canvas, 46 x 61 cm. National Museum of Art, Osaka. © DACS 1993.

Summing-up

One conclusion from this introductory discussion is that meaning is produced by viewers reading a painting in both iconic and symbolic terms. This is the case even when, like Chardin's *Rayfish*, it follows a paradigm of representation in which resemblance to objects is accorded a high priority. It might be argued that in the latter case viewers are expected to be relatively passive consumers of the ideas, values and beliefs conveyed – pictorial resemblance, after all, serves to naturalize the encoded ideological message and to dissemble the power relations on which it depends, usually those of gender (for example the assumed male viewer) and of class (*vanitas*, for example, was a bourgeois preoccupation rooted in the Protestant work ethic). Does Cubist collage serve as a critique of such a paradigm of representation? By confounding the expectation of resemblance, are viewers forced to become more self-reflexive? That is, to become aware not only of collage as a coded representation but also of the *relationship* between the codes and the viewer's process of 'reading'? In collage, this awareness is produced by the use of various 'materials' – literally (newspaper, labels, advertisements) and metaphorically (high art and mass culture, political debate, the modernity of Parisian social life). What does such a self-reflexive awareness reveal about the particular signifying systems, codes or 'languages' of different visual representations? What does this imply about the knowledge, social class and gender of viewers? These are problematic and contested questions, especially as they relate to the relationship between notions of realism and representation.

For some, such as Patricia Leighton and Christine Poggi, the collages are an avant-gardist assault on bourgeois notions of high culture. For those, such as Rosalind Krauss and Yves-Alain Bois, whose concern is the traditions of representation in Western art,