Picasso and the Typography of Cubism

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By now it is a commonplace of art history to say that the innovations of Cubism altered the structure of Western painting to a degree unparalleled since the Renaissance. Indeed, so drastic were Cubism’s shattering and reconstruction of traditional representations of light and shadow, mass and void, flatness and depth that discussions of Cubist art have rightly concentrated upon the nature of these overwhelming changes. But for most commentators, the formal revolutions wrought by Cubism are so arresting that many secondary aspects of Cubist art tend to be neglected, particularly those which, at least at first glance, seem to be peripheral or even irrelevant to the multiple new visual problems posed. Above all, the subject matter of the great masters of Cubism—Picasso, Braque, and Gris—has been of minimal interest, for the themes they preferred—single figures, still lifes, and less often, landscapes—were so traditional that, in themselves, they hardly detracted attention from the most anti-traditional Cubist language into which they were translated. And with this broad assumption in mind—that the subject matter of Cubism plays an intellectually and emotionally neutral role in the restless formal explorations of Cubist art—even the most unconventional aspect of Cubist subject matter, that is, the abundant intrusion of words and printed papers culled from everyday life, has often been construed as a device primarily oriented toward the solution of the successive formal problems raised by the rapid changes of Cubist structure in the years between 1910 and 1914. How many times have we read that the introduction of hand-painted and stencilled words by Braque and Picasso in 1910-11 was a means of asserting the flatness of the picture plane; or that the pasting of bits of newspaper onto canvas or paper, beginning in 1912, was motivated by the need for enriching the lean textual vocabulary of Cubism! Such explanations are by no means incorrect, but their exclusivity has blinded most spectators to the possibility of additional interpretations that would enrich, rather than deny, the formal ones. Indeed, this indifference to the actual reading matter in Cubist art has often been so deeply ingrained that, on more than one occasion, the date printed on a newspaper used in a Picasso papier collé has been overtly contradicted by the date assigned to the work by historians and cataloguers. The question, simply, is this: could it really have been that Picasso and his fellow Cubists chose the words, the newspaper clippings, the calling cards, the cigarette-paper packets, the advertisements, the bottle labels, even the kind of type-face (roman, italic, Gothic) with total indifference to their potential verbal meaning or associative value?

Consider, to begin with, the recurrent references to newspapers in Picasso’s Cubist paintings, drawings, and collages. Although at times, Picasso painted, stencilled, pasted or drew the names of such French newspapers as L’Indépendant, Excelsior, Le Moniteur, L’Intransigeant, Le Quotidien du Midi, Le Figaro, as well as the Spanish newspaper, El Diluvio, and the new Italian Futurist periodical, Lacerba, it was, above all, Le Journal which recurred in these works as well as in those of Braque and Gris. Characteristically for the aesthetic of Cubism at its most inventive, even this ephemeral commonplace, that daily newspaper read by Picasso

66 Bottle of Suze, 1913.
and other Parisians, is thoroughly transformed. Like the objects that surround them—whether figures, stringed instruments, bottles, wine glasses—the letters on the masthead, LE JOURNAL, are subjected to constant metamorphosis, changing from lucid, discrete wholes to ambiguous, interdependent fragments. Indeed, it is almost a rule that in no Cubist work of Picasso does the entire newspaper name, LE JOURNAL, appear;¹¹ and even when it is most legible, as in a papier collé of winter 1912-13, where it hovers together with a siphon, wine glass and violin upon a drawn tabletop, the article, LE, is omitted. Far more commonly, it is shattered into yet smaller parts. Thus, in the case of a painted still life of 1914, the same two-syllable newspaper title is broken into three syllabic parts, JO/UI/NAL, the verbal equivalent of the planar dissection of Cubist objects, and this release from conventional verbal completeness permits, in turn, a whole series of permutations and combinations that, to be understood, must often be read as well as seen. Students of Cubism have frequently used the metaphor of a pun to characterize the visual ambiguities so intrinsic to Cubist art, but in fact, such puns exist on a more literal, verbal level as well. Like his fellow Cubists, Picasso was a member of that literary
generation which included the greatest punster in the history of Western literature, James Joyce. And in more personal terms, too, Picasso was an intimate of such Parisian poets as Apollinaire, who, in the Calligrammes of 1914, confounded words and images with a new-found typographical freedom; and of Max Jacob, who was often obsessed with the possibility of endless transmutations of common words. And among his fellow artists, such Dadaists as Duchamp and Picabia would delight in elaborate puns that, at simpler moments, parallel variations on LE JOURNAL. Thus, Duchamp once provided a parody dictionary entry for another Dadaist, Man Ray, whom he defined as: n.m. synon. de Joiejouerjourir.14

It is exactly this kind of multiple verbal-visual reading of similar sounds and letters (joie=joy; joueur=to play; jouter=to enjoy or, in sexual slang, to come) that we can trace in Picasso’s metamorphoses of LE JOURNAL. Freed from an absolute form and meaning by the Cubist aesthetic of the relative and the ambiguous, this prosaic word can take on new guises in new contexts. Thus, a simple transformation can be achieved merely by bisection. In Still Life with a Bottle of Vieux Marc, dated spring 1913 (but usually misdated spring 1912), LE JOURNAL becomes LE JOUR (the day). But with bisections at different points in the word, other, more evocative puns are also made possible. Thus, JOURNAL can become just JOU, a word fragment that, in French, conjures up the root of the verb jouer, to play, a concept that is not only generally appropriate to Picasso’s first collage, with its capricious interplay of multiple realities, where the true and the false, the handmade and the machine-made are constantly shuffled, but is even more specifically appropriate to The Card Player of 1913–14, whose playing cards, part revealed, part concealed, are echoed in the almost clandestine disclosure of the first letters, JOU, of the newspaper included on the table top.

In other cases, the fusion of word and image is more complex, in the manner of an Apollinaire calligramme whose disposition of letters creates an image of the subject described. Thus, in the Still Life with Skull of 1913, which repeats the macabre memento mori still-life theme that Picasso had already introduced in 1907, the
grey, papery, mask-like skull merges with the equally grey and papery newspaper in an evocative way. The vowels, OU, of JOURNAL, are obscured by the lower part of the skull, whose nasal cavity suggests a carat, which points upward to the eye cavities, whose rounded hollows fulfill, as it were, the visual and verbal expectation of the concealed vowels. The same kind of fusion of an image and the word JOURNAL occurs, without such grim associations of time and death, in a later still life, The Saucepan of 1919 by Juan Gris, whose verbal and visual punning so often rivals that of his compatriot, Picasso. In this example, the J and U of the newspaper title are obliterated by the presence of a wine glass, whose sloping sides isolate the letter O. As a result, this vowel functions ambiguously as both a single letter, excerpted from JOURNAL, and as a description of the round rim of the glass, transformed by Gris’s flattening and geometricizing stylizations into an oval.

Elsewhere, still other possibilities are extracted from the simple verbal premise of LE JOURNAL. In Picasso’s Student with a Newspaper of 1913-14, one finds the intrusion of a slightly off-colour pun, here perfectly suited to the schoolboy grin of the scarecrow figure, who wears a broad-brimmed faluche, the French student’s cap; the JO is dropped, leaving URNAL, a combination of letters easily associated with URINAL.18 The same joke recurs in an earlier still-life context, where the newspaper title, URNAL, is followed by another fragment, UN COUP DE THÊ, which, heading an article about the Balkan Wars that appeared on 4 December 1912, originally read UN COUP DE THÉATRE. Moreover, with the multiplicity characteristic of the Cubist aesthetic, the phrase UN COUP DE THÊ may evoke not only tea, but also the title of Mallarmé’s famous poem, Un Coup de dés n’abolira jamais le hasard, whose typographical freedom was a major inspiration to the poets in Picasso’s circle,19 and whose titular subject, a die, was a common object in Picasso’s still lifes.20

The sullying of the ostensibly pure and cerebral character of Cubism with risqué verbal puns can be demonstrated in other works by Picasso. In depicting a still life and a man with guitar, both of 1913, Picasso continues his and Braque’s frequent intrusion of lettering inspired by posters, in this case announcements of a GRAND
CONCERT.21 Again, through simple Cubist bisection, Picasso evokes, instead of GRAND CONCERT, GRAND CON,22 a commonplace French insult that is further compounded, in 1917, in the lettering (as well as the position of hand and bow) of a sandwich-man costume for the ballet Parade, which adds, à la Jarry’s Ubu Roi, MERD, to the suggestion of GRAND CON.

Far more clandestine and witty is the lascivious joke concealed in a masterly collage of 1912-13, which substitutes for the commonplace of the newspaper title, LE JOURNAL, a collection of pastings that advertise two famous Parisian department stores, LA SAMARITaine and AU BON MARCHÉ. Above, we see a commercial drawing of a properly dressed lady, cut off at the waist; below, the label of the lingerie and broderie department at the Bon Marché; and below that, in much smaller letters that point directly up to the word ‘lingerie’ and that, in turn, partly fill a pictorial ‘hole’ in the jigsaw-puzzle compactness of this collage, we read the fragmented words TROU ICI (hole here).

The stimulus of brand names, labels, advertisements, posters was constant in the Cubist milieu and, in two cases, Picasso even managed to combine the very word Cubism with a commercial commonplace, the trade name, KUB, of a bouillon cube that is still sold in France today. Here the letters KUB, together with the number 10 (the price in centimes), are imposed upon the schematic drawing of a cube, which then, as now, appears in the advertisement. In fact, the unexpected topicality of this familiar French advertising emblem for the milieu of avant-garde painting was seized as well by Mondrian, who, engrossed by Cubism in Paris between 1912 and 1914, made both a relatively literal drawing of this advertisement on a Montparnasse facade and an abstract composition in which the same letters, KUB, can be read.23 And it is said, too, that in 1911, upon arriving in Collioure for his summer holiday, Matisse was chagrined to discover that even there he could not escape Cubism, for he found a KUB poster on his house.24

Picasso’s singling out of the KUB advertisement was clearly motivated by the
joke on Cubism that it offered both verbally and, in the transparent cube drawing, visually. In the same way, his choice of the popular slogan (and title of a brochure\textsuperscript{25}), NOTRE AVENIR EST DANS L’AIR (Our future is in the air), for inclusion in three Cubist still lifes of spring 1912\textsuperscript{26} may allude to his and Braque’s private joke that their experiments in collage and constructed sculpture paralleled the innovative techniques of such pioneer aviators as Wilbur Wright, whose death on 30 May 1912 might even have provided the stimulus for Picasso to commemorate this topical phrase by inscribing it in works of art.\textsuperscript{27}

Most often, however, Picasso’s selection of commonplace words, like his selection of commonplace objects, belonged to the milieu of the French café (whose ambiance provided the richest stimulus for Cubist art) and, in particular, to the inventory of alcoholic drinks available there. Even in a pair of such casual Cubist drawings as those made during the summer of 1912, Picasso chose to record, with the eye of a flâneur on holiday, 1) a café corner with chair and table top laid out with newspaper headlines (La Vie au Gran . . . ), bottle, glass, and in the background, lettering with the price (50 centimes) of Munich beer; and 2) a street facing the old port of Marseille, where the nearly illegible scaffolding of Cubist hieroglyphs, punctuated by an anchor, is suddenly given a prosaic point of visual entry by the lettering, APÉRITIF, on a café awning, by the fragment of a street sign, LA CANE (BIÈRE?), and by the no less literal rendering of figures at a café table and of the carriages below.

From such cafés Picasso selected the names and labels of apéritifs like Pernod, Anis del Mono, and Suze, brandies like Hennessy, Vieux Marc, and Françoise, and ales like Bass, all of which turn up with the frequency of the daily newspaper and are subjected to similar metamorphoses. Picasso especially enjoyed a kind of Cubist prestidigitation of these identifying labels, that is, a constant oscillation of their levels of fact and fiction. At times, as in the case of a bottle of Suze, he actually pasted a real label onto a Cubist bottle; elsewhere, at the opposite extreme, he would label a bottle of Bass with his own, irregular hand lettering in typographical contrast to the printed lettering on a calling card and the label of a package of tobacco. But at other times, with even richer Cubist wit, he would further compound

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\textsuperscript{25} Landscape with Poster, summer 1912.
\textsuperscript{26} Still Life with Bouillon Cube, spring 1912.
\textsuperscript{27} Piet Mondrian, Paris Buildings (Rue du Départ), 1912–13.
\textsuperscript{28} Piet Mondrian, Oval Composition, 1913–14.
\textsuperscript{29} Still Life (‘Notre Avenir est dans l’Air’), spring 1912.
\textsuperscript{30} Cafe Table, summer 1912.
\textsuperscript{31} The Old Port at Marseille, summer 1912.
these levels, of fact and fiction by identifying a Cubist bottle neither by hand nor by the actual label, but rather by pasting a newspaper advertisement for the alcohol in question. Such is the case in a still life of 1914, where the lettering RHUM simultaneously identifies the contents of the Cubist bottle and suggests the presence of the newspaper itself on the still life table, or yet more ambiguously, in an earlier "papier collé" of December 1912, where, if we trouble to read the trapezoidal column of advertisements Picasso selected from the newspaper, we discover not one, but two possibilities—MARC 'A LA CLOCHE' and VIN DÉSILES—for identifying the exact contents of the drawn bottle to which the clipping has been affixed. And with still greater duplicity, Picasso could also turn a bottle of BASS into a playing card simply by isolating the AS (French for ACE) of BASS on a flat plane and locating it next to a floating symbol of a playing card club. The result is an act of clubs split into verbal and symbolic fragments—that, like the evocative JOU of the JOURNAL which hovers on this table top, keep changing identities.

Such Cubist conundrums are quite as common in the labelling of the bottles of Picasso's compatriot, Juan Gris. On his café table tops, even humble bottles of Beaujolais can suddenly be transformed into verbal jokes. Often, the word BEAUJOLAIS is fragmented to a simple BEAU, which, in addition to taking on adjectival status that might define the quality of the wine, could even confuse the wine drinker into thinking that he had a bottle of Beaune; and in one case this word fragment joins verbal forces with the equally fragmented newspaper title, LIJOURNAL, so that the two elide in a new phrase that begins, BEAU JOUR (beautiful day). In another example, Gris offers the most comic metamorphosis of all. Here, in identifying a bottle of red wine, he permits only the letters EAU to show on the label (originally Beaujolais, Beaune, or Bordeaux), and thereby performs his own
Cubist version of The Miracle at Cana. And in yet another case, the name of the popular apéritif, DUBONNET, is observed on a matchholder and faceted into separate syllables—BON and NET— which again provide a permutation of verbal meanings that creates the exact linguistic counterpart of the Cubist visual legerdemain that questions the identity of objects through fragmentation and elision.

Like newspapers and the brand names of alcohol, references to music are as common in the Cubist dictionary of words as in the Cubist repertory of still life objects. Although Braque, in particular, alluded often to classical music, with sprinklings of words like SONATE, ETUDE, DUO, ARIA, RONDO, or even the names BACH, MOZART, KUBELICK, it was popular music that dominated most Cubist art. For Picasso especially, popular songs provided further possibilities for the piquant intrusion of the commonplace within the arcane visual environment of Cubist art. These may range from unspecified waltzes to a mazurka like Trilles et Baisers, from more sentimental songs like Sonnet (after Pierre Ronsard) to the famous habanera, La Paloma. But the most frequent musical reference is undoubtedly MA JOLIE, words excerpted from the refrain—'O Manon, ma jolie, mon coeur te dit bonjour!'—of a popular song, Dernière chanson, written by Fragson in 1911. Shortly after, in the winter of 1911-12, the phrase MA JOLIE appears in Picasso's work, at first in the magisterial figure painting now commonly known by this title, although originally catalogued by Zervos as 'Femme à la guitare'. The inclusion of the phrase MA JOLIE in this complex, nearly indecipherable Cubist context can be interpreted in many ways. For one thing, it functions here as a pseudo-title, mocking with its impersonal lettering and its position at the bottom of a nearly illegible painting the identifying title one might find on a picture in a museum. For another, it must have provided in 1911-12, the time of the song's debut and success, a jolting reminder of a popular tune, known to all, in the midst of an avant-garde pictorial style, understood by few. Indeed, this abrupt confrontation between a new experimental art of overt difficulty and an easily comprehensible fragment culled from popular art is paralleled at exactly the same time, 1911, by Stravinsky, who, in the first scene of Petrouchka, suddenly introduced

86 Juan Gris, Still Life, 1916.
87 Juan Gris, The Check Tablecloth, 1915.
88 Juan Gris, The Siphon, 1917.
into a daring new musical fabric of polyharmony and polyrhythm (the musical counterpart of Cubist visual multiplicity) a simple and lilting popular melody—‘Elle avait un’jambe en bois’—which he had often heard played on a hurdy-gurdy outside his window in Beaulieu. But Picasso’s use of the phrase MA JOLIE could have, with typical Cubist ambiguity, yet another meaning, this time private and sentimental rather than public and aesthetic. For Picasso’s new girlfriend of the Cubist years, Marcelle Humbert, was called ‘Eva’ by the artist, who, on 12 June 1912, wrote to his dealer Kahnweiler that he loved her and would write her name on his pictures.

That name, EVA, like a still-life object or the words of a newspaper clipping, was subjected to Cubist metamorphoses which combined it with the refrain, MA JOLIE. In one case, JOLIE, in its role as half of the song phrase, is inscribed above EVA, offering an adjectival embellishment to a lover’s tribute to his loved one. Elsewhere, Picasso inscribes more explicitly J’AIME EVA. But more often—at least twelve times—he simply writes or stencils MA JOLIE, which in this context becomes, as it were, a clandestine reference to Eva in the guise of a public reference to a popular song.

Again, Picasso’s exploration of song titles for secret allusions or puns was
89 Woman with Guitar ('Ma Jolie'), winter 1911–12.
90 The Violin ('Jolie Eva'), 1912.
91 Still Life ('The Architect's Table'), 1912.
93 Juan Gris, The Package of Coffee, 1914.
94 Juan Gris, The Violin ('Auprès de ma blonde'), 1913.
paralleled by Gris. In one particularly witty example, a café still life of 1913, Gris inscribes on his table top a fragmentary sheet of music which reads, AUPRÈS DE MA BLONDE, the name of the well-known French folk song, and locates this title next to a fluted beer glass, of a kind so common in his still lifes. A joke may well have been intended, for French café slang refers to a glass of light beer as ‘une blonde,’ a reference that would here unite, in a verbal and visual joke, the love song and the beer glass. In a similar example, Gris establishes yet another connection between word and image. Here, in a still life of 1914, which includes a package of coffee, a bottle, two cups and a newspaper, the clipping at the left reports on the French invasion of the Moroccan city of Tazza and diagrams these military manoeuvres on a map. Again, the juxtaposition of the printed word TAZZA and the drawn shadow of a Cubist cup at its right would hardly seem accidental; for especially to Gris, a Spaniard in France, the word TAZZA would offer a kind of Romance language pun on both French tasse and Spanish taza. Even in lesser Cubist masters like the American Max Weber, this kind of punning can be found (perhaps expectedly in his case, in view of his efforts to create in Cubist Poems of 1913 the verbal equivalent of his pictorial Cubist aesthetic). In his representation of a scale, painted in 1915, the stencilled word AVOIDDUPOIS hovers precariously in letter fragments that echo the movement of the balancing mechanism, and is then translated into a visual joke by the contents of the scale: a mound of peas (pois).

It was the words and images of the newspaper clippings, however, that tended to produce the Wittiest and most clandestine jokes in Cubist art. Consider a Picasso papier collé of 1913, in which a trapezoidal newspaper clipping, pasted upside-down, enlivens an unusually ascetic drawing of a still life. One might well ask why Picasso had chosen to paste this clipping upside down, and the answer, to begin with, might be that this position contributes to the Cubist sense of weightlessness, of gravity-defiant objects. But if one also takes the trouble to read the small print, one sees that the upper portion is an advertisement for an electric light bulb, which is illustrated, and that the text boasts that this bulb is ‘la seule qui éclaire dans toutes les directions’ (the only one which gives light on all sides) and ‘la seule qui se place indifféremment dans toutes les positions’ (the only one which can be placed in any position at all)—which is exactly what Picasso has done. Indeed, the location of the commercial illustration of the bulb in the centre of a skeletal linear network transforms this bottle-shaped volume into a lamp base (with arced shade), yet another example of Cubist sleight of hand.

The same attention might be paid to an earlier papier collé of winter 1912-13, where a clipping from LE JOURNAL joins visual, verbal, and conceptual forces with the dissected wine glass that is drawn upon it. To begin with, the square frame of the diagram provides another geometric variation among the trapezoid of the siphon at the left, the spiral of the violin at the right, and the circle and parallelogram of the wine glass’s lip and bowl. But even more, the diagram within the newspaper frame is delightfully appropriate, for it illustrates, as the caption explains, ‘Comment on pose une ligne à 1000 mètres de fond’ (how to lay a line at a depth of 1000 metres). Here, in a cross-section of the sea, almost Cubist in its schematic transparency, a fishing boat is seen dropping a line that visually connects with the drawn circle of the wine glass’s lip and that almost seems to attempt to anchor, with its plumb-line verticality, the swaying, teetering rhythms of the Cubist objects set afloat around it. In gravitational contrast to Picasso’s deep-sea fishing, Gris, on one occasion, used a newspaper diagram to make his still life airborne. Here, the illustration, formally analogous to the checkerboard squares to the right, shows us the lower part of a dirigible, whose swollen arc seems to hover under the base of a wine glass that, with an almost Futurist path of movement, floats up to the
Gris, in fact, was especially canny about choosing newspaper clippings that pertained to the aesthetic of Cubism, whether in terms of gravity, the interplay of fact and fiction, the technique of collage itself, or the question of signatures. In one case, The Table of 1914, the headlines of the lead article announce LE VRAI ET LE FAUX . . ., an appropriate comment on a still life that constantly confuses, in a manner worthy of Pirandello, the true and the false components in an array of illusionistic devices that range from the trompe l’oeil key to actual pastings from books and newspapers. Moreover, at the extreme right, another newspaper clipping offers a joke on the Cubist aesthetic: the upper half of a photograph of a man’s head, whose face disappears beneath an opaque plane, is topped by the word fragment DISPAR . . ., which might be disparu or disparition (disappeared or disappearance), a reference, as it were, to the missing person who vanishes in accord with the Cubist principle of the fragmentary and the elusive.
In another collage of 1914, *The Teacups*, Gris alludes to the very technique of pasting papers. Here, a pair of before-and-after photographs of the statue of a lion on its plinth in the Place de la Concorde demonstrates, as the caption explains, 'Une des conséquences de la loi restreignant l'affichage électoral' (One of the consequences of the law restricting the posting of electoral notices). The text of the article, not included in Gris's clipping, actually went on to explain how the photograph at the left showed the statue in January, 1889, during the electoral campaign between Jacques and General Boulanger, whereas that on the right showed the same statue just yesterday (i.e., 25 April 1914). The lesson was that the picturesqueness of these pasted posters may have been lost, but that beauty and cleanliness had certainly won. It is almost as if Gris jestingly suggested that henceforth the technique of Cubist collage was to be a subversive activity, not only made illegal by the new law, but aesthetically condemned as ugly and untidy. And in yet another collage of 1914, Gris offers perhaps his wittiest newspaper clipping of all. A faceless gentleman is concealed behind a newspaper, LE MATIN, and a glass of beer, evoking perhaps the sinister mystery associated with that famous fictional detective, Fantômas, so popular in Paris at the time, thanks to Marcel Allain and Pierre Souvestre's book (1911) and the cinema serial made from it by Louis
The article that faces us bears out this allusion to criminology. Entitled 'Bertillonnage: On ne truquera plus les oeuvres d'art', it refers to the famous French criminologist, Alphonse Bertillon, who had devised a new system that would prevent forgeries. The small print, only partially included by Gris, goes on to propose that artists fingerprint their own works, so that authentic works could be distinguished from forgeries by criminological methods, an idea approved, so the newspaper reported, by such painters and sculptors as Harpignies, Bonnat and Rodin. The article went on further to include a diagram of fingerprints, a fact which may well have stimulated Gris's idea of permitting the naturalistically drawn fingers of the invisible man to make their imprint, as it were, on the front of the newspaper as a kind of mock signature.

The very idea of true and false works of art and true and false signatures could hardly have been more timely to the Cubist milieu. Indeed, in the same year, 1914, Gris was sharp-eyed enough to find his own name in LE JOURNAL as part of a headline, and used it comically as a mock signature that might have unsettled Bertillon's criminological methods. But it was Picasso, above all, who experimented with the typographical jokes and disguises potential to a signature in a Cubist work of art. It should be remembered, to begin with, that in the period 1908-
13, Picasso, like Braque, almost never signed his Cubist pictures on the front side, presumably to underline their anonymity. When such a signature does, in fact, appear on the front of a Cubist picture it generally has been added by Picasso at a much later date in order to authenticate it. But given this voluntary proscription of traditional signatures, Picasso began to find Cubist fictions that could re-introduce his signatory identity in as unexpectedly witty and stealthy ways as his surreptitious references to Eva in the guise of the song phrase, ‘Ma jolie’. In a tiny, oval still life, probably dating from spring 1912, Picasso painted a letter with a handwritten inscription, ‘Monsieur Picasso, 11 Bd. de Clichy, Paris,’ which functions, with typical Cubist double-entendre, as both an imitation of a real letter addressed to the artist and the artist’s own handwritten signature. Perhaps, too, it was the same impulsive to break the facade of pictorial anonymity in 1911-12 that may help to explain Picasso’s occasional choice, at this time of his and Braque’s greatest stylistic convergence, of specifically Spanish motifs: Spanish words, references to the bull fight, and in one case, even the bright red-and-yellow Spanish flag, which forms a background to the bullring phrase, SOL Y SOMBRA.

By 1914, however, Picasso once more began to sign his pictures in an explicit way, except that now, in many cases, his signature was the subject of the same kind of metamorphoses which characterized his Cubist treatment of other objects and typographical elements. In one such work, his signature reappears in the unexpected role of a mock printed label, affixed to a frame as mock as the rope frame on the first collage. This, in turn, encloses a matting of speckled paper, upon which is illusionistically affixed a small still-life drawing which casts a mock shadow. Like Pirandello’s Six Characters in Search of an Author, this collage keeps juggling layers of
artistic illusion, which here reach their most ambiguous point in the *trompe l’oeil* name plate. Together with the decorative paper border, which parodies the baroque carved frame of a traditional masterpiece, the name plate ennobles, as if in a museum display, the modest little Cubist still-life of pipe and music score (again ‘Ma jolie’). And as a further complication, the printing on the name plate, though nominally impersonal in its block letters, is nevertheless sufficiently irregular to suggest that it, unlike the decorative frame, is handmade, not machine made, so that all facts and fictions are cast into doubt. And later, in 1918, Picasso added still another level of complication by signing the *trompe l’oeil* name plate on a little still life not with impersonal block letters, but rather with his usual personal signature, a hand-painted flourish underlined and followed by the date, 18. Such ideas, in fact, even preceded Cubism; for already before 1900, Picasso had made many casual drawings that included *trompe l’oeil* frames and labels, as in the case of a portrait drawing of his friend, Hermen Anglada, presented within a pseudo-frame whose prominent inscriptions identify both the sitter and the artist.

The aggrandizement of a Cubist still life to the pretensions of framed and labelled museum pieces must have seemed at the time a particularly ironic joke, for Picasso could hardly have suspected then that one day his modest studio experiments would, indeed, be publicly displayed and esteemed in the company of earlier masterpieces of Western painting. The joke, in fact, was shared by other Cubists. For example, Braque, in his *Music* of 1914, enclosed a still life in an irregular, biomorphic frame, outside of which he added a *trompe l’oeil* name plate that also functions, like Picasso’s, as both an official museum label and (since it is handmade) a mock signature and equally confounds the proper boundaries of the work of art. Gris, too, was later to explore the joke in 1917, when he enclosed a Cubist still life with an elaborate *trompe l’oeil* frame, at the top of whose arced grey boundaries are inscribed, as if by machine, the artist’s name and the date of the work: JUAN GRIS 12-17. Again, the frame and the label are, so to speak, both inside and outside the picture, and the signature itself is both true (having been made by the artist’s own hand) and false (having been imitated from an impersonal inscription made by a machine).

110 Diego Rivera, *Still Life with Carafe*, 1914.
An even more complex example of mistaken identities in Cubist signatures may be found in a work of 1914 by the Mexican master, Diego Rivera, who was then part of the Cubist milieu in Paris. Included in a Cubist still life of a glass and carafe is a real telegram received by the artist, with his name and address (26 rue du Départ) handwritten by an anonymous postal clerk, presumably with the trompe l'oeil fountain pen (then a new invention) that hovers beside it. In contrast to this 'signature' of the artist, hastily scrawled in ink by someone else, is another signature, this time drawn by the artist himself on the table's rounded edge, as if carved in wood in impersonal block letters. The Cubist delight in confounding identities reaches a baffling climax here, for the overtly impersonal, printed signature is, in fact, the true one, made by the artist's own hand, whereas the overtly personal, handmade one is, in fact, the false one, made by a stranger.

The idea of a signature that could mimic styles of writing other than the artist's own appealed particularly to Picasso. Even before 1900, first as a child and then as a prodigious young artist in Madrid and Barcelona, Picasso made endlessly imaginative and abundant doodles in which he experimented with all manner of monogram and signature, ranging from lettering styles that echoed the inventive new shapes of Art Nouveau typography to those that mimicked the traditional elegance of cursive script. In the Cubist years, this precocious diversity was revived and expanded, not only by signatures in the form of a name plate, but also by signatures in the form of a calling card. In one example, a still life of c. 1914, a papery plane with a dog-eared upper right-hand corner has the artist's name stencilled upon it, continuing in the realm of signatures Picasso’s earlier use of stencilled letters to suggest the more impersonal realm of posters and newspapers. Here, the artist's traditional handwritten flourish is transposed to stencilled lettering that seems to be stamped upon a calling card, which is then dropped upon the table with the other still life objects. That the card is dog-eared suggests, according to traditional rules of etiquette, that the owner of the card has paid a personal visit, but found no one at home.

The same kind of wit (used as well by the Futurist Carla Carrà after a visit to Paris in 1914) could be applied to the calling cards of Picasso's friends. Already in spring 1912, Picasso translated the fact of a friend's visit into a pictorial fiction. According to Gertrude Stein, and Alice B. Toklas visited Picasso in his new studio on the Rue Ravignan; but finding him not at home, she left her calling card there, only to discover a few days later that Picasso was working on a painting which included the card on the lower right-hand corner of a table. This hand-painted illusion of a calling card, inscribed by Picasso MIS (sic) GERTRUDE STEIN, was to be transformed, two years later, into a real calling card in a still life of 1914. This time, the story is even more complicated, at least according to Miss Toklas, who recounted that she and Gertrude Stein, again finding Picasso not at home, left a dog-eared calling card to signify their visit. Picasso then stripped off the real folded corner, and, replacing it with a trompe l'oeil fold, included it in a still life of a die and a package of cigarettes. To compound the irony, so prophetic of the switched identities that later would characterize Miss Stein’s Cubist idea of writing her own autobiography in the guise of Miss Toklas’s autobiography, Picasso then left the still life for Miss Stein and Miss Toklas at 27 rue de Fleurus as a kind of Cubist calling card in which the identity of the original owners had been completely absorbed, as it were, by the identity of Picasso and his art.

In another example of 1914, Picasso used the actual calling card of André Level (a dealer and the author of a book on Picasso published in 1928). Here, in a manner rivalling Diego Rivera’s confusion of signatory identities, the card provides the typographical stimulus for Picasso’s own signature (in the lower right-hand corner).
116 Still Life with Chair Caning, spring 1912.
117 Still Life ("Au Bon Marché"),
winter 1912–13.
118 Restaurant Still Life, 1914.
119 Still Life with Grapes and Pear, 1914.
120 Still Life: Bottle of Bass, Glass, Package of Tobacco, and Calling Card ("André Level"),
winter 1913–14.
121 Still Life with Calling Card, 1914.
inaires and others of their circle in the Family of Saltimbangues, cf. T. Reff, ‘Harlequins.


123. Giotto and Life with Picasso, p. 82.


126. Daix and Boudaille, Picasso, pp. 87–104, from which the quotations are taken, is the most detailed discussion of this period.

127. Zervos, VI, 720.


132. ibid., especially fig. 30: on this point, cf. p. 39, quoting an observation by William Rubin.

133. ibid., pp. 38–39. However, Steinberg’s conclusion that the picture can no longer be understood in memento mori terms overlooks precisely those iconographic parallels in Picasso’s work which are discussed here.


139. Stockholm, Nationalmuseum, Inv. N.M.B. 1246; bought from the Swedish artist George Paulin in 1930; exhibited at the Moderna Museet, Stockholm, in 1963–64; and at the Louisiana, Copenhagen, in 1968, according to information kindly furnished by Gunhild Osterman, Chief Librarian of the Nationalmuseum.

140. Notice by L. Descaves in J.-K. Huysmans, Oeuvres complètes, Paris, 1928–29, V, pp. 129–133; interestingly, this Tentation was to be illustrated by Degas.


142. Zervos, IV, 331, 332. Cf. also the discussion of sources in Rubin Picasso, pp. 112–114, which however insists that ‘the monk is totally unanticipated in prior work’ by Picasso.

143. L. Venturi, Cézanne, son art, son œuvre, Paris, 1936, no. 688; cf. also nos. 684, 686, etc.

144. Zervos, II, 145; cf. II, 138, 149. In the same year, however, Picasso also painted a Harlequin’s Family and a Carnival in the Bistrot in which Harlequin figures; cf. Zervos, II, 120, 62, VI, 1065–1067, 1073, 1074.

145. Zervos, II, 277, 333; the former is also called The Accordionist.

146. Cf. note 12, above. Some of the details, such as Casagemas’ address, are obviously incorrect.

147. José Esporrénsa, a Spanish poet of the Romantic era, who was much influenced by Byron.

148. A writer of Anarchist convictions and member of the Quatre Gats circle.

149. The proprietor of the Quatre Gats café in Barcelona.

2. Picasso and the Typographic of Cubism

Robert Rosenblum

This article is a considerably revised and amplified version of a lecture, ‘The Typographic of Cubism’, first given at a meeting of the College Art Association of America in Los Angeles, 28 January 1965, and subsequently repeated in many universities and museums in the United States and England. The idea that the choice of words in Cubist art could involve intentional puns and jokes seems to have been largely a product of the growingly non-formalist interpretation of Cubism common to the 1960s. In my own Cubism and Twentieth-Century Art, New York, 1960, I made several observations (pp. 92, 93, 95, 96) on Columbia’s role in this composition.

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46. See also Rosenblum, Cubism and Twentieth-Century Art, p. 121.
47. The clipping is taken from Le Matin, 26 April 1914. The text reads: 'Un des lions de la Place de la Concorde en janvier 1889, à l'époque de la lutte électorale entre Jacques et le Général Boulanger. Le même (à droite) photographié hier. Le pittoresque y a perdu, mais l'esthétique et la propreté y ont certainement gagné.'
48. The irruption of Pompantus is from a 1914 comment on briefly by E. Fry, op. cit., p. 31; and Nicholas Wedady, op. cit., p. 81.
49. The masked emblem of Pompantus is even included in a Gris still life of 1915 (Illustrated in Kahnweiler, op. cit., p. 261). Kahnweiler, in fact, comments on Gris's fascination with this fictional detective (ibid., p. 49). For further references to the importance of Pompantus in the Cubist milieu, see J. Charlat Murray, op. cit., p. 54.
50. The full article, of which Gris provides only a provoking fragment, can be read in Le Matin, 3 February 1914. Bertillon, incidentally, died on ten days later (13 February), a fact which might have made the inclusion of this article in Gris's 'papier collé' all the more topical.
51. A brief reference to the general relevance of this headline, 'On ne trinquera plus . . .', to Cubism is also made by Wedady, ibid.
52. I believe this joke was first pointed out in print by Thomas Hess (Paste Mixed with Paint, Art News, XLVII, October 1948, p. 25, caption).
53. For a succinct and informative discussion of the problem of Picasso's signatures during the Cubist period, see Maurice Jardot's 'Note sur les signatures de Picasso et les titres de ses tableaux' in the indispensable catalogue, Picasso, Paris, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, 1955, in the unpaginated section 'Documents'. The question of reproductions was raised earlier by Kahnweiler (op. cit., pp. 124-125).
54. Zervos dates it winter 1911–12, but in view of its similarity to such other oval still lifes as Picasso's first collage (Zervos, II, 294), also misdated by Zervos winter 1911-12, and now generally dated no earlier than May 1912 (see above, note 16), it is probably to be advanced in time. The address on the painting, however—11 Bd. de Cligny—provides a terminus ante quem, since Picasso left that address on his return from the outbreak in October 1913.
55. An idea similar to this painting of a letter may be found earlier in a drawing of 1911 which includes a paste with: PICASSO, ARTISTE PEINTRE, 11 Bd. DE CLICHEY, PARIS (Zervos, VI, 1134). See also the painted letter in Marcoussis' Nature morte à l'échiquier (1912), illustrated in J. Lachnich, op. cit., p. 23.
56. The other Spanish word fragments include: [PUBLICIDAD, DON, and BARCE (LON). For other Spanish allusions in Picasso's Cubist works, see Zervos, II, 319 (with the inscription ENTRE EUX ARISNÉS); 162 (the so-called Aficionado, with its reference to the bullfight periodical, Le Torero, and to Nimes, a city whose arena is still used for bullfights); and 348 (with the clipping from the Barcelona newspaper, El Díalvio. For more on Picasso and Spain during the Cubist years, see the sections on Céret in Josep Palau I Fabre, Picasso en Cataluña, Barcelona, 1966, pp. 160ff.
57. Gris, too, may have wished to suggest obliquely his Spanish identity, not only by the inclusion in his still lifes of such alcoholics as Jerez de la Frontera and Anís del Mono, but by such overtly Spanish subjects as the Torero of 1913, illustrated in Kahnweiler, op. cit., p. 47.
58. For other related works, with mask frame and name plate, see Zervos, II, 478, 500, 552, Picasso also signed, in his natural handwriting, the illusionistic borders around many still lifes of 1917–19 (e.g. Zervos, III, 102, 121, 140, 367, VI, 141, 1432).
59. See also Ciudad de los Muertos, Capsule Cabanne, L'Épopée du Cubisme, Paris, 1963; pp. 147-148.}

With Braque's The Portuguese of spring 1911, with its stencilled letters (GRANJD BAL, and Picasso's Still Life on a Piano (Zervos, II, 728), which also uses a stencilled postcard CORT(OT), presumably announcing a concert by that pianist. For the problem of the date of the Picasso, see below, note 61.

23. Mondrian's use of this advertisement and its precedent in Picasso's work are discussed in Robert P. Welsh, Piet Mondrian, 1872–1944, The Art Gallery of Toronto, 1966, pp. 144, 146. Douglas Cooper (The Cubist Epoch, London, 1970, p. 106) has also suggested that the spelling KUB may have influenced the Parisian tendency to refer to 'le Cubisme' as 'Der Kubismus', i.e. something foreign and German.
26. The other two are Zervos, II, 312, 734. Zervos dates the latter of these winter 1911–12, but its similarity to the other two and, above all, to the rope-framed first collage (Zervos, II, 294) suggests that they must all date from the same time, spring 1912.
27. The connection between the aeronautics slogan and Picasso's comments on his and Braque's interest in the making of aeroplanes as analogous to the making of Cubist constructions (as well as Picasso's reference to Braque as 'mon cher Vilube') was first made by Roland Penrose (Picasso; His Life and Work, London, 1958, p. 161).
28. It is reprinted in Cooper, op. cit., p. 39.
29. It should be noted that the aeronautics motif was againagreed in the Cubist milieu by La Frenaye's Conquest of the Air (1913) and Delaunay's Homage to Blériot (1914).
30. And that, in at least one case, a watercolour still life of 1915, with an aeroplane viewed through a window, Picasso was to refer more literally to aviation. (Illustrated in J. Richardson, ed., Cubism', no. 24.)
31. See memoirs of 1915–1916, with the additional clipping of a Dubonnet matchbox are seen: (a) D.U. (illustrated in D.H. Kahnweiler, Juan Gris, His Life and Work (rev. ed.), New York, 1969, p. 23) and (b) DUBON (illustrated in Jannes Thrall Soby, Juan Gris, New York, 1958, p. 17). It should be added that a modern advertisement for Dubonnet uses a comparable series of puns (DU BON, DUBONNET) and may have existed, in a similar form, earlier in the century. If so, it would offer yet another case of the confluence of commercial imagery and Cubist art.
32. Marcoussis, too, included verbal fragments of the alcoholic brand names found on matchboxes, as in Le Pygôgne 'Quinquina' (1912) and Le Pygôgne 'Birry' (1914). (Illustrated in Jean Lafranchis, Marcoussis, sa vie, son oeuvre, Paris, 1961, p. 22, pl. 30.)
34. Zervos, II, 786.
35. I believe the first writer to pinpoint this reference was Maurice Jardot, in his exemplary catalogue, Picasso, Paris, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, 1955, no. 26.
36. Zervos, II, 244. It is there dated 'printemps 1911', although its style has suggested to David that a chronometer of Cubism is somewhat later date, i.e., winter 1911–12.
37. See also Rosenblum, Cubism and Twentieth-Century Art, pp. 64ff.
38. Contrary to what Stravinsky thought, the song was copyrighted by its composer, Émile Spooner, to whom royalties on performances of Petrouchka then had to be paid. For further details, see Eric Walter White, Stravinsky, the Composer and His Works, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1966, p. 162, note 10.
41. The frequency of this phrase is even greater than the nine examples cited by David (ibid., op. cit., no. 26). It is found in Zervos, II, 244, 306, 321, 341, 351, 445, 446, 503, 505, 525, 526, 527.
42. The collage was often dated 1913, although research in a periodical room would have disclosed that the newspaper clipping from Le Matin is dated 12 May 1914.
43. Published in London by Elikin Matthews.
44. That this particular clipping might be relevant to the imagery of the work was first suggested briefly by Lawrence Alloway ('Against Picasso', Art International, IV, no. 8, 25 October 1960, p. 46, note).
45. The newspaper clipping comes from an account in Le Journal, 3 May 1914, of the expulsion of the dirigeable 'L'Adjugant-Réau' near Verdun.
46. A related example here would be his use of the upper half of a clipping about a 'train volant', whose aerial wires are just visible and contribute to the Cubist sense of a new airborne reality in the twentieth century. On this collage, see the exhibition catalogue, The Herbert and Nannette Rothschild Collection . . . op. cit., no. 60 and unpaginated notes on Gris.
62. The refinements of the situation are explained in such a standard French etiquette book as La Baronne Staffe, Règles du Savoir-Vivre dans la Sociéte Moderne (15th ed.), Paris, 1890, p. 224: ‘... la core signifie qu'on est venu en personne et, dans ce cas elle équivaut à une visite, qui doit être rendue comme si elle avait été reçue.'

63. In the Sentei circulaire di oggetti, reproduced and discussed in Marianne W. Martin, Picasso: The Paris Years, 1909–1919, Oxford, 1968, Fig. 192 and pp. 193–192. (For a more legible reproduction, in colour, see H. Wesscher, op. cit., p. 67.) The inscription on the calling card reads: C. D. Carrè, Pittore Futurista, Milano. Prof. Martin suggests that the tilting of the card and wine glass against the siphon allude to a bout of drunkenness. In any case, the intersection of the plane of the siphon and the upper right-hand corner of the calling card creates the effect of a dog-eared card.

64. The incident is recounted in G. Stein, The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas, New York, 1933, p. 136, a reference kindly called to my attention by Miss Margaret Potter.

65. For further comments on this painting and its title, see Four Americans in Paris, the Collection of Gertrude Stein and Her Family, New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 1970, p. 171. This painting, incidentally, is misidentified in Jaime Sabartés, Picasso: documents iconographiques, Geneva, 1954, fig. 194 and pp. 329–330, as the work Picasso executed on a wall of the villa Les Clouchettes at Sorgues and then had transferred to canvas. This wall-decoration, which a writer remembered as containing a mandolin, a musical score inscribed ‘Mia Jolie’, and a bottle of Pernod, is to be identified rather with Zervos, II, 351.


67. For another complex example in Picasso’s work of this kind of double identity, see Zervos, Picasso, II, 454, 455, 787. There are other signatures of this year that stand more ambiguously between the cursive script and Picasso’s usual signature (e.g. Zervos, II, 469, 530), as if the natural and the artificial were being combined.

68. As in the italic signature on The Musician (1917–18), illustrated in J. Richardson, op. cit., pl. 13.

69. In her Portrait of Paul Fort, the calling card of the poet, Fort, is pasted onto the canvas, and its italic type is imitated by Severini in the inscription in the lower right-hand corner. The ‘signature’ is illustrated in the catalogue, Collage, Zurich, Kunstgewerbe Museum, 1968, p. 79, where it is misdated 1931, despite the date of December 1930 printed on one of the collage elements, the periodical Poèmes de France.

70. On this drawing, see also R. Rosenberg, ‘Picasso at the Philadelphia Museum...’ p. 183.

71. The story is recorded in an interview of Kahnweiler by Hélène Parmelin in Picasso: oeuvres des Musées de Leningrad and de Moscou and de quelques collections parisiennes, Paris, 1955, p. 20. I am grateful to Miss Margaret Potter for this and the following reference.

72. See Gertrude Stein, The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas, New York, 1933, p. 195. The context suggests that this took place in the winter of 1914–15, although the picture in question is dated 1913–14 by Zervos. Since Féret had known Picasso in Paris since 1910, the reference lesson may well have taken place somewhat earlier than implied by Stein’s narrative.

73. The other letters and numbers (which offer a contrast in terms of the use of numbers and the Latin alphabet) are less easily read. The FRA refers perhaps to a price (francs), the 94 to the time (i.e. 94 heures).

74. This is fully as true of Gris, who, in a still life of 1915, even imitated the complex typographical variety on the labels of both a bottle of Cognac and a package of Quaker Oats (illustrated in I. Soby, op. cit., p. 51), thereby providing a kind of Cubist prophecy of Andy Warhol’s paintings of Campbell’s soup cans.

75. A package of Job cigarette papers also turns up in a still life of 1916, not included in Zervos, but illustrated in J. Richardson, ed. cit., ‘Cubism’, no. 27.

76. It has been suggested by J. Charlat Murray (op. cit., p. 26) that the references to JOB in Picasso’s still lifes are also puns on Max Jacob’s name.

77. For a useful survey of these French posters, see the exhibition catalogue, Cent Ans d’Affiches: ‘La Belle Époque’, Paris, Bibliothèque des Arts Décoratifs, 1964.

78. See Soby, op. cit., pp. 11–12. Gris’ illustrations for José Santos Chocano’s Alma América—Poemas Indo-Españoles (Madrid, 1906) and the Parisian humorous journal L’Assiette au Beurre (to which he contributed from 1908 to 1910) offer a surprisingly large receptivity of proto-Cubist ideas, ranging from flattening, geometric stylizations of figure drawing and eccentric perspective schemes to complex interplays of words and images.

79. Some of the newspaper illustrations of the young Cubists are discussed in Jean Adhémar, ‘Les journaux amusants et les premiers peintres cubistes’, L’Oeil, no. 4. 15 April 1955, pp. 40–42.

80. See, for example, his illustrations for the Madrid periodical, Arte Joven (31 March 1903), most readily reproduced in Anthony Blunt and Phoebe Pool, Picasso, the Formative Years: a Study of His Sources, London, 1962, fig. 57. Here, as elsewhere, words and images are interwoven, including even the repetition of the title. Arte Joven, on the paper the woman is reading.


82. This menu-card was published for the first time in Blunt and Pool, op. cit., and discussed in the catalogue Art in the Afternoon, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, 1964, pp. 147–148.

83. The former still life with a chicken (Zervos, II, 347) is dated by Zervos 1912, a date repeated in D. Duncan, op. cit., p. 206. Nevertheless, the easy legibility of this still life, as well as its stylistic and thematic closeness to 534 (dated by Zervos 1914), suggest that it, too, should be dated 1914 rather than 1912.

84. For an earlier, more legible example of such a restaurant still life, see Zervos, II, 308 (1911–12), where a ‘pigeon aux petits pois’ is presented against the inscription CAFE. For a later, more legible one, see Zervos, II, 430 (1913), where a paper collé roast chicken (duck? goose?) is set against a drawn menu, wine glass, bottle and knife.

85. This enumeration of urban printed matter comes from the following lines in Apollinaire’s Zone: Tu les prospections les catalogues les affiches qui chantent tout haut Voilà la poésie ce matin et pour la proie il y a les journaux Il y a les livraisons à 25 centimes pleines d’aventures policières... Les inscriptions des enseignes et des maraîchères Les plaques les avis à la façon des perroquets criailaient...