

Visual-verbal encounters in Cendrars and Delaunay's *La Prose du Transsibérien*

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Published in late 1913, in a period of French cultural history characterized by intense interartistic experimentation, Blaise Cendrars and Sonia Delaunay's collaborative work *La Prose du Transsibérien et de la petite Jehanne de France* (fig. 1) offers an investigation into the relationship between visual and verbal modes of expression.¹ The work is made up of a single fold-out page, two metres in length: Cendrars' long poem in free verse, which recounts a fictional voyage on the Trans-Siberian railway in the company of the prostitute Jeanne, is arranged in a column on the right of the page, while stencilled 'couleurs simultanées' by Sonia Delaunay occupy a parallel column on the left. Despite this basic left-right opposition, text and image are not entirely distinct within the space of the work, as the visual form of Cendrars' poem is itself of interest: printed in four different coloured inks and a number of different typefaces, it is also surrounded by blocks of paler colour that accentuate its shifts in alignment and encourage the reader to *view* the poem as well as to read it.

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¹ '*La Prose du Transsibérien*' will be understood throughout as referring specifically to this 1913 work. This contrasts with the terminology employed by Amanda Leamon, who uses 'Le Premier livre simultané' to refer to the 1913 work, and takes '*La Prose du Transsibérien*' to refer to Cendrars' text only (as realized in a number of different editions); see 'Simultaneity and gender in the *Premier Livre Simultané*', *Symposium*, 51.3 (1997), 158-71 (p. 158). I have not adopted Leamon's terminological schema, on the grounds that it implies from the outset that the poem's meanings are self-contained both in respect of its typographical characteristics and in relation to Sonia Delaunay's painting – or that the poem as published in 1913 is essentially the same as other editions.



Fig. 1. Blaise Cendrars and Sonia Delaunay, *La Prose du Transsibérien et de la petite Jehanne de France* (Paris : Éditions des Hommes nouveaux, 1913).

This article will explore the nature of the encounters between visual and verbal elements within *La Prose du Transsibérien*, looking firstly at the relationship between the *mise en page* of Cendrars' poem and its meaning, and then at the relationship between poem and painting. The complexity of these encounters means that the work is difficult to situate in relation to generic categories such as visual poetry, or the *livre d'artiste*: indeed, by publicizing it as 'le premier livre simultané', the authors indicated that they conceived of it as inaugurating a new, entirely original genre.² One of the key questions that will occupy us here is what precisely a 'livre simultané' might be, and how visual-verbal relationships in *La Prose du Transsibérien* may be articulated.

Pär Bergman has demonstrated that 'simultané' (and the related terms 'simultanéité' and 'simultanéisme'/'simultanisme') bore a multitude of varying meanings in the years immediately preceding the First World War.³ The well-known 'polémique' that arose over the origins of simultaneity as an aesthetic concept occurred precisely because various different literary and artistic movements – including the Futurists, and those poets associated with Henri-Martin Barzun and his review *Poème et drame* – were putting forward aesthetic theories which employed the term in divergent ways. Thus, for the 'dramatist' poet Barzun, simultaneity in poetry meant polyphony, or the use of multiple voices speaking at once.⁴ Although the lines to be spoken simultaneously were indicated typographically, through the use of 'acolades', Barzun conceived of simultaneity as something that could only be realized through the oral performance of the poem, and his theory thus contrasts strongly with that of Apollinaire – for whom, as we shall see shortly, simultaneity was created on the page, through the pictorial arrangement of text. Meanwhile, as Boccioni's 1913 article

² On the circumstances of the work's publication and the publicity materials announcing it as 'le premier livre simultané', see Antoine Sidoti, *Genèse et dossier d'une polémique: 'La Prose du Transsibérien et de la Petite Jehanne de France'. Blaise Cendrars - Sonia Delaunay* (Paris: Lettres Modernes, 1987), pp. 32-38.

³ Pär Bergman, 'Modernolatria' et 'Simultaneità': *Recherches sur deux tendances dans l'avant-garde littéraire en Italie et en France à la veille de la première guerre mondiale* (Uppsala: Svenska Bokförlaget/ Bonniers, 1962); on Cendrars' role in debates surrounding simultaneity, see Sidoti, *Genèse et dossier d'une polémique*, p. 46ff, and Susan Taylor-Horrex, 'Cendrars, Delaunay et le simultanéisme: évolution de l'esthétique simultanéiste', *Cahiers Blaise Cendrars*, no. 3 ('L'Encrier de Cendrars'), ed. by Jean-Carlo Flückiger (Neuchâtel: Éditions de la Baconnière, 1989), 209-17 (which also provides a very different account of the nature of Cendrars' 'simultanisme').

⁴ Henri-Martin Barzun, 'Voix, rythmes et chants simultanés: Esthétique de la poésie dramatique', *Poème et drame*, 4 (May 1913), 5-50.

'Simultanéité futuriste' reveals, the term carried a whole host of associations for the Futurist movement: in poetry it denoted the effects attained through the use of *mots en liberté*, while in the visual arts it might refer to 'la synthèse de ce dont on se souvient et de ce que l'on voit', to the interpenetration of objects and surrounding space, or to the representation of movement and temporal flow; it could also be taken more generally as a byword for 'la nouvelle sensibilité futuriste (machinisme moderne, télégraphie, rapidité simultanée de communications, nouveau sens du tourisme, nouveau sens des sports, électricité et vie nocturne, intensité simultanée des affaires).'⁵ In this context, it is hardly surprising that critics were baffled by the term 'livre simultané', and accused Cendrars and Delaunay of wilful obscurity.⁶ The 'prospectus' announcing *La Prose du Transsibérien* as 'le premier livre simultané' was circulated before the work itself was published in late 1913, and without having seen the work, critics had no way of telling which of these potential meanings of 'simultané' – if any – was applicable. Cendrars' letters to the press did little to resolve the confusion, often skirting the issue completely (as in his lyrical article for *Der Sturm* of November 1913),⁷ or deliberately accentuating the multiple possible interpretations of the term. In a letter to *Gil Blas*, for example, rather than fixing the sense of 'livre simultané', he playfully introduces another possible meaning: 'Ce livre n'est pas une invention, mais une représentation simultanée. Ce livre est déjà paru et est *exposé simultanément* à Londres, à Berlin, et le sera prochainement à Paris.'⁸

One critic who seemed to have arrived at an authoritative understanding of Cendrars' and Delaunay's 'livre simultané' was Guillaume Apollinaire. In his article 'Simultanisme-librettisme', published in the summer of 1914, Apollinaire confidently pronounced *La Prose du Transsibérien* to be closely related to his own experiments in poetic simultaneity:

C'est ainsi que si on a tenté (*L'Enchanteur pourrissant*, 'Vendémiaire', 'Les Fenêtres', etc) d'habituer l'esprit à concevoir un poème simultanément comme une scène de la vie, Blaise Cendrars et Mme

⁵ Umberto Boccioni, 'Simultanéité futuriste', *Der Sturm*, 4.190-91 (December 1913), 151.

⁶ The authors were branded 'fumistes' in *Paris-Journal*, 17 October 1913.

⁷ Blaise Cendrars, 'La Prose du Transsibérien et de la Petite Jehanne de France', *Der Sturm*, 4.184-85 (November 1913), 127.

⁸ Letter of 12 October 1913, reproduced in Blaise Cendrars, *Inédits secrets*, ed. by Miriam Cendrars (Paris: Club Français du Livre, 1969), p. 363 (my emphasis).

Delaunay-Terck ont fait une première tentative de simultanéité écrite où des contrastes de couleurs habitaient l'œil à lire d'un seul regard l'ensemble d'un poème, comme un chef d'orchestre lit d'un seul coup les notes superposées dans la partition, comme on voit d'un seul coup les éléments plastiques et imprimés d'une affiche.⁹

Apollinaire had attempted, in poems such as 'Les Fenêtres', to encourage the reader to treat the poem as representing not a linear temporal flow of events, but rather a number of elements occurring at the same time, within the space of the poem. The poem's message would thus be conceived as akin to a picture, or indeed to 'une scène de la vie'. Subsequently, in his first calligrammes or visual poems, Apollinaire had experimented with typography and layout so as to encourage the reader not only to conceive of the poetic message as simultaneous, but to take in the whole of the poem simultaneously (to 'lire d'un seul regard l'ensemble d'un poème'), perceiving it in terms of its global layout rather than simply taking in one word at a time.¹⁰ This was an attempt to distance poetic experience from a serial or linear model of reading, and to bring it closer to the simultaneity, or the global awareness, involved in picture perception.

Apollinaire sees *La Prose du Transsibérien* as participating in these same concerns: Cendrars' and Delaunay's work is 'une première tentative de simultanéité écrite', an experiment in poetic simultaneity realized through the printed form of the poem, much like his own calligrammes. Having suggested that reading a poem might be rather like looking at 'une scène de la vie', Apollinaire goes on to offer two further perceptual models for the reader's experience of *La Prose du Transsibérien*, both of which also incorporate the idea that the reader must attend to multiple elements simultaneously. On the one hand, reading *La Prose du Transsibérien* might be like reading a musical score, a task in which it is necessary to attend to multiple elements in parallel; on the other hand, Apollinaire compares Cendrars' and Delaunay's work to poster art, implying not only that the reader may direct his attention to multiple lines of text simultaneously, but that the

⁹ Guillaume Apollinaire, 'Simultanisme-librettisme', *Œuvres en prose complètes*, ed. by Michel Décaudin and Pierre Caizergues, 3 vols (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1977-93), II, 976.

¹⁰ As Willard Bohn remarks, Apollinaire's focus shifted 'from the mind to the eye, from simultaneous *conception* to simultaneous *perception*' (*The Aesthetics of Visual Poetry, 1914-1928* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 18).

reader's attention may span across visual and verbal elements: the reader may 'voir d'un seul coup les éléments plastiques et imprimés d'une affiche.' Apollinaire's point is that when we view a poster, reading and viewing are not distinct processes partitioned off from one another; we are able to attend to and interpret both text and image at the same time. Likewise, in Apollinaire's view, *La Prose du Transsibérien* is simultaneously visual and verbal, in the sense that it requires the processes of reading and viewing to be merged.

One must bear in mind, in considering Apollinaire's interpretation of *La Prose du Transsibérien*, that 'Simultanisme-librettisme' was written in the context of an ongoing spat with Barzun over the nature and intellectual ownership of poetic simultaneity, and that this may partially motivate his reading. In seeking allies against Barzun, it may be that Apollinaire deliberately plays down any differences between his calligrammes and *La Prose du Transsibérien*, in order to bring it into line with his own theoretical concerns. Indeed, one might immediately raise the objection that *La Prose du Transsibérien* cannot be 'simultané' in quite the way that Apollinaire thinks it is: certainly, the single-page format of the 'livre simultané' makes the whole of the poem *available* to the eye at once, and we can perceive Cendrars' coloured text as an element within a larger pictorial composition, but we cannot actually *read* the entire poem 'd'un seul regard'. To do that, we need to look at one word at a time, in a particular order. By the same token, however, it is equally unclear whether this kind of 'simultaneous' reading would be feasible for the calligrammes; and one might also add that, even if 'Simultanisme-librettisme' does argue for a non-linear, more pictorial form of reading, Apollinaire probably did not wish to suggest that we could literally 'lire d'un seul regard l'ensemble d'un poème'.¹¹

Apollinaire's reading of *La Prose du Transsibérien* in terms of a visual-verbal simultaneity that merges text and image, reading and viewing, and the implication that it is fundamentally similar to his own calligrammes in this respect, are nevertheless not entirely mistaken. Cendrars and Delaunay's setting of poem and painting in a parallel, column-like arrangement contains an implicit challenge to the reader to direct his attention to both simultaneously, or at the very least to look for connections between the two. *La Prose du Transsibérien* also shares

¹¹ The question of how readers approach visual poems perceptually, and in particular how they integrate attention to global spatial arrangement with attention to local word forms, is beyond the scope of the present article, but is one that I will be addressing in future publications, with reference to recent research into the psychology of reading and picture perception.

with the calligrammes a mobilization of the expressive resources of typography, or an attempt to make the visual forms of the printed word intervene at the level of verbal meanings, the varied effects of which will be examined shortly. Despite these affinities, however, the theory of simultaneity underlying Cendrars and Delaunay's collaboration is ultimately quite different from the one proposed by Apollinaire in 'Simultanisme-librettisme' – a fact that he implicitly acknowledges when he refers to it later on in the article as 'le poème en couleurs contrastées simultanément de Blaise Cendrars et Mme Delaunay-Terck'.¹² Simultaneity, for Cendrars and Delaunay, is all about contrast, and specifically colour contrast. In another letter to *Gil Blas*, Cendrars gives a crucial clue to nature of the work's simultaneity, indicating that as he understood it, the term 'simultané' did not have its roots in literary theory (and especially not in the theory disseminated by Barzun), but rather in painterly technique, specifically the technique shared by Sonia Delaunay and her husband Robert: 'Le *simultanisme* annoncé n'est pas "la profondeur psychologique" de Barzun, il est purement pictural comme dans les tableaux de M. Robert Delaunay. Il est représentatif.'¹³

It is hence necessary to relate *La Prose du Transsibérien* to Robert Delaunay's pictorial technique, as put into practice in his works from 1912 onwards. This technique was derived directly from his reading of Michel-Eugène Chevreul's theory of simultaneous colour contrasts, elaborated in his 1839 treatise *De la Loi du contraste simultané des couleurs*. Originally a chemist, Chevreul had been employed by the Gobelins tapestry works to find a way of producing colours as vivid and as pure as possible. He found that by juxtaposing complementary colours (that is, maximally contrasting colours, situated opposite one another on the colour circle), placing them in relationships of what he called simultaneous contrast, they would appear to be more vivid to the spectator.¹⁴ Sonia and Robert Delaunay's shared aesthetic takes this idea as its point of departure, investigating the ways in which contrasting colours modify one another and interact. Robert Delaunay emphasizes in his writings that for himself and his wife the meaning of 'simultané' is unconnected to its etymological meaning; it has nothing to do with 'all-at-onceness' or opposition to temporal succession but is

¹² Apollinaire, *Œuvres en prose complètes*, II, 978.

¹³ Letter of 12 October 1913, *Inédits secrets*, p. 363; neither of Cendrars' letters to *Gil Blas* (see n. 8) were printed in full.

¹⁴ Michel-Eugène Chevreul, *De la Loi du contraste simultané des couleurs et de l'assortissement des objets colorés considérés d'après cette loi* (Paris: Léonce Laget, 1969), esp. § 8.

a technical term denoting the use of colour contrast in the visual arts.¹⁵ Accordingly, Robert Delaunay conceived of literary simultaneity as practised by Cendrars (with whom the painter couple were close friends and formed a kind of creative triad in the pre-war years) as characterized by the use of contrast:

Le simultanisme en littérature ne s'exprime pas tel que l'a conçu Barzun et ses imitateurs, par des voix (des masses) parallèles ou divergentes, accordantes ou discordantes, qui parlent ensemble dans le temps. Cette conception n'est pas nouvelle, elle se pratique dans tous les opéras et surtout dans le chœur de la tragédie grecque. Ceci n'est plus du simultanisme mais du contrepoint littéraire.

Le simultanisme littéraire peut être donné par l'emploi des contrastes de mots.

Transsibérien – Jehanne de France est un contraste simple (contraste continu qui seul ne peut donner la profondeur forme vivante).

Transsibérien – Jehanne de France laisse la latitude [à] la sensibilité de substituer un ou plusieurs mots, un mouvement de mots, ce qui forme la forme, la vie du poème, le simultanisme.¹⁶

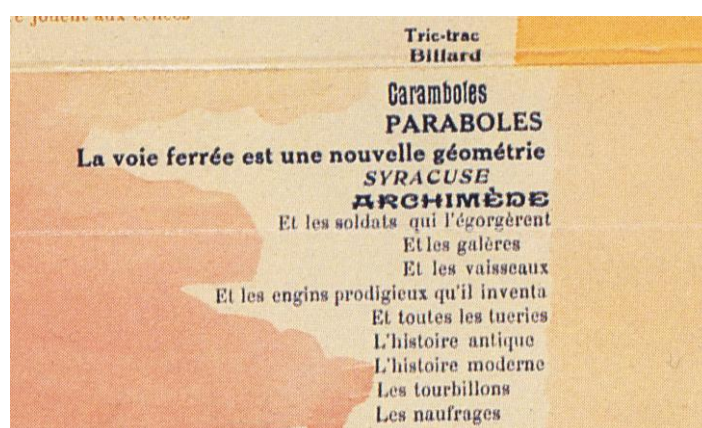
As Robert Delaunay conceives of it, Cendrars' poetic simultanism is distinct from the polyhymnic, 'librettist' ambitions of Barzun (like many other contemporary commentators, he compares the latter's technique to that of the composers of 'livrets d'opéra' who place two or more sung lines in counterpoint).¹⁷ For Delaunay, the principal feature of Cendrars' poem, as a truly simultanist work, is contrast, and he cites as an example of this the opposition of 'Transsibérien' and 'Jehanne de France' in the title of Cendrars' poem, where the modernity of the former clashes with the archaic spelling of 'Jehanne', and its

¹⁵ Robert Delaunay, *Du Cubisme à l'art abstrait*, ed. by Pierre Francastel (Paris: SEVPEN, 1957), pp. 110 and 112.

¹⁶ Delaunay, *Du Cubisme à l'art abstrait*, p. 112.

¹⁷ See, for example, Henri Hertz, 'La Revanche du livret d'opéra', *Paris-Journal*, 11 December 1913; Nicolas Beauduin, 'Un Renouveau de l'École de Scribe, ou l'ère du livret d'opéra', *Paris-Journal*, 5 December 1913; Cendrars, *Inédits secrets*, p. 367. Similarly, in Apollinaire's 'Simultanisme-librettisme', true poetic simultanism as realized through typographic innovation is opposed to mere 'librettisme', that is to the use of 'accolades' to indicate lines that should be read simultaneously.

traditional, even nationalistic association with Joan of Arc. In a technique that bears affinities with Marinetti's *mots en liberté*, in which apparently unconnected nouns are brought together in ever more surprising relations of analogy, Cendrars delivers a jumble of heterogeneous sensations to the reader, juxtaposing ancient and modern, moving abruptly between different timeframes and locations, and leaving it up to the reader to construct connections between his contrasting images. The following passage provides an example of this:



(l. 320-35; fig. 2)

Of course, the use of varying typefaces and sizes, and the disjointed justification of the text, intersect with Cendrars' verbal contrasts in this passage, visually underlining the verbal ruptures. It is apparent from Robert Delaunay's comments, however, that for him the poem's 'simultanisme' has nothing to do with its visual presentation; the contrasts to which he refers are purely verbal, not visual. Applying this to the work as a whole, the label 'livre simultané' may be taken to mean that both the poem and the painting that make up the 'livre' are themselves 'simultané' (in that they are both characterized by contrast), but it does not seem to indicate any kind of attempt to bring writing into closer contact with visual representation. Indeed, given that simultaneity implies contrast, Cendrars and Delaunay's intention may not have been to merge poetry and painting but instead to place them in opposition to one another, to highlight their essential difference.

If this is the theory that informed the composition of *La Prose du Transsibérien*, then it appears to be at odds with other contemporaneous theories of simultaneity, and especially with the theory that informed Apollinaire's visual poetry. By calling their work 'le premier livre simultané', Blaise Cendrars and Sonia Delaunay are

affirming that it is made up of two contrasting modes of expression, as diametrically opposite as complementary colours on Chevreul's colour circle. However, Cendrars' own reflections on the theory of simultaneous contrast in painting reveal a concept of contrast much more nuanced than that presented by Robert Delaunay in his writings. In a letter to the Delaunays written in early 1914, Cendrars insisted that contrast does not mean absolute opposition, but bespeaks hidden affinities and kinships:

Une couleur n'est pas une couleur en soi. Elle n'est couleur qu'en contraste avec une ou plusieurs autres couleurs. Un bleu n'est bleu qu'en contraste avec un rouge, un vert, un orangé, un gris.

Le contraste n'est pas un noir et blanc, un contraire, une dissemblance. Le contraste est une ressemblance. On voyage pour connaître, reconnaître les gens, les choses et les animaux. Pour vivre avec. On s'approche, on ne s'en éloigne pas. C'est dans ce que les hommes ont de plus commun qu'ils se différencient le plus. Les deux sexes font contraste. Le contraste est amour. C'est par contraste que les astres et les cœurs gravitent.¹⁸

Thus, even if text and image are contrasting elements within the 'livre simultané', this is not to say that they are completely distinct, opposed, and to be treated separately by the reader. For Cendrars, elements in contrast are also attracted to one another, like magnetic opposites, or indeed like the two sexes; hence, poem and painting contrast but are also intimately linked, even interdependent. The two modes of expression interact and modify each other, just as according to Chevreul's theory complementary colours modify each other. In fact, it is only when they stand in such relationships of contrast that the full vividness of colours is revealed (hence the seemingly paradoxical term 'complementary colours', denoting colours which contrast as strongly as possible and yet, in a sense, also complement or complete each other). Just as a red is only really red when it enters into relationships of contrast with other colours, the essence of poetry may only be revealed

¹⁸ Cendrars to Sonia and Robert Delaunay, January 1914, *Inédits secrets*, p. 373. Parts of this letter were reproduced in a 1919 article on Delaunay: see 'Modernités', in Blaise Cendrars, *Tout autour d'aujourd'hui*, ed. by Claude Leroy, 15 vols (Paris: Denoël, 2001-06), XI, 68-70.

through contact with different modes of expression – and the same is true of painting.

With this last point in mind, it is interesting to note that in the letter just cited Cendrars relates the concept of contrast, which informs the visual-verbal encounter in *La Prose du Transsibérien*, to travel and to the relationship of self and other. The poem is, after all, one in which the young poet-narrator sets out on a journey of discovery, in search not just of new, unknown people and spaces, but of himself, and his identity as poet. The travelling self may learn from those it encounters – it may even absorb some of their characteristics – but it also emerges from the encounter with the foreign other with a firmer sense of its own identity, reinforced through knowledge of what it is not. As we shall see in the discussion to come, one of the ‘others’ through which the poet of *La Prose du Transsibérien* seeks to discover his poetic identity is, in fact, painting. The formal encounter between visual and verbal modes of expression in *La Prose du Transsibérien* mirrors this theme of Cendrars’ text: while the dialogue between the two reveals their affinities, this is accompanied by a sense of their irreducible difference.

Having arrived at an understanding of the theory of simultaneity underlying the creation of ‘le premier livre simultané’, we will now consider how Cendrars and Delaunay put that theory into practice, beginning with an examination of the relationship between the visual and verbal aspects of Cendrars’ poem – that is, the way in which the visual form of the poem, as it was printed in this 1913 edition, interacts with its meanings. This interaction of meaning and *mise en page* has seldom received a sustained critical analysis: Pierre Caizergues and Marjorie Perloff are amongst the few scholars to devote much attention to the poem’s visual aspect, but even Caizergues neglects the role of colour, tending to treat the 1957 Seghers edition, published in black and white although attempting to recreate the original typographical variations, as ‘the poem’.¹⁹ This critical neglect is no doubt at least partly due to the inaccessibility of extant copies: although Cendrars and Delaunay had planned an edition of 150 copies, whose cumulative

¹⁹ Pierre Caizergues, ‘Blaise Cendrars, poète du voyage et voyageur de l’écriture’, in *Blaise Cendrars 20 ans après*, ed. by Claude Leroy (Paris: Klincksieck, 1983), pp. 57-74; Marjorie Perloff, *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant-Guerre, and the Language of Rupture*, 2nd edn (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2003), pp. 2-43. There is, of course, a growing body of scholarship on typography and its semiotic value, focusing particularly on its exploitation by early-twentieth-century avant-gardes; the most sustained analysis is provided by Johanna Drucker, *The Visible Word: Experimental Typography and Modern Art, 1909-23* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1994).

height would equal that of the Eiffel Tower, far fewer were actually produced, and these are now closely guarded in the rare book departments of libraries and museums.²⁰ The original edition is therefore out of the reach of the greater public, and even the largest available reproductions reduce the text to such a degree that it is rendered illegible. (At the time of writing, however, a new full-size facsimile edition to be produced by Yale University Press, and a high-resolution, zoomable image recently made available on the British Library website, stand to correct this situation.)²¹ Critics may also have overlooked the semiotic role of *mise en page* because the correspondences between verbal meanings and the various aspects of the poem's visual setting tend to be quite loose and mobile, their significance difficult to explicate in concrete terms. This may, however, be seen to follow from Cendrars' and Delaunay's theory of simultaneity: since simultaneity means a dialogue between two modes of expression, and a fundamental premise for that dialogue is difference, the reader should not expect to see a complete collapse of the boundaries between visual and verbal modes of expression, or the kind of close correspondence between visual and verbal meanings that is often found in Apollinaire's calligrammes.²²

'L'homme poursuit noir sur blanc', wrote Mallarmé: however innovative his use of typography and layout in his 1897 visual poem *Un Coup de dés*, he continued to work within the confines of black print on white paper, as did the vast majority of poets who experimented with typography in the early twentieth century.²³ Cendrars' and Delaunay's major innovation in this context is their use of colour – not just of coloured illustration, but of coloured *print*. This innovation had been

²⁰ In her 1971 interview with Antoine Sidoti, Sonia Delaunay claimed that only around 60 copies were completed (Sidoti, *Genèse et dossier d'une polémique*, p. 22). I have worked from the copy of *La Prose du Transsibérien* held in the special collections of the National Art Library in London.

²¹ The largest colour reproductions currently available are given in Monica Strauss, 'The First Simultaneous Book', *Fine Print*, 13.3 (1987), 139-40; and Arthur A. Cohen, *Sonia Delaunay* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1975), pp. 24-26. The Yale University Press facsimile, edited by Timothy Young, is due to be published in August 2008; the British Library copy may be consulted at <http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/features/breakingtherules/btrtranssiberienz.html> [accessed 4 June 2008].

²² This close correspondence between visual and verbal aspects of the calligrammes has resulted in them being branded 'tautological', or redundant: see Michel Foucault, *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1973), p. 26. This is a charge that *La Prose du Transsibérien* clearly avoids.

²³ Stéphane Mallarmé, 'L'Action restreinte', *Œuvres Complètes*, ed. by Bertrand Marchal, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1998-2003), II, 215.

heralded by Marinetti's manifesto 'Imagination sans fils et les mots en liberté', but Cendrars and Delaunay appear to have been the first to put the idea into practice.²⁴ One possible motivation for using coloured print may have been that the authors wished the text to be seen as part of the larger-scale coloured composition of the work, so that the colours of the printed text might interact with Delaunay's stencilled colours; another may have been to give a visual corollary to the verbal evocations of colour that are prominent throughout *La Prose du Transsibérien*. For instance, a shawl is 'bariolé/ Comme ma vie' (l. 101-102), and Cendrars evokes colourful poster art, highlighting the work's own relationship to this art form, in the line, 'Et voici des affiches, du rouge du vert multicolores comme mon passé bref du jaune' – and here the importance of the colours in the poet's experience is signalled by their appearance in bold type (l. 415). The poet's imaginary journey to Mexico with Jeanne, framed as a means of escape from the horrors of the 'real' journey on the Trans-Siberian, is also highly coloured:

Viens au Mexique!
 Sur ses hauts plateaux les tulipiers fleurissent
 Les lianes tentaculaires sont la chevelure du soleil
 On dirait la palette et les pinceaux d'un peintre
 Des couleurs étourdissantes comme des gongs
 Rousseau y a été
 Il y a ébloui sa vie.

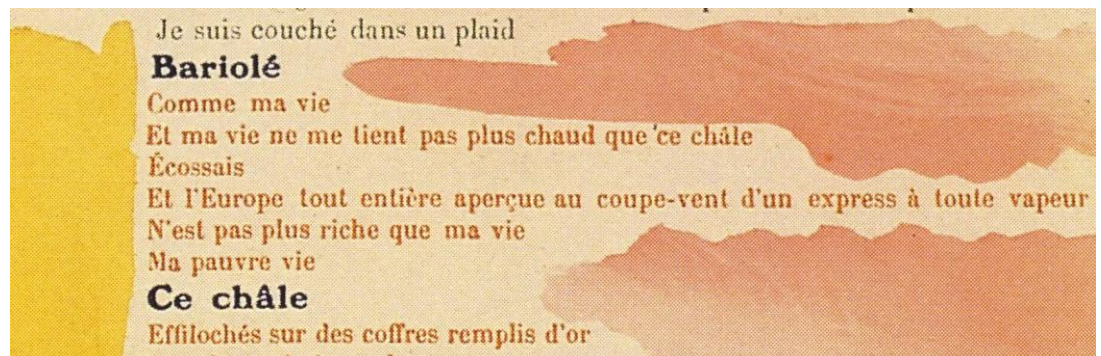
(l. 255-61)

Cendrars' positioning of his own verbal evocation of colour in relation to painting (in the case of this passage, the exotic paintings of Henri Rousseau) is further brought out in the line, 'Si j'étais peintre je déverserais beaucoup de rouge, beaucoup de jaune sur la fin de ce voyage' (l. 360). This affirmation is important because it shows the

²⁴ Marinetti's manifesto, which recommended the use of varied colours and typefaces, was published in French in June 1913 (reproduced in *Futurisme: Manifestes, Proclamations, Documents*, ed. by Giovanni Lista (Lausanne: L'Âge d'Homme, 1973), pp. 142-47). Lista suggests on the basis of this that Cendrars and Delaunay were inspired by Marinetti, but only the precedence of Marinetti's manifesto provides any support for this; see 'Entre Dynamis et physis, ou les mots en liberté du futurisme', in *Poésure et peinture*, exh. cat (Marseille and Paris: Musées de Marseille/ Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1993), pp. 46-67 (pp. 50 and 52n).

extent of Cendrars' tendency towards the visual, and his desire to capture visual experience, and the colours of that experience in particular. It expresses his wish that he could render the subjective, qualitative properties of colour vision in all their immediacy, and his regret that colour words are not sufficient to do this: the mere mention of 'rouge' and 'jaune' is not equivalent to the use of those colours in a visual representation, and reading a colour name is a poor substitute for perceiving the colour itself. Cendrars clearly envies the painter's resources: in 'Journal', in *Dix-neuf poèmes élastiques*, he confessed, 'J'ai même voulu devenir peintre'.²⁵ His response to the arbitrariness of colour names in *La Prose du Transsibérien* is to adapt these resources to his own poetic practice, literally colouring the text and making our sensory experience, rather than simply our imaginative response to the poem, coloured.

There are often rough correspondences between colours evoked by the text, and the colours in which they are printed, as in this passage, which evokes the aforementioned shawl:



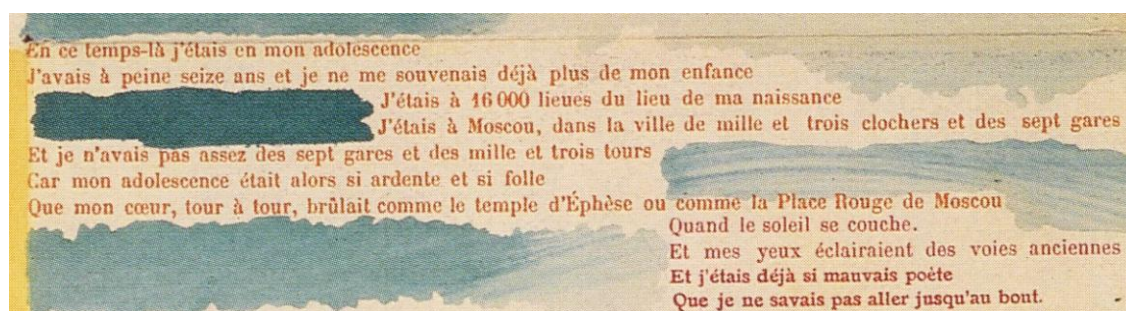
(l. 100-109; fig. 3)

The extra emphasis on 'Bariolé' and 'Ce châle' here, created through the sudden, and brief appearance of indigo ink as well as through the larger, bold type in which these lines are set, brings the idea of a mix of

²⁵ Cendrars did in fact try his hand at painting: see Miriam Cendrars, 'J'ai même voulu devenir peintre', in *Cendrars et les arts*, ed. by Maria Teresa de Freitas, Claude Leroy and Edmond Nogacki (Valenciennes: Presses universitaires de Valenciennes, 2002), pp. 11-19.

bright colours to the forefront of the reader's mind. The swift movement between different coloured inks in this passage evokes not just the vividly contrasting colours of the shawl, but also the rapid succession of different views suggested by the line 'Et l'Europe toute entière aperçue au coupe-vent d'un express à toute vapeur', the shifts in colour corresponding to the fleeting views of different landscapes experienced by the poet as he looks through the window of the Trans-Siberian train.

Another instance where a shift in the colour of the print reinforces the poem's verbal imagery occurs in the opening sequence of the poem, where we move from orange to red print:



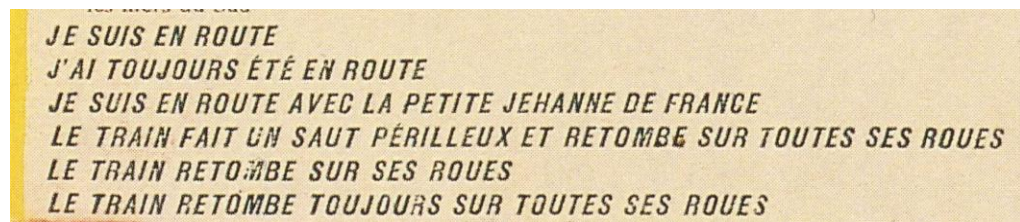
(l. 1-11; fig. 4)

The shift to red print here is clearly prompted by the verbal mention of 'la place Rouge de Moscou', in the preceding line; and visually this section of the poem might also suggest the setting sun, evoked just after the colour change with 'le soleil se couche'. These colours also tie in with the images of fire occurring in this passage and reappearing throughout the poem, and which are closely associated with the poet's assumed identity (the pen name 'Blaise Cendrars' obviously bringing to mind 'braise' and 'cendres', as well as 'art').

However, this kind of loose correspondence between verbal imagery and the colour of the print is by no means a general practice, and just as often Cendrars flouts the reader's expectation for these correspondences by refusing to take up cues in the poem. For example, the evocation of 'des couleurs étourdissantes comme des gongs' (l. 259) is not itself brightly coloured, and the colours we would expect to see accompanying the line, 'Si j'étais peintre je déverserais beaucoup de rouge, beaucoup de jaune sur la fin de ce voyage' (l. 360) are replaced by a green colour for the print, and there is a notable lack of red or yellow in the surrounding blocks of colour. The reason for this is undoubtedly that Cendrars is keen to avoid making the

colour-correspondences facile or over-regular, such that the colour variations hold no surprises for the reader: in accordance with the theory of simultaneity, the aim is to create a dialogue between visual and verbal meanings, rather than to create consistent effects of correspondence or mirroring. Furthermore, in this particular instance, Cendrars' refusal of an all-too-easy correspondence ultimately reinforces his verbal message: as much as he may be tempted by painting, he is not a painter, and poetry is distinct from visual representation. The very disparity between the colours that he verbally evokes, and those that the reader sees, is a reminder of the distance between the two art forms.

There are also instances where typography – the shape and size of the printed letters themselves – is used to echo verbal meanings, as in this passage:

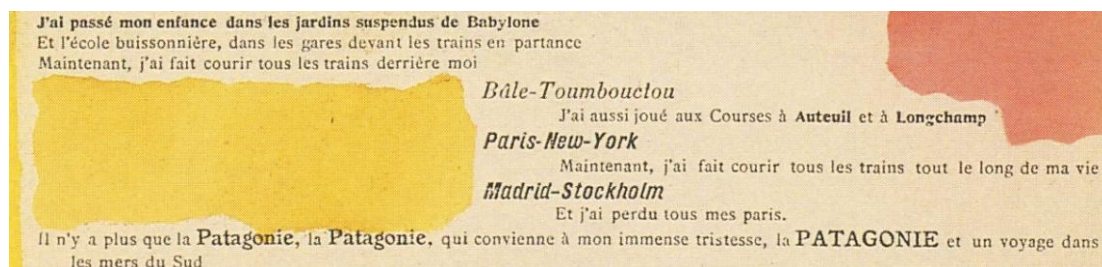


(l. 156-61; fig. 5)

This passage is printed in lineal or sans serif capitals, a form which connotes modernity (as opposed to non-lineal forms, which are generally more traditional in flavour).²⁶ The slanting italic form of the characters also seems to suggest the speed of the moving train. One might also claim that the regular 'blocks' formed by the capital letters make each line visually resemble a train moving at speed towards its destination, while the jagged profile of the free verse lines might correspond to the Trans-Siberian's repeated 'saut périlleux' as it is evoked in this sequence. The single line 'Tomsk Tchéliabinsk Kainsk Obi Taichet Verkné-Oudinsk Kourgane Samara Pensa-Touloune' (l. 205) achieves a similar effect: standing out from the surrounding lines by its use of a bold lineal typeface, the italic slant of the words again connotes speed, giving the impression that the place names mentioned are railway signs glimpsed through the train window. The typographical choices relating to the place names mentioned in the

²⁶ On this basic opposition, and on the connotations of typographical fonts more generally, see Gérard Blanchard, *Pour une sémiologie de la typographie* (Andenne: Remy Magermans, 1979), n.p.

following passage, meanwhile, do not function to reinforce verbal meaning in such a direct way, instead establishing visual links between different elements within the linear sequence of text:



(l. 148-55; fig. 6)

In this passage, place names are brought to the forefront visually, even within the line. The visual link between the places mentioned prompts us to contemplate them in direct relation to one another, setting aside the physical distances that separate them, and which are no obstacle within Cendrars' ruptured temporal and spatial frameworks. The disruption of the narrative flow that is produced by the insertion of the pairs of place names ('Bâle-Toumbouctou', 'Paris-New York', 'Madrid-Stockholm', representing trajectories that ostensibly have little to do with the central narrative event, the journey on the Trans-Siberian) is emphasized by their typography and alignment, which separate them off from the other lines in the sequence.

This kind of visual linking effect achieved through typography is also present elsewhere in the text, although the words or passages linked may be some distance apart. For instance, towards the beginning of the poem, 'Un vieux moine me lisait la légende de Novgorode' (l. 16) is written in a small lineal character, whose modernity perhaps contrasts with the line's verbal content. Line 49 ('Un vieux moine chantait la légende de Novgorode') repeats the same motifs, and is printed in the same typeface as the earlier passage. Clearly, Cendrars is setting up a kind of visual link between the two lines, but given that they are some distance apart (in both spatial and temporal terms), and that the reader could not possibly perceive both lines simultaneously, it is perhaps more appropriate to consider the effect along the lines of an activated memory association: coming to the second mention of the 'vieux moine', the reader's memory is jogged by the repetition of the same typeface, and the verbal repetition is thus highlighted. As Pierre Caizergues has pointed out, the same typeface is used only once more, much further on in the poem, with 'Comme dit Guillaume Apollinaire'

(l. 349), the visual association with the ‘vieux moine’ from earlier in the poem providing an implicit criticism of Cendrars’ poetic mentor and rival, in ‘une sorte d’écho peut-être ironique’.²⁷

Visual repetitions such as these function alongside verbal repetitions, making the poem move back on itself in a kind of cyclical pattern, and disrupting any semblance of linear temporal flow. Cendrars’ verbal repetitions are not always reinforced through typographical indications, however: perhaps because the verbal repetition is already too prominent to require visual reinforcement, Jeanne’s repeated question, ‘Dis, Blaise, sommes-nous bien loin de Montmartre?’, is printed in different typefaces for all six of its occurrences. One effect of these typographical variations is to differentiate Jeanne’s utterances from one another, to subtly suggest differences in tone of voice and gesture. We might extend this claim to apply to Cendrars’ own narrative voice: the unified lyrical ‘je’ is fractured as variations in colour and typography allow it to be seen (literally) under many different guises, in a technique that feeds into Cendrars’ treatment of the formation of poetic identity.²⁸

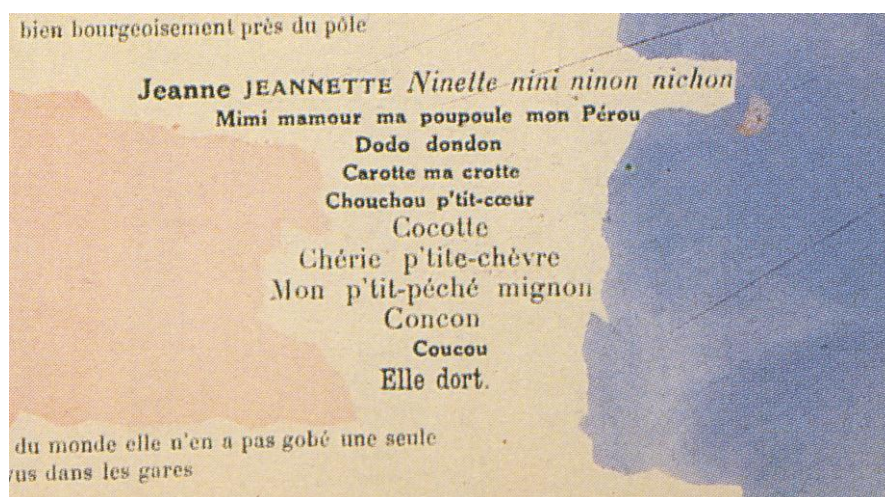
It is, of course, difficult to flesh out this sort of claim about the meaning of typography in *La Prose du Transsibérien* in concrete terms: what kind of tone is brought to mind by non-linear italics, and how exactly does this compare to the connotations of square, bold lineals? The difficulty we have in unpacking the connotations of typography should not, however, be taken to mean that it has no semiotic value, that it is purely decorative, or that Cendrars and Delaunay’s typographical experiments were motivated by a simple desire to appear ‘avant-garde’.²⁹ Above all, typographical variations serve to rupture the poem at a visual level, working alongside Cendrars’ verbal contrasts to undermine the unity of the poem as emanating from a stable poetic subject, and its continuity as a representation of a journey through space and time. Casting an initial glance over the poem, the reader sees that there are no clearly marked stanza breaks, and that it looks very much like a continuous column of text – which, like the map of the

²⁷ Caizergues, ‘Blaise Cendrars, poète du voyage et voyageur de l’écriture’, p. 68.

²⁸ This particular aspect of *La Prose du Transsibérien* distances it from another coloured text of the same period, Sébastien Voirol’s *Sacre du printemps* (c.1914), which used ink colour to indicate the identity of the character pronouncing the words in a dialogue, rather than to fracture the identity of the poetic voice.

²⁹ While Cendrars had primary responsibility for the poem’s typography (‘Pro domo. Comment j’ai écrit *Moravagine*’, *Tout autour d’aujourd’hui*, VII, 228), one may assume that Delaunay had some input on this: she claimed that the idea for the coloured print was hers (see Sidoti, *Genèse et dossier d’une polémique*, p. 18).

Trans-Siberian route placed above the poem, might visually represent the uninterrupted line of the poet's trajectory. This column is, however, fractured and divided through shifts in the colour, the typeface and the alignment of the text, all of which disrupt the continuous flow of the poem and reinforce its verbal disjunctions. The disruptive effect of typographical changes is often quite subtle, as in the opening lines of the poem (fig. 4), where the shift from orange to red print, and the accompanying indentation of the text, visually point towards a shift in sense, or a change in direction in the narrative, that simply is not there in the words themselves. As such, these typographic changes provide a form of visual punctuation that contradicts the running-on of sense, undermining verbal continuity. Similar effects are achieved in the following passage, which gains its unity from the sound associations that flow on from one word to the next:



(l. 280-90, fig. 7)

Typographical variations break up the passage, and even fracture the unity of the individual verse line, highlighting the logical discontinuity of the 'images associations' (l. 337) presented here, and once again suggesting modulations of tone.

Subsequent editions of Cendrars' poem, in which the text is divided into stanzas and the typography standardized, fail to capture the complex visual-verbal rhythms, and the delicate balance between continuity and rupture, produced in the original edition.³⁰ These later

³⁰ Cendrars' poem was first reprinted in the collection *Du Monde entier* (Paris: Nouvelle Revue Française, 1919); the 1957 Seghers edition reproduces the original

editions also do not include Delaunay's stencilled 'couleurs simultanées', and we shall now consider the interaction between poem and painting within *La Prose du Transsibérien*, showing that this interaction generates layers of meaning that are absent from later, visually impoverished editions of Cendrars' text. As Sonia Delaunay herself described the painting, it is a 'représentation du voyage dans un style de pures formes, entre la vision initiale de Moscou et celle finale de Paris (rappel de la 'Roue' et de la 'Tour'). Non pas des *images*, des objets au sens traditionnel, mais des couleurs, des *lignes*, des *sensations*, des *sentiments*. *De l'inspiration pure*.'³¹ The painting might be seen as an 'illustration' of the poem to the extent that it is inspired by Cendrars' text, and attempts a representation of the journey related in the poem. Despite this, the painting departs from strict models of illustration in that it does not figure many of the text's motifs; indeed, it attempts to give a schematic visual form only to the domes of Moscow seen by the poet at the beginning of the journey, and to the tower and wheel evoked in relation to the journey's end. In between, poem and painting seem to go their separate ways, with Delaunay refusing figuration in favour of abstract forms intended to evoke the poet's journey in a looser, more suggestive way.

Once again, any expectation of a close correspondence between visual and verbal meanings is frustrated. The painting is not there simply to 'illustrate' the poem – or to fix its sense in visual form – but rather to contrast with the poem, and thereby serve as a kind of sounding-board for the poet's reflection on the relationship between visual and verbal modes of expression. We considered earlier on Cendrars' yearning for the raw pigments that are the currency of the painter – the upshot of which is that his own words are seen as regrettably lacking when it comes to the representation of visual experience in all its colourful intensity. The poet's feeling of inadequacy, repeatedly expressed in lines such as, 'Pourtant, j'étais fort mauvais poète./ Je ne savais pas aller jusqu'au bout' (l. 24-25), is consistently placed in relation to the perceived successes of painting. For example, having finished a chain of rapidly shifting images with the somewhat ironic complaint that these are 'Autant d'images associations que je ne peux pas développer dans mes vers' (l. 337), the poet then goes on to reason: 'Comme mon ami Chagall je pourrais faire une série de tableaux déments/ Mais je n'ai pas pris de notes en voyage' (l.

typography, but not the coloured print, and adopts a traditional codex format, thus spreading the poem over several pages.

³¹ Interview with Sidoti, *Genèse et dossier d'une polémique*, p. 27 (original emphasis).

344-45), and shortly after, ‘Si j’étais peintre je déverserais beaucoup de rouge, beaucoup de jaune sur la fin de ce voyage’ (l. 360). Cendrars’ self-confessed inadequacy as a poet is hence compounded by reminders that painters have other, essentially different means at their disposal – and, by implication, that poetry cannot hope to match the power and immediacy of the painted medium. The presence of Delaunay’s painting next to Cendrars’ poem is a kind of materialization of this comparison. By setting poem and painting on opposite sides of the page, the authors invite us to contemplate them in their difference – this contemplation itself becoming a kind of ‘illustration’ of the thematic concerns of the poem.

This insistence on difference is accompanied by the possibility of meeting-points between poem and painting. This is suggested not only by the way in which each mode of expression invades the territory of the other within the space of the ‘livre simultané’, but also by the ways in which both poem and painting disrupt the spatial-temporal dichotomy that has traditionally divided visual and verbal arts.³² Sonia Delaunay’s painting has an extremely elongated format (it is two metres in length but measures only 18 centimetres across), and resembles a kind of vertical frieze. This format invites a certain kind of viewing, the eye tending to travel downwards, from top to bottom, in a movement that approximates the way in which readers take in the column of text. The painter’s comment, ‘Je m’inspirai du texte pour une harmonie de couleurs qui *se déroulait* parallèlement au poème’, makes it clear that the painting is deliberately temporal, allowing the viewer’s experience to unfold over time.³³ It works as a kind of pictorial narrative, suggesting the poem’s movement from the domes of Moscow to the Eiffel Tower and the ‘Grande Roue’ so inextricably associated with the Parisian landscape to which Cendrars abruptly returns after his Trans-Siberian journey; in doing so, it flouts Lessing’s association of painting with the representation of space, and not time.³⁴ Indeed, this incorporation of a temporal element into painting appears to have been an integral part of Sonia and Robert Delaunay’s ‘simultanist’

³² On this, see also Eric Bonnet, ‘L’Espace-temps chez Blaise Cendrars et Sonia Delaunay: *La Prose du Transsibérien et de la Petite Jehanne de France*’, in *Blaise Cendrars et les arts*, ed. by Maria Teresa de Freitas, Claude Leroy and Edmond Nogacki (Valenciennes: Presses universitaires de Valenciennes, 2002), pp. 89-98.

³³ Sonia Delaunay, *Nous irons jusqu’au soleil* (Paris: Éditions Robert Laffont, 1978), p. 54 (my emphasis).

³⁴ G.E. Lessing, *Laocoon*, trans. by R. Philimore (London: Macmillan and Co., 1874), p. 171: ‘Succession of time is the domain of the poet, as space is the domain of the painter.’

enterprise: the writings of the latter frequently come back to the idea of 'l'introduction du temps dans la structure du tableau', the paradoxically 'statique – et dynamique' quality produced through the use of 'ces phrases colorées vivifiant la surface de la toile de sortes de mesures cadencées, se succédant, se dépassant en des mouvements de masses colorées'.³⁵ This effect of movement produced through colour contrasts, which lead the eye around the painting in a certain direction, is perhaps most visible in the spiralling forms of some of the Delaunays' circular canvases, but the same thing is at work in Sonia Delaunay's painting for *La Prose du Transsibérien* – although in this particular case the movement is deliberately conceived so as to mirror the movement of our eyes down the page as we read Cendrars' poem.

The poem, meanwhile, is undeniably narrative – an account of events unfolding in time – but as we have already seen, the linear continuity of that narrative is undermined at the visual level. Moreover, at the verbal level, the temporal frameworks within which the events of the poem take place are constantly blurred. Cendrars begins the poem in a conventional narrative mode, with the imperfect being used to set the scene in Moscow, shifting into the past historic when the 'action' of the journey begins; but this mode is quickly abandoned in favour of the present tense, which is used indiscriminately to relate the journey on the Trans-Siberian, the moment of narration, and even distant memories predating the journey, with few temporal markers allowing us to distinguish between these timeframes. Thus, 'Et voici mon berceau/ Mon berceau' (l. 143-44) is introduced as very much a part of the 'present' of the journey, memory being experienced just as strongly as immediate sensation. It is only with the next line ('Il était toujours près du piano quand ma mère comme Madame Bovary jouait les sonates de Beethoven', l. 145) that we can separate this memory image from the present of the journey. At other points in the poem different tenses are contrasted, as in the following lines:

Tsitsikar et Kharbine
Je ne vais pas plus loin
C'est la dernière station
Je débarquai à Kharbine comme on venait de mettre le feu
aux bureaux de la Croix Rouge

(l. 408-11)

³⁵ Robert Delaunay, *Du Cubisme à l'art abstrait*, pp. 68, 75 and 81.

The disparity between the present tense of 'Je vais' and the past historic 'Je débarquai', both used to talk about events in the poet's past, is one that the reader can only resolve by considering the events related in a kind of atemporal way, rejecting any attempt to order them in sequence; as Marjorie Perloff puts it, 'all of it is happening *now*, in an ongoing, continuous present.'³⁶ Throughout the poem, disparate and highly contrasting images flow into one another, undisturbed by the constraints of temporal sequence; far from being a smooth, linear narrative of a journey in time and space, the text moves suddenly from the present of narration to the poet's lost childhood, from the wilds of Siberia to the bustle of Paris, as the poet declares, 'Je m'abandonne/ Aux sursauts de ma mémoire' (l. 353-54). Cendrars' mingling of narrative timeframes is furthermore reflected in the poem's juxtaposition of images with ancient and modern associations: 'Et je construirai un hangar pour mon avion avec les os fossiles de mammoth' (l. 275) immediately comes to mind, as does the image of the Eiffel Tower assimilated to the 'Grand Gibet' of Villon's Paris (l. 445), and the 'vieux moine' (l. 16 and 49) whose presence is out of place in a paean to modern travel.

Just as the train sometimes leaves its rails, performing 'un saut périlleux' (l. 159), Cendrars' narrative departs from a continuous temporal flow. Time is not seen as an unbroken line, but perhaps resembles the jagged, discontinuous layout of the poem. The poem's verbal repetitions (reinforced, as we have seen, by typographic repetitions) may also suggest a conception of time as a cycle, or an infernal wheel: 'Et le monde comme l'horloge du quartier juif de Prague tourne éperdument à rebours' (l. 312). Situating Cendrars' text within the work as a whole, it is apparent that *La Prose du Transsibérien* is a work in which poetry and painting strain at the boundaries of their representational domains of space and time respectively, bringing into question the basis of their difference according to Lessing. Thus, while Sonia Delaunay's painting takes on a temporal quality, and in so doing transcends its traditional boundaries and enters the territory of poetry, Cendrars' poem questions Lessing's notion of poetry as an art of time, whose linear sequence of words is apt to capture a linear sequence of events in time; indeed, the poem seems to question whether time is ever experienced, or remembered, as linear

³⁶ See Perloff, *The Futurist Moment*, p. 23, and Clara Orban, 'Words, Images and Simultaneity in *Zang Tumb Tumb* and *Prose du Transsibérien*', *Romance Notes*, 33.1 (1992), 97-105, also takes note of this effect.

at all.³⁷ Moreover, in moving away from a strict temporal ordering of events, Cendrars' poem might perhaps be seen to move closer to the simultaneity, the 'all-at-onceness', of pictorial representation. Indeed, looking back on his career as a writer in 1950, Cendrars declared, 'j'ai surtout voulu supprimer la notion du temps', identifying this tendency as a constant in his work.³⁸ It is important not to go too far with this claim, however: as Eric Robertson notes, 'Cendrars' portrayal of "simultaneous" experience is at this stage still bound to a sequential framework', and it is only with the slightly later *poèmes élastiques* that Cendrars succeeds in creating a poetry that is simultaneous in the sense of representing several elements occurring at once, rather than succeeding one another in time.³⁹ While we may be justified in saying that the disrupted temporality of Cendrars' poem is a first step towards the kind of poetic simultaneity which obliges the reader to put temporal progression to one side, and to 'concevoir le poème comme une scène de la vie', as Apollinaire put it, temporality is never abandoned completely. *La Prose du Transsibérien* questions the idea of a necessary connection between poetry and temporality, and painting and spatiality, as each attempt to cross over onto one another's territory – to meet in the middle, as it were. The fact that both poem and painting overstep their bounds in this manner reveals their affinities and points of contact, but never fully dissolves their opposition as essentially different, contrasting elements within the work.

Cendrars' 'Si j'étais peintre...', and his 'J'ai même voulu devenir peintre', are thus very different from Apollinaire's 'Et moi aussi je suis peintre'.⁴⁰ The latter conceived of the activity of poet and painter as essentially the same, whereas Cendrars was certainly tempted by the expressive resources of painting but ultimately chose poetry, and rather than attempting to merge the two, set out to test the properties and limits of poetic language in relation to this essentially different, 'other' art form. The self is discovered through an encounter with what it is not; the poet defines himself as such through an encounter with an

³⁷ In this respect, the poem might be related to the notion of *durée*, as opposed to quantified time as a constant, in Bergson's *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*, which Cendrars had read (*Inédits secrets*, p. 122).

³⁸ 'Blaise Cendrars vous parle', *Tout autour d'aujourd'hui*, XV, 55.

³⁹ Eric Robertson, 'Painting Windows: Robert Delaunay, Blaise Cendrars, and the Search for Simultaneity', *Modern Language Review*, 90 (1995), 883-896 (p. 893).

⁴⁰ This was the title of a planned 1914 collection of calligrammes, at that time known as 'idéogrammes lyriques'; see the *bulletin de souscription* in *Les Soirées de Paris*, nos. 26-27 (July-August 1914).

alternative art form, whose resources he appropriates in the typography of his poem, and whose affinities with poetry he explores, but whose language remains essentially different from his own. This placing of writing in relation to what it is not, this staging of an encounter between writing and its others – be it painting, music or cinema – is a pattern that is frequently found elsewhere in Cendrars' texts. Yet it is arguably only in Cendrars' and Delaunay's collaboration on *La Prose du Transsibérien* that the poet's textual explorations of this idea find such powerful expression in the visual form of the work.

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