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| Simltaneism (simultanéisme) |
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| Neither a movement, nor a group of loosely connected artists, Simultaneism instead describes a tendency in modernist avant-garde art and literature from roughly 1912 through to the 1920s, primarily but not exclusively in Paris. It is also known as ‘simultanism’ (*simultanisme*) or ‘simultaneity’ (*simultanéité*). Artists such as Robert Delaunay, Sonia Delaunay-Terk, Marc Chagall, and others from the Orphist group, along with writers including Henri-Martin Barzun, Blaise Cendrars, and Gustave Apollinaire were among those who explored and commented on techniques of simultaneity in their work. Simultaneist technique experimented with the concurrent presentation of elements from different places, multiple points-of-view, radically disconnected segments of time, and separate media. Like Futurism and to some extent Cubism, Simultaneism took up elements from and responded to major developments in modernity: technological innovation, large-scale urbanization, mass telecommunication, and scientific discoveries. Perhaps the most famous and recognizably Simultaneist work to exhibit these tendencies is the fold-out book published by Delaunay-Terk and Cendrars in 1913, *Prose of the Trans-siberian and of little Joan of France* (*La Prose du Transsibérien et de la petite Jehanne de France*). |
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Like Futurism and to some extent Cubism, Simultaneism took up elements from and responded to major developments in modernity: technological innovation, large-scale urbanization, mass telecommunication, and scientific discoveries. Perhaps the most famous and recognizably Simultaneist work to exhibit these tendencies is the fold-out book published by Delaunay-Terk and Cendrars in 1913, *Prose of the Trans-siberian and of little Joan of France* (*La Prose du Transsibérien et de la petite Jehanne de France*).  The origins of Simultaneism can be traced in piecemeal to previous and contemporaneous intellectual developments in psychoanalysis, non-Euclidean geometry, and the vitalist school of philosophy associated with Wilhelm Dilthey, Friedrich Nietzsche, and especially Henri Bergson. In painting, forerunners included Cézanne and Monet, while in poetry Mallarmé’s typographic innovations and Rimbaud’s fascination with colour were equally influential. At the *Ballets Russes*, Cendrars and the Delaunays regularly witnessed disjunctive fusions of elaborate, shocking, and colourful music (Igor Stravinsky and Sergei Prokofiev), direction (Serge Diaghilev), and choreography (Michel Fokine and Vaslav Nijinsky) that clearly fed into their own creative impulses.  The Italian Futurists explored simultaneity around the same time and some of their paintings (such as Umberto Boccioni’s *Simultaneous Visions*, 1911) and poems (such as Filippo Marinetti’s *Zang Tumb Tumb*, 1914) bear a family resemblance to their Parisian counterparts, though these would be ‘too mechanical’ for Delaunay’s tastes. Though they are sometimes linked with Cubism, especially since Delaunay-Terk began experimenting with collage shortly after Picasso and Braque, the ‘Simultaneists’ took up abstraction, non-representation, vivid colouration, and vaguely spiritual themes in ways that the Cubists never did. Finally, while the poet and critic Barzun claims to have invented the term to describe his own work, such as *Hymns of Strength* (*Hymnes de forces*, 1912), the term is more generally associated with Apollinaire, Cendrars, and the Delaunays.  Simultaneity was first ‘discovered’ by Robert Delaunay through his two series of paintings, *Simultaneous Windows on the City* (*Fenêtres simultanées sur la ville*, 1912) and *Simultaneous Disks* (*Disques simultanées*, 1912-13). Though the analytic cubism of Braque and Picasso and especially Italian Futurism previously made great inroads in the depiction of simultaneity, multiplicity, and movement, with the two aforementioned series Delaunay was the first to achieve a presentation of movement through abstraction. Unlike Futurist depictions of movement, which are still figurative, Delaunay’s non-objective series, particularly the *Disks*, achieve this in a more ‘vital’ manner, through the use of the pure painterly elements of line and colour alone. Delaunay explains: ‘Simultaneity of color, simultaneous contrasts and every uneven proportion that results from colour, as they are expressed in their representative movement: this is the only reality with which to construct a picture.’  Shortly after Delaunay’s series, his friend Cendrars and his wife Sonia jointly published what they called ‘the first simultaneous book,’ *Prose of the Trans-siberian and of Little Joan of France* (1913). Measuring seventy-nine centimeters long, the unfolded scroll of the book featured a right hand column of Cendrars’ poem juxtaposed against a left-hand series of watercolours by Delaunay-Terk. The poem, in a mélange of typesets, recounts Cendrars' journey through Siberia to the Far East in the company of a prostitute named Jehanne, though frequent spatial and temporal jumps make it barely recognizable as a standard journey-poem. Delaunay-Terk’s watercolours overlap and bleed into one another in a cacophonous tower of curvaceous colour forms whose disjunctive intermingling create the impression of vital movement. Together, the elements encourage the viewer to read the entire book in a single glance.  Cendrars’ subsequent two volumes of poetry, *Panama, or the Adventures of My Seven Uncles* (*Le Panama ou les a ventures de mes sept oncles*, 1913-14/1918) and *Nineteen Elastic Poems* (*Dix-neuf poèmes élastiques*,1919), also exhibited the Simultaneist tendency both in their poetic forms and as unfoldable objects, and his interest in the cinema is specifically centered on its Simultaneist possibilities. His later work, such as the novel *Dan Yack* (1927), betrays a preoccupation with wireless simultaneity, as when the titular character, situated in Antarctica, plays several gramophones at once to express global simultaneous transmissibility. Delaunay-Terk, meanwhile, would continue experimenting in design and bookbinding, and would even attempt to create ‘simultaneous clothes’ and fabrics, as well as a ‘simultaneous boutique.’  Several other artists and writers, not directly affiliated with the core group who spoke of simultaneity directly, exhibit traits of the Simultaneist impulse. Chagall’s paintings from this period, though thoroughly representational, also project a kaleidoscopic vision of disparate figurations in dream-like co-presence. After the war, Dada poets Tristan Tzara, Richard Huelsenback, and Walter Serner composed simultaneous sound poems that often required several people to recite separate parts, often in different languages, in a mass jumble of words. The ‘Synchromist’ painters Stanton Macdonald-Wright and Morgan Russell, though hostile to the Delaunays, sought to use colour as the simultaneous basis for all line, light, and volume. In cinema, Dziga Vertov’s montage practice made particular use of the Simultaneist impulse to cut between globally separate regions, while Sergei Eisenstein’s later notion of ‘vertical montage’ evinces a similar attempt to synchronize shifts in music, light, and formal composition across a succession of shots. In music itself, the jarring, overwhelming urban ‘dis-symphony’ of Futurist noise music, such as the ‘noiseism’ produced and advocated for by avant-garde composer and instrument-inventor Luigi Russolo, also has clear resonances with Simultaneism. |
| Further reading:  (Affron)  (Bochney)    (Caws)  (Cohen)  (Cohen, Sonia Delaunay)  (Sonia Delaunay: Fashion and Fabrics)  (Garber)  (Hughes)  (Kern)  (Visions of Paris: Robert Delaunay’s Series) |