“On the Origins of Simultanism”,
Cécile Godefroy

“(…) Synonymous with the name Delaunay, *Simultanism* was a term associated with ideas of restlessness and dynamism engendered by the immediate reality of the modern era: technological innovations and urban developments, the invention of fast-moving machines for the conquest of sky and space, new lifestyles based on action, sport and speed, cosmopolitanism.

(...) An expression of the early avant-gardes, Simultanism was closely associated with Guillaume Apollinaire’s Orphism, an intellectual movement in which the painters designated by the poet – Fernand Léger, Francis Picabia, the Italian Futurists and even Kupka – partook of the same optimism with regard to the modern world. Unlike the Orphists, Robert Delaunay, aka ‘Monsieur Simultané’, gave prominence to the applied arts and held the ‘simultaneous metier’ to be an ‘absolutely new principle in all the potential developments (posters, fashion, fabric, furnishings, architecture, city planning), [which] is going to regenerate or breathe life into everything to do with the visual.’

(...) The Delaunays’ apartment, where the Parisian *intelligentsia* came together on Sundays, was the first ‘exhibition venue’ for their simultaneous creations. (...) As shown in period photographs, the pattern and colouring of the cushions recalled those of Delaunay’s early *Windows* paintings and the lampshades were akin to artificial electric prisms. When she posed in a ‘simultaneous’ dress, surrounded by her book-bindings, with a sketch of Robert’s *Homage to Blériot* and a copy of the *Prose on the Trans-Siberian Railway* hanging on the walls, Sonia Delaunay affirmed the oneness of Simultanism.

(...) Another showcase for pure painting, ‘simultaneous’ clothing conveyed the new visual language to the masses. The ‘built’ look of clothes whose cut was based on colour in ‘new materials in many hues’ corresponded to the fashion for ornament referred to in contemporary specialist magazines. (...) It was in this context in which fashion, painting and the avant-garde were closely related that the ‘simultaneous’ dress, acclaimed by Cendrars, was born: a ‘violet tailored suit, a long violet and green waistband, a harlequin bodice consisting of bits of juxtaposed woollen fabric, taffeta, tulle, flannelette, moire and silk poul. The old pink conversed with the yellow-orange, the nattier blue gamboled with the scarlet.’ To the motley dress there corresponded the outfit of the modern man: ‘A red overcoat with a blue collar, green jacket, sky-blue waistcoat, a minuscule red tie, black trousers, red socks, and black and yellow shoes.’

(...) From the very start, decorative Simultanism was the most tangible method for disseminating pure painting and marked the passage from one mode of elitist representation – the Delaunays’ salon, the exhibitions of Der Sturm – to that of public space: the street, the ballroom. In their advocacy of total art, the Delaunays threw off the yoke of those rival ‘isms’ that were restricted to painting. (...) The Delaunays stood apart from the pioneers of abstraction, the colourists in particular, who consciously rejected a decorative approach of any kind in that they considered that the
phenomenon of chromatic expansion was not a violation of pure painting but attested, instead, to the part it had to play in the reformation of a new world”.

“Sonia Delaunay’s First Stay in Madrid. Classical Masters and Popular Arts”,
Marta Ruiz del Árbol

“(...) All things point to the suggestion that the two artists felt very much alone during their first months in Madrid. Isolated from the artistic centre that up to then had been the focus of their lives and lacking a group of intellectuals to receive them in Spain, they sought refuge among the Old Masters at the Museo del Prado. On 24 February 1915 Sonia Delaunay enrolled in the museum’s registry of copyists, something Robert did not. As an outcome of those days of work in the galleries of the museum, the two of them decided, according to Bernard Dorival, to take up again their paintbrushes, which they had not touched since they left France the summer that the First World War began.

(...) Following in the footsteps of the travelling artists who since the Romantic period had journeyed to the peninsula to visit the Prado and experience the allure of the local culture’s exotic and unusual aspects, Sonia was captivated by Spain’s popular forms of expression and folk culture. Her time in Madrid coincided with a particularly important moment in the development of flamenco. (...) The works she painted beginning in 1915, in which bailaoras and cantaores frequently appear, leave no doubt as to the impact that the syncopated rhythms of that art form made on her.

(...) Delaunay’s own origins appear to have played a decisive role in her attraction to all things Spanish. She remarks in her memoirs how her arrival in the Iberian Peninsula awoke memories of her childhood. The colours and the hustle and bustle of street life and marketplaces recalled the Russia of her youth. So did the popular dances. Like the artist, some of her friends from her Spanish period, including Sergei Diaghilev, Igor Stravinsky and Manuel de Falla claimed to recognise similarities between Spanish cante jondo and Russian folksong”.

“Sonia Delaunay’s Second Stay in Madrid. Total Art and Casa Sonia”,
Marta Ruiz del Árbol

“(...) What led the Delaunays to return to the city which they had left a little over two years before and where they did not seem to have found a favourable artistic environment? Perhaps they caught wind of the renewed cultural and artistic milieu in the Spanish capital, spurred on by the intellectuals who, fleeing the war in Europe, had sought refuge in Spain. Perhaps they got word of the lively literary gatherings, prominent among them the tertulia led by Ramón Gómez de la Serna at the Café de Pombo, of which they became regular participants. What they certainly became aware of, however, was the propitious juncture that the performing arts had reached in Spain. In this regard, the presence there of Sergei Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes at the invitation of King Alfonso XIII in May 1916 was particularly significant.

(...) In London, Diaghilev had programmed an event for the end of the summer of 1918 in the London Coliseum. It was a new performance of Cleopatra, the sets for which (designed by Léon Bakst) had caught fire during the company’s tour of South America. For the revival in London, the impresario relied on the help of Sonia Delaunay for the dancers’ costumes and that of Robert Delaunay for the sets.
(...) Sonia Delaunay took advantage of the opportunity that Diaghilev afforded her to focus her explorations once again on dance and to rework her simultaneous dress from 1913 for Cleopatra. Her interest in the world of dance and fashion thus converged for this project. The queen, performed by Lubov Tchernicheva, appeared before the audience in a costume in which the irregular patchwork of the dress the artist wore to dance at the Bal Bullier was replaced by a symmetrical pattern dominated by three circles of colour. These elements, encircling the dancer’s breasts and abdomen, were a three-dimensional translation of her Electric Prisms from 1913 and 1914. It is also closely tied to her studies of flamenco cantaores and bailaoras in which she expressed pictorially the infinitely sinuous rhythms of that tradition of song and dance through simultaneous contrasts in colour.

(...) Casa Sonia is cited in the press for the first time in early July 1919, in La Época, the newspaper published by her friend the Marquis de Valdeiglesias. The piece describes in detail the ‘complete furnishing’ of the apartment of Antonio Monedero, Director General of Agriculture. Indeed, in her abundant correspondence with the Marquis, which previously had dealt with theatrical matters, the subject was now this new project. At this point, Valdeiglesias asked Delaunay to keep him abreast of her projects in order to cover them in his newspaper. As before in the theatre world, he became a central figure who provided her access to high society. Not only did he put her in contact with influential people, however. He also became one of her principal clients.

A scant few weeks after that first public mention of her work, the trademarks ‘Sonia’ and ‘Delaunay’ were registered by Robert Delaunay in the Official Bulletin of Industrial Properties. According to the description appended to each name, they represented ‘distinctive artistic creations of every sort, prominent among them objets d’art or decorations, installations and the interior design of dwellings and businesses.’

(...) Faithful to her artistic concept, the aim of Sonia Delaunay’s new initiative was, as she remarked in a letter to her friend the Marquis, to transform ‘quotidian banality and its attendant objects into a more artistic and elevated environment.’ In order to achieve this, every object around a person must change so as to ‘elevate and ennoble the instincts of popular taste towards more human ideals.’

(...) Her success was surely owing to the taste among the bourgeoisie and local aristocracy for everything Parisian. The French capital was a paradigm of fashion and décor, and, at a time when the neighbouring country found itself at war and the border was practically sealed, the thirst for novelties from abroad turned many eyes towards Sonia Delaunay.

(...) The surviving photographs of Sonia Delaunay from this period present her wearing her own designs: parasols, vests, raffia jackets and hats – all decorated with large leaves, branches, discs and flowers, hand-painted or embroidered in felt, oilcloth, worsted or other materials that, like her interior decorations, are coherent with the pictorial aesthetic she had developed during her years in the Iberian Peninsula”.

“Sonia Delaunay: The Force of Colour”,

Matteo de Leeuw-de Monti

“(…) When the silk manufacturer J.-B. Martin & Cie commissioned 50 designs from her, the time seemed right to start her own design atelier in her apartment. With an abundance of Russian seamstresses, embroiderers and knitters available, she set herself to create textile designs for her own production. (…) On 20 March 1925 she registered her fabric and fashion enterprise under the
name ‘Sonia’, and Chevreul’s often cited word ‘simultané / simultaneous’ was no longer an adjective, it was promoted and ennobled to her now registered trademark: ‘Simultané’.

(...) Sonia’s reputation grew at a fast speed, she got involved with theatre and film, but in fact her fashion clientele remained an eclectic group of artists, actresses, members of the intelligentsia and the haute bourgeoisie. (…) In spite of admirable artistic recognition, from a business point matters did not prove to be easy in the long run. (…) The fashion side was drastically reduced, ‘Sonia’ and the Simultané brand were abandoned as the focus was now placed on the fabrics. (…) She continued to design supported by the Dutch firm she had already been collaborating with for five years: Metz & Co. (…) The vision and policy of Joseph de Leeuw and his son Hendrik de Leeuw as owners and directors made it for many years the country’s leading address for exclusive fabrics and avant-garde design.

(...) Since August 1924, Sonia Delaunay had kept a meticulous record of her fabric designs with reference numbers, sketches, notes and – when applicable – the buyers, in her Livres noirs: black linen-bound books, volumes I–X, covering the period from 1924 to 1940. By then she had created no less than 1,500 designs.

(...) For numerous designs she created a separate pancarte, her special design card. On it she could add a small gouache of the design, its number, the date of creation, the Livre noir number, and the different coloris that would be colour-coordinated. Sonia had developed her distinctively own palette of over 400 colours that bore their own names and reference numbers: Noir, Cerise 6, Nuit 4, Blanc, or Angora 8, Ruines 4, Jaune 7, Ruines 2.

(...) A design could have different versions: the original gouache, the pancarte, the dessin de travail (working drawing), the scale drawing and the calques – designs on tracing paper in various colour schemes. Of some designs the final master prints still exist. Sometimes designs were sent by post back and forth, folded in half, with instructions or comments pencilled in (…) Sometimes small pieces of the drawings or the fabrics were cut out for reference and would end up glued into Metz’s or Sonia’s fabric books. The designs did not always receive the museum treatment they enjoy today; they were working material.

(...) In Sonia’s designs for Metz & Co a distinction is made between ‘dessins anciens’ – old Simultané designs that were originally created in 1924 – but revised or adapted with new colour schemes or pattern sizes at a later date – and ‘dessins nouveaux’ (new designs). The designs for Metz & Co cover the entire spectrum of her extensive artistic diversity. The large geometric, contrasting colour blocks and pastilles of the mid-1920s changed to finer structures. She played with squares, oblongs, circles, crosses, dots, stripes, strokes and zigzags in countless combinations of poetic rhythms and themes that in themselves form new motifs in ingenious repeats. (…) Floral designs are abundantly represented: some delicately stylised, others somewhat roughly but decisively sketched, some with an explosive freshness jumping from their black or dark blue fond, even an Op-Art bloom way ahead of it’s time.

(...) Sonia Delaunay was never a designer in the usual sense. Her designs were not subject to the whims of fashion. The force of her colours makes them timeless. She remained true to herself, a versatile artist, living her art and living for her art. ‘When art is within you it can be everywhere’."