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## The Color of Grammar and the Surface of Language: 20th Century Avant-Garde Poetics in Gertrude Stein, Mina Loy, and Blaise Cendrars

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THE COLOR OF GRAMMAR AND THE SURFACE OF LANGUAGE:  
20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY AVANT-GARDE POETICS  
IN GERTRUDE STEIN, MINA LOY, AND BLAISE CENDRARS

BY

SARAH E. KRUSE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
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2016

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY DISSERTATION

OF

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2016

## ABSTRACT

The study here arises from a long held interest in the philosophical works of Ludwig Wittgenstein and a preoccupation with the role and function of ordinary language. Examining the late work of Wittgenstein, and focusing on his last work, *Remarks on Color*, I connect the place of color within language and its fundamental role in our visual perception with an earlier idea of Wittgensteinian grammar. Grammar for Wittgenstein is not sets of rules or even descriptive rules as in linguistics, but a certain use and function of language that is as varied and multiple as humans are themselves. For Wittgenstein, there is a disconnect in our systems of thinking *about* language and our actual use. The difficulties that arise in language come from a limited way of talking about these things because we are already enmeshed in language itself. What is possible, I argue in light of Wittgenstein's philosophy, is a kind of visibility of grammar that is realized through operative examples rather than through statements of fact. Color for Wittgenstein, I argue, is that example. Color, then, is no longer an emotive aspect nor a scientific method nor a psychological condition, but an example that reveals a grammar of language not ordinarily seen. Taking up the work of early 20<sup>th</sup> century avant-garde poetry and poetics, specifically the poetry of Gertrude Stein, Blaise Cendrars, Sonia Delaunay, and Mina Loy, I examine how these authors' works with their unusual use of color that runs contrary to ordinary description demonstrates a different "grammar," what I call the color of grammar, that reveals the framework of how language itself functions. The color of grammar in the avant-garde, I argue, carries with it a unique sense in language that cannot be easily categorized as simply nonsense or experimentation. In rereading what

earlier scholars often categorize as nonsense, I illuminate a facet of language that is not the way things *are* in language, but the way in which a reader comes to *think* things are. The ways a reader may come to recognize alternative ways of reading and the affect that has on understanding everyday and ordinary language in the world is exemplified by avant-garde poetics. The combination of philosophy and poetry, I believe, makes operative alternative methods of understanding. What I call “the color of grammar” functions slightly in the margin of what we think of as the ordinary “sense” of things. The goal of this work combines disciplines to open a “between space” in language, making other facets of language and our thought “visible.”

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I do not believe that we ever really know what we think until we have come to it through the process of writing. Writing itself is a topic worthy of a dissertation and the affects it has on an individual. In this transformative process, I would like to thank my outside dissertation committee members, Cheryl Foster and Jean Walton, for their careful attention and support. And to my core committee, Galen Johnson for his clarifying insight and afternoon discussions of philosophy; to my second reader Peter Covino for his love of the avant-garde and poetry and his understandings of all the interworkings of poetry from sound texture, to print production, to aesthetics of the page; and my Major Professor, Mary Cappello for her brilliant insights, enlightening innovations in bending genre, and her careful and meticulous reading of my work.

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## INTRODUCTION

I lean against the streetcar's glass window mesmerized by the reflection of red taillights mirrored against rain. On first seeing Kandinsky's *Panels for Edwin R. Campbell* (1914) at MoMA, I feel like I could fall into the movement of his color. Walking at twilight, I watch the sky on certain days and in particular weather turn the most magnificent, luminescent blue before fading to black. The four o'clock sun lights up a brick building, giving way to an image of knocking over the cardboard universe of a theater set. In a vintage shop, I purchase a dress because I cannot quite describe the color and how the fabric reflects light. None of these examples are a definition of color. None of these examples illustrates anything about the uniformity of color; instead, they are something else beyond a certain limit of reflection, surface, light, and lighting. There is no stasis here, but a moment of something imperceptible made visible if only ever so briefly.

Color is not a set object, it is not one emotional response, one cultural association, but something that overwhelms my senses, an instant in my perception that moves me beyond the ordinary routine of experience. Color is that which is fundamental to my world and something that transcends my ordinary world in the moments when it is most transient. The brightness of a neon sign in the rain, the blur of colored lights through a fogged window is an effect that I cannot quite touch or place permanent parameters around. Color is an experience that resists event.

When we think of color, we think of color as primary attribute of perception. Color is also a kind of surface because what we see is really only a reflection of light

on a surface. I propose that language too is a kind of surface, but one through which the surface figuration creates what we come to think of as depth and meaning. This is not to say that surface is oppositional to depth, but that surface is integral to our idea of depth. What may manifest in language as inconsistencies, contradiction, and nonsense in our ordinary grammar, perhaps better illustrates the visibility of this particular surface because it highlights the constructedness of our language.

Theorizing surface and color, and grammar and visibility, I investigate the use of color in early 20<sup>th</sup> century avant-garde poetics as a space between the color I perceive and conceptualize and color as it exists in the world. Ludwig Wittgenstein in his late work, *Remarks on Color* (1951), tells us nothing about color theory *per se*, but rather illustrate the fissures in our thinking about color concepts. I examine color in avant-garde poetics as a sign-post for unraveling how we perceive and read through grammatical structure and syntactical form in language. Similar to Wittgenstein's example of color, I posit that the avant-garde's use of color, structure, and form causes the reader to recognize the structures of language and how ideas themselves are framed. The avant-garde does not just present a reader with a new idea of an object or the thing the reader thinks he/she is looking at, but reveals the framework of our thinking. Elements of the avant-garde often characterized as just experimentation or an attempt to break with form must be reevaluated and reexamined for the critical work made possible through this method of reading.

## **Color and the Avant-Garde**

The rise of modernism yielded the birth of varied art movements and masterpieces of experimentation. From roughly the 1910s through the late 1920s, the movements included Italian and Russian Futurism, Dada, Imagism, Vorticism, automatic writing, stream of consciousness, Cubism, and Surrealism. The avant-garde, typically more experimental and fragmentary than traditional modernisms, was an innovative movement that prioritized experimentation especially within music, art, and literature. Aesthetically speaking, the avant-garde generally is considered to emphasize fracturing and fragmentation, speed, abstraction, and experimentation with form, color, language, and sound. Creating numerous cross-pollinations between genres and across national borders, the movement gained momentum in the mid-teens and continued as late as the 1940s in both Eastern and Western Europe and the United States.

Although the term “avant-garde” has become a kind of catchall category for various movements across genres in painting, literature, theater, and film, major scholarship on the poetic avant-garde by Marjorie Perloff, Charles Bernstein, Johanna Drucker, Mary Anne Caws, Charles Altieri, and Jerome McGann, focuses closely on avant-garde poets’ unusual and radical experimentations with language. What remains largely un-theorized in the scholarship of avant-garde poetry and poetics is the role, use, and function of color. While color is occasionally regarded as a symbol or for its use to create imagery, color as catalyst, which alters how one reads a work, has never been addressed. For most critics, the role of color in avant-garde poetry always remains secondary and subordinate to other indicators of meaning such as description,

symbolism, and representation. The poetic avant-garde exists at the forefront of language. Not only is the avant-garde ahead of its time, and as the name suggests in the French, “before the guard,” the poetic avant-garde is also its own ground, and indeed the battleground through which the remaking of language potentially alters thought and reveals alternative possibilities to the expected and daily habitual use of language.

The numerous revolutionary, experimental turns in avant-garde art produced a host of work on color: Wassily Kandinsky’s *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1912), Alexander Remington’s *Color Music* (1912), and Robert Delaunay’s *Simultaneous Contrasts: Sun and Moon* (1913) for example. Each attempts to theorize through various scientific and unscientific methods a more primary role of color in relation to aesthetic works. It is the last of these figures I propose to take up not simply for application of a theory, but because both Robert and Sonia Delaunay are interested in the possibility of color contrast as a catalyst to bring something unseen or unrecognized into view. Poet and Delaunay collaborator, Blaise Cendrars himself, in his 1919 essay “Simultaneous Contrast,” characterized the theory: “A color is not color itself. It is only color in contrast with one or several colors itself. A blue is only blue in contrast with a red, a green, an orange, a gray, and all other colors. Contrast is not black against white, an opposition, a dissimilarity. Contrast is similarity” (155). Similarity is also not to say sameness. Color within the avant-garde text may not be representational, but is used to highlight and make apparent contrast within language itself. Color as a range within language changes the way we think about dichotomies or binaries of meaning and nonsense or sense in language. The possibilities of color

that the Delaunays brought to the forefront when compared with Wittgenstein's *Remarks on Color* further informs the movement of both color and language at work within the poetic avant-garde.

Focusing on the early poetry of Gertrude Stein, Mina Loy, and Blaise Cendrars from approximately 1912 to 1923, I am interested in the ways the unusual manifestations of color in these poets' *oeuvre* move beyond description or imagery to bring the reader to a different surface of language as stated earlier. I am not using "surface" as a binary to depth or meaning, but as the framework of language that, when recognized, reveals how depth and meaning are constructed. Surface enables the construction and appearance of depth, and the terms are not oppositional as much as they are codependent. The critical potential of surface must be reconsidered when not Thinking of surface not as a binary. Surface then becomes a space of recognition and a new starting point rather than the limit of final in-depth meaning.

Johanna Drucker's work is theoretically rich for rethinking ideas of between spaces, or networks that are not oppositionally based or limited. In *Theorizing Modernism: Visual Art and the Critical Tradition*, Drucker opens the possibility of other theoretical modes in the avant-garde through her analysis of the materiality of the text. Drucker concludes that much of midcentury theoretical work characterized the avant-garde as working against representation to emphasize the status of the artwork as an autonomous object. However useful this analytical work was at the time, Drucker largely emphasizes how midcentury critique glossed over other theoretical modes also present in the avant-garde. While I am not working strictly on the materiality of the text, the interventions that Drucker creates are useful in examining

the function of color in relationship to the surface of language, and in opening the possibilities of theoretical work not enmeshed in the binary of aesthetic object and authorial meaning.

This dissertation addresses how the poetic avant-garde's unconventional use of color, in relationship to language, enables and participates not only in an avant-garde aesthetic, but also a critique of the framework and assumptions of conceptual meaning in language. The avant-garde's poetic methodology creates the possibility of subversion and critique because of the way it reframes the viewer or readers' assumptions of genre, form, and meaning. Rather than just an experiment in form, as often characterized, the avant-garde that I explore in these pages demonstrates an active methodology that alters thinking, not simply because it is "new," but because it critiques *how* we think rather than *what* we think. Color reveals a new visibility of language and grammar in the avant-garde. Color itself bridges a gap between divisions of genres because of the space it occupies as both lexical referent and as visual image, particularly in multi-genre works like Blaise Cendrars and Sonia Delunay's *La Prose Du Transsibérien*. The avant-garde's particular use of color highlights the surface of the text that is taken for granted, and this reorientation towards structure and meaning alters how one "sees" the framework of language that is otherwise not immediately recognizable.

### **The Complexity of Surface**

The idea of surface here should not be confused with the more recent movement of surface reading as proposed by Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus in the

2009 special issue of *Representations*. My examination of surface and its relationship to color seeks to recognize the constructedness of language itself, and not the immediately readable or accessible part of a text. Surface, as I will be reading it in the avant-garde, is not the apparent meaning, but the structuring or framework of the text that directs a reader's attention towards *how* meaning is made rather than *what* meaning is. Best and Marcus "take surface to mean what is evident, perceptible, apprehensible in texts; what is neither hidden nor hiding; what in the geometrical sense, has length and breadth but no thickness, and therefore covers no depth. A surface is what insists on being looked *at* rather than what we must train ourselves to see through" (9). The idea of surface reading then is looking for what is apparent in the text and thinking about what the face value of the text is able to teach us. Best and Marcus oppose surface reading to more postmodern methods of reading that they call "symptomatic reading" (3) where the method focuses more on what the text reveals as its own lack. Best and Marcus claim, "symptomatic reading asserts that 'what a text means lies in what it does not say, which can then be used to rewrite the text in terms of a master code. By disclosing the absent causes that structures the text's inclusions and exclusions, the critic restores to the surface the deep history that the text represses'" (3).

While postmodern criticism in the last ten years seems to be in decline, I cannot say that my characterization of surface sides with either Best and Marcus' definition nor with that of the more recent past of what they characterize as "symptomatic reading." The color of grammar, as I have coined it and will explain more fully momentarily, and the surface of language is neither about a hidden,

repressed intention of the author or social codes, nor is it what is completely apparent on the surface of the text. My position, whose premise is neither surface reading nor symptomatic reading, takes its lead from philosophy of language and specifically the late work of Ludwig Wittgenstein. The main difference lies primarily in the location of “meaning” in the text. The surface of language, which I argue color or more specifically the color of grammar brings us to, is not the immediate “meaning” of a text, nor is it a “meaning” located elsewhere in a text’s lacks or gaps. Rather the surface of language is the constructedness of language itself. It is language as frame.<sup>1</sup> It is not one specific critical lens that we happen to be reading through, but rather the revelation of how language constructs thought. The color of grammar, I suggest, is what makes this recognition possible. The surface of language is not something “hidden” that we must uncover, but rather a surface that we are more or less blind to recognize because of how we think. Surface, in the sense that I am using it, is always there, but it is *how* to look at it that makes it difficult to see. The avant-garde poets give us a way of looking at surface because of how they use and employ “nonsense” or elements that run against our “normal” way of understanding and reading both texts and the world. The avant-garde relies not on surface recognition of “easy” meaning or meaning that is hidden in-depth, but the dissolution of what and how things mean altogether.

I propose that the critical work of certain avant-garde texts functions within the bounds of ordinary language and grammar to highlight the possibility of a simultaneous alternative grammar that is within language itself, or, what I shall call, following the influence of the late work of philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, the

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<sup>1</sup> My use of “frame” should also be distinguished from Derrida’s use of frame discussed later.

“color” of grammar. I employ Wittgenstein’s *Remarks on Color* to further develop an understanding of the multifaceted nature of color that destabilizes static conceptual meaning and illuminates the surface of language that is the frame of meaning. While Wittgenstein’s *Remarks* dates to 1950, post-dating the poetic avant-garde by at least thirty-five years, his early notebooks from 1914-1916 indicate his conception of the function of color in relationship to logic and language as early as 1914, the same year Stein’s *Tender Buttons* was first published, one year after Cendrars and Delaunay published *La prose du Transsibérien et de la Petite Jehanne de France* in 1913, and the same year Mina Loy’s early poems “Cafe du Néant” and “Italian Pictures” appeared. I am not suggesting that Wittgenstein read these particular poets or that there was a direct correspondence of any kind; however, I do think it suggests something about the consciousness of the time that poetic and philosophical inquiries on color seem to arise around roughly the same time period, and that this might indicate something about the era itself.

### **Color and Philosophy**

I have attempted here to trace a brief lineage of philosophical ideas that develop around color. The following is intended to move as a cursory tracing to arrive at the juncture I am looking at in Wittgenstein’s late philosophy. I am making no claim that this sketch is totally comprehensive or exhaustive. Rather it is my intention to trace the beginnings of ideas on color and how they metamorphose over time to better understand the unique position color takes when we reach modern and contemporary philosophy.

Color within an historical context of philosophical thought first makes an appearance in relationship to ancient rhetoric. Quintilian in his *Institutions of the Orator* discusses rhetorical presentation and color in relationship to how one uses or presents language and what “slant” or angle their presentation employs. Color in this sense is similar to our saying that someone has presented us with a biased or “colored view” of something. To have language that is colored implies deception and the ability of powerful persuasion to affect our emotions:

Such composers of memorials, however, would be less mischievous if they wrote down everything merely as it occurred. Instead, they add motives, coloring, and inventions that do more harm than the plain truth, and most of our orators, when they receive these farragos, think it wrong to make any change in them and adhere to them as strictly as to cases proposed in the schools. (12: 8, 6)

Color in this context, though perhaps a compelling aspect of rhetoric, is also somewhat suspect as it seems to detract or obfuscate the plain truth of facts.

In Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* color, too, is something rather suspect. In book 2, part 24 of *Rhetoric*, under the discussion of syllogisms, “color” is an emotional influence that affects the truth factor of the syllogism. Aristotle aligns color with “indignant” language:

Another line is the use of indignant language, whether to support your own case or to overthrow your opponent’s. We do this when we paint a highly-coloured picture of the situation without having proved the facts of it: if the defendant does so, he produces an impression of his innocence;

and if the prosecutor goes into a passion, he produces an impression of the defendant's guilt. (II: 24: 3)

Again, color is in opposition to truth, and takes on an almost dangerous quality as it can impress passions without the actuality of truth. The "highly-coloured" picture gives sway to emotion without a basis of fact behind it. In book three of *Rhetoric*, color comes up again under the discussion of expression, and it is with poetry that color is aligned: "Now it was because poets seemed to win fame through their fine language when their thoughts were simple enough, that the language of oratorical prose at first took a poetical colour, e.g. that of Gorgias. Even now most uneducated people think that poetical language makes the finest discourses. That is not true: the language of prose is distinct from that of poetry" (III: 1). Color in language here too is suspect and suggests something duplicitous. Color appears to add substance to a subject, but is more closely associated with the performance and presentation rather than truth. Thinking about the potential hazards and interest in color, scholar Charles A. Riley notes in his chapter on "Color and Philosophy" in *Color Codes*, "From the time when Aristotle branded color a drug (*pharmakon*) to our own day, when Jacques Derrida offers a rhapsody on *pharmakon* as both drug and poison, color has been a source of fascination for philosophers" (20). The idea of color as a *pharmakon* connects to the idea in rhetoric of color as a persuasive, although secondary, element. Citing Derrida's *Dissemination*, Riley gives various translations of *pharmakon*: "For in Greek, *pharmakon* also means paint, not a natural color, but an artificial tint, a chemical dye that imitates the chromatic scale given in nature" (qtd in Riley, 65). The idea of color as secondary or something added appears in multiple instances. Riley

traces a quick history of how color has been treated in philosophy, noting how for Kant in his discussion of aesthetics in *Critique of Pure Judgment*, color is an aspect of the aesthetic work that is secondary and falls under the category of “charm” and is separate from the more fundamental elements of form and taste.

With the advent of Romanticism and German Idealism, literature saw cataclysmic shifts from the earlier empirical mode of thought in the eighteenth century to one more primarily focused on ideas of epistemology, hermeneutics, and metaphysics. Goethe in his *Theory of Colours* (1810) takes up color exclusively as his subject, dividing color into three primary categories, the physiological, or the way the eye perceives; the physical, or the phenomena of color in the world; and last, the chemical, or colors that appear as inherent properties of objects, i.e. pigments and dyes found in nature. Several scholars largely agree that Goethe’s study of color is highly inaccurate and has little to do with the scientific understanding of color that we rely on today. Nevertheless, Riley brings up an important point, recognizing Goethe as a turning point for color in philosophy, and for his influence on G.W.F. Hegel in Hegel’s work on aesthetics and the study of color’s more primary role in painting: “From Kant to Goethe, color questions scatter widely in many different directions. However, there is no question that most often they lead to aesthetics . . . . [In] Hegel’s *Aesthetics* the power of color advances to a higher station than Kant was willing to allow” (23).

In the *Aesthetics*, Hegel divides the aesthetic arts into four classifications, beginning with the plastic arts of sculpture and architecture, moving on to painting, followed by music, and lastly poetry which he exalts as the highest form. Each mode

of art, according to Hegel, combines the sensuous material of the world with the ideal of form. Hegel differs from Kant, who is more interested in pure form, and Hegel chooses to examine more equally the multiple facets that create an aesthetic work. Unlike Kant, Hegel gives color a more integral role in painting: “the visibility and the making visible which belong to painting have their differences in a more ideal way, i.e. in the particular colours, and they free art from the complete sensuous spatiality of material things by being restricted to the dimensions of a plane surface” (87). The use of color and surface that makes painting possible and visible, for Hegel, makes painting an aesthetic object. It is precisely painting’s use of color and surface that removes it and differentiates it from the merely sensuous materiality of things. Color is no longer a secondary and lesser quality, or dangerous addition, but becomes integral to the aesthetic object of painting. The idea that surface here plays a role is also in interesting shift from the more abstract ideal to one that *uses* the materiality of objects and what might appear on a surface, something that has a material reality, but that is also separate from the material nature of the everyday. However, we must not forget that for Hegel the most ideal form is poetry precisely because, out of all the forms, it elides the questions of materiality the most. Materiality, for Hegel, coming to play any role, ushers in a major shift in philosophical thought.

The complexity of divides in aesthetics, the role of the material and the ideal, and the function of color enter into modern and contemporary philosophers’ discussions at various junctures. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century in particular, the role of color in various branches of philosophy moves far beyond the classical conception of color as secondary. Often enough, color seems to take on the role of a kind of intermediating

medium.<sup>2</sup> For French phenomenologist, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in his late work, *The Visible and the Invisible*, color is a kind of reverberation between the one who sees and what is seen. The idea of the visible in Merleau-Ponty is difficult to summarize, but is necessary for understanding color's significance in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Discussing painting in "Eye and Mind," Merleau-Ponty writes,

It is no more possible to make a restrictive inventory of the visible than it is to catalog the possible expressions of a language or even its vocabulary and turns of phrase. The eye is an instrument that moves itself, a means which invents its own ends; it is *that which* has been moved by some impact of the world, which it then restores to the visible through the traces of a hand. (127)

The idea of "expression" and "turns of phrase" touch on the expansive and also transitory nature of the visible. Far from being simply a thing in the world one can see, Merleau-Ponty's visible seems a movement between what we are able to touch and what touches us. There is something of a sympathetic vibration between what I am seeing and how I am seeing it. My encounter with a moment in time, a place, or an instant where the world "speaks," though it is perhaps saying nothing that is precisely audible in the ordinary sense, is something like the visible; something that resonates in the simplest of events, or a detail that moves me for no rational reason and touches some recess of my brain with a significance greater than what can be simply defined.

Walking through Kennedy Plaza to my bus stop, I pass an old woman with white hair

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<sup>2</sup> I realize that it is potentially dangerous to over generalize, and I am by no means suggesting that the following philosophers are working on the same problems or through the same methods. I do, however, find it potentially telling how notions of color in philosophy similarly shift in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and that while Derrida, Merleau-Ponty, and Wittgenstein's methods are entirely different, the general focus and attention to color does bear similar resemblances.

in a bright turquoise knit cap. She really looks nothing like my grandmother, but the vividness of the blue, my grandmother's favorite color, and her blue eyes and white hair send me spinning back in time to some moment when I last saw my grandmother though I have no exact event or memory. It is not memory exactly because there is a reverberation in the now that I cannot quite name— something that *is* in this present moment all that I have lost in the past, and it is that “speaking” or “seeing” now that has the pull of gravity that is so different from the simple act of recollection.

In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty writes, “The visible about us seems to rest in itself. It is as though our vision were formed in the heart of the visible, or as though there were between it and us an intimacy as close as between the sea and the strand” (130). The visible is not completely at a remove from us, but becomes a relation that draws our perception and what we perceive into a kind of harmony. In relation to painting, Galen Johnson writes on Merleau-Ponty's “Eye and Mind” that “The account of painting as participating in the genesis of things, the Flesh, found in “Eye and Mind” moves us towards indecidability, alterity, and chiasm, the intersection of the painter and painterly work within the becoming of the world rather than apart from it attempting to signify it” (172). For Merleau-Ponty, the medium of painting is situated nicely within what is visible. What is painted is not so much the representation of a tree, but as Johnson says, “the work within the becoming of the world” rather than “signifying it.” Becoming here is a kind of active participation and engagement rather than passive observation.

Though my subject is poetry and language rather than painting, I find that Merleau-Ponty's idea of the visible can allow us to see more clearly the dynamic role

that color comes to play. While Wittgenstein is not a phenomenologist, I believe it is also important to first understand some of these tenants of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology to better grasp why some Wittgenstein scholars have argued that late Wittgenstein draws on phenomenology, and why Wittgenstein himself writes in *Remarks on Color*, "There is no such thing as phenomenology, but there are indeed phenomenological problems" (II: #53).

Color in Merleau-Ponty's *The Visible and the Invisible* connects both color in the world and how we perceive color. Color is the entity that seems to exist somewhat in two places at once. This does not specifically have anything to do with the physics of color, but, rather, with the relationship of our color perception to the world. Color is, Merleau-Ponty writes, "a certain node in the woof of the simultaneous and the successive" (132). The simultaneous seems the world while the successive seems the relationship of human perception to that world. Color is the "woof" as though it were the foundation to the weave of what is seen and how we see it. Color, in this sense, perhaps moves through me and through the world as a kind of thread that makes visible my participation in the world that is itself a kind of becoming through seeing. Merleau-Ponty catalogues various examples of "red" throughout time and concludes, "a certain red is also a fossil drawn up from the depths of imaginary worlds" (132). Red as a "fossil" is not the association "red" carries with it, but that as color it functions somewhere *between* the associations we carry within us and how the world affects us. The thread of color is a sympathetic attunement. Merleau-Ponty writes that

If we took all these participations into account, we would recognize that a naked color, and in general a visible . . . is rather a sort of straits between

exterior horizons and the interior horizons ever gaping open, something that comes to touch lightly and makes diverse regions of the colored or visible world resound at distances, a certain differentiation, an ephemeral modulation of this world—less a color or a thing, therefore, than a difference between things and colors, a momentary crystallization of colored being or visibility. (132)

The idea of “crystalized being” is a moment where becoming in the world is made visible through a kind of attunement of subject and object. Color’s complex function for Merleau-Ponty also is the “difference between things” and operates as a separating/uniting intermediary.

The idea of color as something working between also plays a role in the work of Jacques Derrida. His discussion of color in relationship to painting and his examination of the *parergon* in *The Truth in Painting* is relevant here, although the function of color for Derrida is very different. Derrida is no phenomenologist, but, interestingly, he sees color as doing particular “in-between” work within painting. In his discussion of the *parergon* in *The Truth in Painting*, he deconstructs Kant’s *Third Critique* on the basis that Kant’s critique of judgment, rather than be understood as a revelation of a true aesthetic judgment, is a philosophy that itself “frames” a problem or question precisely because of a lack. Derrida then takes up Kant’s aesthetic judgment and Kant’s need for “purposless-purposiveness” not as the condition needed for recognition of the aesthetic, but as a gesture that is symptomatic of how aesthetic philosophy organizes itself:

This permanent requirement—to distinguish between the internal or proper sense and the circumstances of the objects being talked about—organizes all philosophical discourses on art, the meaning of art, and meaning as such, from Plato to Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger. This requirement presupposes a discourse on the limit between the inside and the outside of the art object, here a *discourse on the frame*. (45)

The disparity between inside and outside, or the lack of direct correspondence itself enables philosophical discourse on aesthetics according to Derrida. The very philosophy that frames the problem is one that is created from a lack. Philosophy, in this sense, is the function of the frame and the idea of the frame that Derrida addresses.

While I am not pursuing a direct study of aesthetics in this dissertation, one must understand the position Derrida takes on the frame and the *parergon* to recognize where color fits, and why Derrida's characterization of color is different from traditional philosophies. Such an understanding, I believe, is a helpful pre-requisite for considering how Wittgenstein's study of color departs from the philosophical discourses on color in philosophy. For Derrida, it is not philosophical discussion of the *parergon* that interests him, but the way in which philosophical discourse *is* a *parergon*. Drawing from his well-known and already established ideas of the supplement, Derrida writes in *The Truth of Painting*, "The *parergon*, this supplement outside the work, must, if it is to have the status of a philosophical quasi-concept, designate a formal and general predicative structure, which one can transport *intact* or deformed and reformed *according to certain* rules, into other fields, to submit new contents to it" (55). Derrida then locates what is supplementary to a work according to

Kant, and then reorients those elements as examples of *parerga* even while maintaining that philosophy itself is a kind of *parergon*.

In the work or *ergon*, what constitutes the *parergon* or supplement is some ornamental feature—the ornateness of a gilt frame, the drapery on a statue, the decoration on columns, the facade of architecture. The *parergon*, for Derrida, is not just a thing with supplementary characteristics; the *parergon* that appears as secondary actually cannot be separated from the work because the *parergon* masks a lack that must be covered. The *parergon* appears as something extra, but is actually essential to the work. “What constitutes them as *parerga* is not simply their exteriority as a surplus, it is the internal structural link which rivets them to the lack in the interior of the *ergon*. And this lack would be constitutive of the very unity of the *ergon*. Without this lack, the *ergon* would have no need of a *parergon*” (59-60). The *parerga* as Derrida calls them are not simply additions, but are the appearance of an exteriority that is needed because of the very structure of the work itself.

The secondary nature of the *parergon* is also its connection to color. As previously discussed in Kant, color was considered a secondary quality despite that it might prove a pleasing aspect because it is too close to materiality (along with sound) to be integral to the ideal of the aesthetic work. Derrida explains that, for Kant, “pure” color or sound by itself is a kind of ideal, but used in a work, it becomes a mere secondary quality:

This ambivalence of color (valorized as formal purity or as relation, devalorized as sensory matter, beauty on the one hand, attraction on the other, pure presence in both cases) is raised to the second power (squared)

when it is a question of the color of the frame (*goldene Rahmen*, for example), when the parergonal equivocality of the color comes to intensify the parergonal equivocality of the frame. (77)<sup>3</sup>

Using Kant's idea of color as secondary, Derrida transforms color into an example of his central examination of the *parergon* and what the inscription of color as secondary illustrates about the work itself. Because it is secondary, color as *parergon* enables the deconstruction of Kant's idea of the aesthetic.

What I have traced thus far is both the secondary nature of color and the reclamation of color in modern and contemporary philosophy as a kind of intermediary medium between dichotomies. Keeping this curious "nature" or characterization of color in mind, I will now turn to Ludwig Wittgenstein's late work on color.

### **Wittgenstein's Grammar and Looking**

Ludwig Wittgenstein was not an aesthetic philosopher. His primary concern is always with language. Even Wittgenstein himself did not maintain one static theory of language in his lifetime, and his work is divided and categorized into the early Wittgenstein of *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922) and his more traditionally influenced work on logic, and the late Wittgenstein of *Philosophical Investigations* (1950) that departs from the possibility that everything that can be said can be said in

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<sup>3</sup> Derrida highlights an interesting aspect of color in assuming the simplicity of "golden" as a color. As Wittgenstein notes, "gold" as color refers to the shine of the color rather than the color itself. Gold and yellow are not the same. Within Derrida's innovative deconstruction of Kant, the problem of color that Wittgenstein takes up is illustrated through this comment.

logical propositions.<sup>4</sup> Late Wittgenstein is characterized by his examination of what the use of our language shows us about a belief of uniformity in the structure of our ideas and truths. What Wittgenstein says in his later work refutes much of what he put forth in the *Tractatus*. For example, in *Philosophical Investigations*, he writes, citing the *Tractatus*, “ ‘The general form of propositions is: This is how things are.’—That is the kind of proposition that one repeats to oneself countless times. One thinks that one is tracing the outline of the thing’s nature over and over again, and one is merely tracing round the frame through which we look at it” (#114). His own early thinking that things in language “are how they are” is the very idea that *Philosophical Investigations* works to undo and critique.

Numerous Wittgenstein scholars have attributed this shift in Wittgenstein to the idea of the “color incompatibility problem.” Wittgenstein’s propositions on color in the *Tractatus* unravel his initial conception of stating things clearly in logic because of how color propositions function. Wittgenstein scholar Sarah Moss writes,

The problem for the *Tractatus* arises when we try to analyze propositions that say that a certain object has a certain color. The alleged problem is that it cannot be that all color propositions are combinations of logically independent propositions. Since we use ordinary language to express color propositions, this means that not all propositions expressed by ordinary

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<sup>4</sup> The structure of the proposition is often used in philosophy. Generally, “Propositions are commonly said to be the bearers of truth and falsity. Sentences used to express commands, questions, etc. do not express propositions. When we say that a person knows that p, believes that p, doubts that p, affirms that p, denies that p, etc. the letter p stands for proposition” (454). Wittgenstein continually upsets the structure affirming and denying nothing and often asking questions that remain without a solution.

language sentences can be combinations of logically independent propositions. So the Tractarian program cannot be accomplished. (842)

The difficulty of color for Wittgenstein is that color logic is not consistently the same nor is it consistently separate. The ways in which we use color in ordinary language slip and shift between contexts, mediums, and ideas. In his *Remarks on Color*, Wittgenstein writes, “our color concepts sometimes relate to substance (snow is white), sometimes to surface (this table is brown), sometimes to illumination (in the reddish evening light), sometimes to transparent bodies. And isn’t there also an application to a place in the visual field, logically independent of a spatial context” (III: #255). Color is a concept that we think we use consistently, but we are actually primarily inconsistent in our use.

I am aware that Wittgenstein’s approach to color is radically different from the discussion of color in aesthetic philosophy; however, I think the ideas of color as secondary as seen in Plato, Aristotle, and Kant, and the work that attempts to reclaim color as a more primary function in Hegel, Merleau-Ponty, and Derrida share a curious similarity in the treatment of color. This is not to say that any of these philosophers are doing the same work on color, but the difficulties that color seems to present, as not quite “fitting” neatly into a theorization or philosophy, and as an entity that seems to function “between” things or touch multiple facets, suggests something about the unique position of color and how we think and perceive it.

Color is not easily reducible nor is it easily classified; however, at the same time, because it is also primary to how we see, or at least how we think we see, I believe we often forget about color’s complexity and potentiality. It is for these

various reasons that I have coined the phrase “the color of grammar.” Grammar too is similarly complex, not in the textbook kind of grammar that we ordinarily think of, but in understanding the structuring of language that relies not on rules, but on our use.

Wittgenstein has a specific use and understanding of grammar, and it is from his work that I suggest the term. It is at the cross-roads of Wittgensteinian grammar and his examples of color that I arrive at the color of grammar which I will explain after more fully examining what each of these terms means to Wittgenstein.

The connection of color in language as an intermediary and as a gesture towards that which falls outside of definition is integral to understanding the structure of our language, which I refer to elsewhere in this study as the surface of language. Surface in this sense is not in opposition to depth as commonly thought, but here is used as the gesture towards the framework of language that allows for the appearance of depth. Unlike Derrida’s frame and *parergon* that suggests the fundamental lack in a work, or that gestures towards a whole and is able to suggest a whole because it is masking lack and masquerading as nonessential, my framework and surface of language is not connected to lack or illusion (indeed there may very well be a depth as opposed to the surface). Language itself, I want to argue, and through the example of the avant-garde poets whose work I will be examining, makes possible what we perceive as depth. That does not make the depth any less real, but it does make possible the recognition of how depth is constructed.

My argument differs from Derrida and deconstruction because it is not based on the fundamental push and pull of presence and absence, and play of meaning. Rather, I’m grounding the idea of the color of grammar and surface of language in the

idea that it is where meaning breaks that its construction becomes recognizable. Meaning is a framework we see through. Derrida's notions of presence and absence of meanings can still function within the color of grammar. But the color of grammar itself is the place where I can't see meaning clearly—not because there are multiple meanings or opposing meanings, but because I see that what I took for meaning is only a boundary that I came to believe was there. It is not the arbitrariness of the sign that is at issue, but seeing the wood and metal that constitutes the materials of the sign. In light of this context, I have also given attention to the very materiality of the specific avant-garde texts that I am looking at, suggesting that the ways in which these objects of language were physically made also attests to a particular approach to language as a material. Respectively, I will be looking at the physical nature of Gertrude Stein's notebooks for *Tender Buttons*; the art object that is *La Prose du Transsibérien*; and, the original 1923 published version of *Lunar Baedeker*. I will examine the relationship these physical objects have to color as an intermediary force.

Color is both a substance and a surface in Wittgenstein's numerous examples. The dual and multiple nature of color, I believe, positions it uniquely to do critical work that falls outside of definition and meaning. Several Wittgenstein scholars, including Wittgenstein's primary biographer, Ray Monk, have addressed the possible relationship between phenomenology and late Wittgenstein's work. Monk, though not in total agreement with other scholars, admits "That Wittgenstein's later work can, in some sense, be correctly described as 'phenomenological' – if not as 'phenomenology' – is something about which there is fairly general agreement" (315). The distinction between phenomenology and phenomenological is an important

distinction. Wittgenstein does not deny there is a physics of color or a psychology of color in *Remarks*, but he is clear that neither of these approaches of physics or psychology are his method. Wittgenstein writes in *Remarks*, “there is no such thing as phenomenology, but there are indeed phenomenological problems” (I: 53). Later in the text when he concludes that the opening proposition to section two cannot be one of physics, he suggests that “Here the temptation to believe in a phenomenology, something midway between science and logic is very great” (II:3). The latter proposition suggests that the temptation is not phenomenology itself but something “between science and logic.” Once again, color has brought us to a curious kind of between space.

I am interested in pursuing through the example of color, and avant-garde poetics unusual and complex employment of color, the strange space that color inhabits, and how that relationship functions within language itself. Ray Monk, commenting on section two, proposition #3, in *Remarks* writes,

Propositions like ‘A patch cannot be at the same time both red and green’, Wittgenstein tells his class, are not based upon observations, and yet, equally, they are ‘not reckoned’ to be propositions of logic. They therefore seem to occupy a place somewhere between the realm of the observable (science) and logic, thus tempting one, as he would later put it, to ‘believe in a phenomenology’. What Wittgenstein is doing here is not characterising these propositions as synthetic a priori, but rather trying to understand and explain how the ‘bewitched’ philosopher might so regard them. (318)

These propositions then are not so much working through various truth functions of logical propositions in language, but are looking at how we come to construct a belief in the propositions that is prior to actual observations and our ordinary use. Further on in his essay, Monk addresses the brief period between spring of 1929 and October 1929 where Wittgenstein takes up the term “phenomenology” but then abandons it. Monk believes that it was after October 1929 that Wittgenstein “switched to the view found in the *Big Typescript / Philosophical Grammar* that is summed up in the slogan ‘phenomenology is grammar.’ This slogan I take to mean something like: the problems that one might be tempted to solve with phenomenology are better addressed through an analysis of grammar” (326). What Wittgenstein means by “phenomenology” and “grammar” must be unraveled. Grammar in this sense seems positioned in that strange middle space or between space that cannot be resolved by either science or logic alone. The Wittgensteinian sense of grammar is placed in an unusual position and is not what we normally associate with grammar rules or regulation of usage.

Hans Sluga addresses the difficulty and unusual position of Wittgenstein’s grammar in his chapter on “Our Unsurveyable Grammar” in his book on Wittgenstein. Picking up with *Philosophical Investigations* and the later period of work, Sluga writes,

The crucial philosophical difficulty turns out to be that ‘our grammar lacks surveyability’ (PI, 122). In order to appreciate the nature of this difficulty we must understand that ‘grammar’ is meant to be here not a system of abstract grammatical rules but more generally the organized pattern of our

linguistic practices. It is the actual structure or order of our language game that proves to be unsurveyable. In fact, we should not be thinking only about language and language games. The human form of life—our society, our culture, our history—each has its grammar and of each such grammar we must say that it lacks surveyability. (98)

Wittgensteinian grammar then is far removed from how we “ordinarily” think about grammar; it is closer to the nuances and subtleties of language that are created through habit, culture, and use. For Wittgenstein, the only way to recognize these grammars is through the study of *description* rather than *explanation*.

We must look at how we come to think *through* language rather than questioning what we think *about* language. Wittgenstein’s late work is primarily concerned with the problem of looking versus thinking; he writes in *Philosophical Investigations* in relationship to how we use the word “games,” “if you look at them you will not see something that is common to all, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that. To repeat: don’t think, but look!” (#66). We only see the difference when we look at how language around a concept is used versus trying to think our way through a particular concept. The Wittgensteinian approach is not to be dismissive of other methods of philosophy or philosophizing, but is simply a different way of working, and is a particular way of working with and looking at language itself.

Wittgenstein scholar Eugene Troxell also emphasizes the important difference between thinking and looking, and explains how this difference was the unraveling of the *Tractatus* and its logical propositions as explanation of what can be said:

The explanation would have been perfectly reasonable if language actually had the characteristics which he, in common with many other philosophers, had assumed it had. The prejudice lay in his idea of what it was that needed to be explained. We, in effect, think we are ‘looking at,’ ‘noticing,’ ‘observing,’ how the language functions, when we are actually just thinking about what we are already convinced is there to ‘see.’ ‘The more narrowly we examine actual language, the sharper becomes the conflict between it and our requirement. (For the crystalline purity of logic was, of course, not a result of investigation it was a requirement’ (#107). (4)

Wittgenstein’s initial search in his early work was for absolute clarity in language via logic, but it was precisely because of this search that he is led to his later philosophy that gives rise to the questioning of what we think we see clearly, and how often what we are “seeing” is not the reality of the object or concept, but a frame of our thinking *through* which we are thinking the object or concept. This fundamental shift in Wittgenstein’s work is what makes his late work so difficult to understand; in every example Wittgenstein gives us in *Philosophical Investigations* and his later work, the fundamental structures of our thinking are challenged. As Troxell succinctly puts it,

The problem is that it is extremely difficult for thinking not to influence observation. This is particularly true when we are attempting to observe something which is ‘always before our eyes’ (#129). Once we have learned how something is, that’s the way it is for us. It’s as though we lose our ability to observe it anew without our old knowledge assuring us of

what is really there to observe. So we think we are observing when we are merely reminding ourselves of what we already ‘know.’ (4)

Patterns of thinking then are the kind of frame through which we see the world. The importance of observation for Wittgenstein, and perhaps also where he departs from phenomenology, is not in the object itself that we are looking at, but in the recognition of how we structure our thinking and observations through language. For Wittgenstein, it is language itself that demonstrates our use of language. Within that use, the fissures and inconsistency of use highlights language’s constructedness. The constructedness and construction of language is the “unsurveyability of grammar.” One cannot merely talk about or prescribe a set of rules to understand this function of language. The “unsurveyability of grammar” can really only be seen through examples.

Sluga writes that Wittgenstein, “goes on to suggest that we need ‘a surveyable representation’ that can generate ‘the comprehension that consists in ‘seeing connections.’ The concept of a surveyable representation, he adds, ‘signifies our form of representation, how we see things’” (99). The way Wittgensteinian grammar is made visible is through examples not through rules, and it is what those examples show, not what they are about, that is their significance. The representation itself, or example, is not something that represents a concept, but illustrates how we think representation works in the world. The importance of “surveyability,” or in the German, *übersichtlich*, Sluga elaborates: “It belongs, moreover, to the vocabulary of visual terms that dot Wittgenstein’s prose everywhere, from the *Tractatus*, to his last notes. Like the rest of this vocabulary Wittgenstein uses the term ‘übersichtlich,’ almost always in a metaphorical fashion. Only occasionally does he employ it in its

literal meaning. He does so, for instance, when he speaks of the color-octahedron as being ‘a surveyable representation of the grammatical rules of our color concepts (PR, p.52)’ (99). The connection of “surveyable grammar” and color here is of great significance, especially when we also consider that the problem of the *Tractatus* lies in the “color incompatibility” problem. Color then, particularly as Wittgenstein’s last work demonstrates, is hardly an arbitrary subject.

Color as an example is of utmost importance because of how it illustrates Wittgenstein’s concept of grammar. The inconsistencies of color concepts (as a surface, illumination, opacity, or part of the visual field) are the perfect illustration of a surveyable representation of our unsurveyable grammar. This is not to say that color is *the* explanation of language, but is rather a particular example that demonstrates one of many facets that function within language. Grammar in the Wittgensteinian sense is also not the rule-governed patterns one ordinarily associates with grammar, but the actual use of language that does not adhere to absolute rules. What is surveyable is not intended in any sense to be regulating or rule-enforcing as one might associate with the term “surveillance.” According to the *OED*, surveillance and being under the eye of the law has a much later origin dating back to 1799. To survey, though, has a much older origin dating back to 1467 carrying the connotation of how one might survey a landscape: “To examine and ascertain the condition, situation, or value of, formally or officially, e.g. the boundaries, tenure, value, etc. of an estate, a building or structure, accounts, or the like; more widely, to have the oversight of, supervise.” Wittgenstein’s *übersichtlich* carries this latter sense with it.

For Wittgenstein, a complete overview of our “grammar” is not possible. That is to say a complete system that encompasses all aspects of language is not possible. Color, in what it offers through example, in this sense, is not an overview of all grammar or language, but the highlighting of one particular aspect. The complexity of how we use color concepts, and other concepts for that matter, and our inconsistencies in language is only visible from a particular viewpoint, but that is not to say there is only one viewpoint. The only way for Wittgenstein to address this complexity is *through* example, not through an explanation of language itself. Language is operative in the world, not a reflective exercise of thought. Color, too, as illustrated through Merleau-Ponty, holds an interesting position as both object in the world that I perceive, but is also a fundamental element of my perception. The double nature of color is what connects so closely to language. The complexity of how I see color in the world, and the simultaneous moment of how I look through color *is* the result of my language and color concepts. Thus, color is significant because it is in the world, but it is also *how* I see the world. By looking at the use of color concepts, the discrepancy of these two worlds comes to light, and it is this discrepancy that makes me recognize the framework, not of what I am seeing, but of how I see. It is at this juncture or crossroads that I now turn to the avant-garde.

### **Stein Meets Wittgenstein**

I aim to investigate the ways in which the avant-garde’s unusual use of syntax, form, and color is so much more than an experiment in the service of challenging tradition through radical methods. Scholars of the avant-garde often read the poets’ or

artists' work as a challenge to traditional form. I argue, that while this is true on one level, what is read as challenging (and I mean that in both senses of unusual form and also difficulty) is actually a method of working in poetics that touches what Wittgenstein would call the "surveyable representation of grammar." Significantly, the texts that I have chosen to examine in every case exceed the boundaries of print culture and the book as codex. In all cases, these texts are, in a certain sense, beyond the limit of the book as linear object that we read. The archive, the art object, and the book that attempts to undo linear reading are the focus of this study because these unusual forms offer visual representations that suggest different orders of thinking. In examining these particular texts, I suggest that they provide a reader with an experience of the text that is closer to the emphasis Wittgenstein places on the idea of looking rather than thinking. The text as object must be taken into consideration along with what it is presumably "saying." Such a method does not necessarily *say* anything about grammar (although Gertrude Stein of course does). The poetic avant-garde's radical use of color is a sign-post that signals a change or shift in the structure or framework of how we think, rather than changing the presentation of the object or subject we are looking at in a poem. I connect the emphasis on structure and framing to a Wittgensteinian kind of grammar rather than to a literal or "ordinary" understanding of grammar. The poetic avant-garde brings the framework or structure of language to the foreground to illustrate its variability or instability and demonstrates what I am calling the color of grammar. The method and process that makes this visualizing and way of looking— and an alternative method of writing and describing— possible is the color of grammar.

The comparison of Wittgenstein, the philosophy of language, and the contemporary avant-garde is already well established. As proponent of the contemporary avant-garde and the emergent language poets of the late 1980s and early '90s (Lyn Hejinian, Charles Bernstein, Bob Perelman, and Susan Howe), Marjorie Perloff has argued in her book *Wittgenstein's Ladder*, "the curious collision of the 'mystical' with the close and commonsensical study of actual language practices . . . make Wittgenstein . . . a natural ally for the poets and artists of our time" (182). Hejinian's own work has also been deeply influenced by her study of Wittgenstein. Charles Bernstein's comparison of Wittgenstein and avant-garde poetics, particularly that of Gertrude Stein, in his Harvard thesis in 1972 was perhaps the first attempt to provoke a critical understanding of the relationship between the two. Here, he explores the idea and function of knowing within the context of Wittgenstein and Gertrude Stein's particular attention to "use." Marjorie Perloff expertly examines how Wittgenstein's examples of grammar inform the non-descriptive nature of Stein's language in *Wittgenstein's Ladder*. However, the examination or employment of Wittgenstein in this particular avant-garde context always focuses on *Philosophical Investigations* (1950) and/or the earlier *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus* (1922). The role that color may play in the work of the early avant-garde in conjunction with Wittgenstein's use and function of color in *Remarks* is under-represented or absent. Grammar alone in relationship to Stein has received some attention most notably in Lyn Hejinian's discussion of the nonlinearity of grammar and landscape in Stein, and in Keith Waldrop's study of the structure of the portrait and the anti-descriptive nature of grammar in Stein. Nevertheless, color and grammar has largely gone unexamined,

and if mentioned at all, slides under the description of representation in the poetry. Moreover, Wittgenstein is seldom studied in relationship to early avant-garde poets other than Gertrude Stein.

Wittgenstein's *Remarks on Color* is not so much a theorization *about* color or an *explanation of* color, but rather is an *examination* of the relationship *between* our uses of color concepts. Much like the Delaunays who theorized color and practiced in painting the movement and alterations of perception through the use of simultaneous color in their visual art, Wittgenstein, I argue, shows a movement within our concepts and logic of color through the "contrast of similarities." The similarity is in the color, but our use is the contrast. He also explains that "In philosophy it is not enough to learn in every case *what* is to be said about a subject, but also *how* one must speak about it. We are always having to begin by learning the method of tackling it" (III: #43). The emphasis on "how" one speaks rather than "what" one speaks exemplifies Wittgenstein's notion of looking at the use of language.

Goethe's influence on Wittgenstein is well documented, and we know for a fact that he had taken up *The Theory of Colours* before writing his own *Remarks on Color*. But all scholars writing on Wittgenstein's *Remarks* come to little conclusion of how and why Goethe was influential because Wittgenstein actually comments very little on Goethe. However, if color is not a theorization of color, but actually an actualization of Wittgensteinian grammar, then the connection to Goethe is not to be found in the subject of color, but in how Goethe divides and writes about color. It seems Wittgenstein would not look so much to what Goethe says, but to *how* Goethe

says it. It would have been Goethe's attempts to create unity of color concepts that Wittgenstein would have been interested in as a particular kind of language game.

Wittgenstein's study of color is unique because of its multiple examples of similarities in color concepts and simultaneous constant contrast of use. To tackle a problem in Wittgenstein's philosophy is not to ask what it is about, but to examine the construction and contours of a thing or concept through use because similarity is not exact. My question then is, how might this contrast be its own kind of grammar? Color, in relationship to language, might be approached in the avant-garde for its effect on perceptual and conceptual understanding of both color and language with the aid of both the Delaunays' theory and practice of simultaneous color and Wittgenstein's *Remarks*.

This dissertation, following the line of philosophy traced above, will begin with an examination of Wittgenstein's *Remarks on Color*, while close reading specific examples in the text as the illumination of what Wittgenstein means by grammar as established by Wittgenstein scholarship elsewhere, and the way in which these examples make visible the framework of language that holds up our color concepts, and what that framework reveals about our language and perception.

### **The Color of Grammar as an Avant-garde Method**

Looking at the trajectory in which color has been discussed in philosophy from ancient rhetoric to Goethe's treatise in *Theory of Colours*, in Chapter One, "The Surface of Language and the Color of Grammar," I arrive at Ludwig Wittgenstein's late work on color and its evolution from his earlier propositions on color in

*Tractatus-Logico Philosophicus*. Wittgenstein illustrates the difficulty of color concepts both in *Philosophical Investigations* and in his *Remarks on Color*. In relationship to language, color is never simply the thing we name because our uses are variable. Wittgenstein refuses to come to a conclusion on color, and causes us to rethink the stability of color concepts. His examples on color show us how language constructs a thing while also showing how language can also not contain a thing. Wittgenstein seems to suggest that we are all at times, in fact, color blind. How, then, through an investigation of language and color, color and juxtaposition, and repetition and displacement, might we come to read color in the avant-garde, not as emotive representation, but as the invention of a new grammar? The work of the Delaunays and their theory of color in painting helps a reader see how color is connected to movement, and for Wittgenstein a similar movement connects to language. Upon further exploration and unfolding of what I call the color of grammar *vis-à-vis* Wittgenstein's philosophy of language, I suggest the avant-garde exemplifies the color of grammar in their employment of color in their poetics.

Numerous scholars have noted and commented on the connection between Stein and Picasso and Stein and painting and the relationship to Cubism; however, the philosophical relationship of color to Stein and avant-garde poetry has remained largely un-theorized. Scholars have addressed the use of color in Stein occasionally; however, her use of abstraction, syntax, and sound receives far more critical attention. Most notable among those who have mentioned the use of color at all is Lyn Hejinian in her "Two Stein Talks" where she observes in Stein's *Portraits and Repetition* that Stein explained how, "I tried to include color and movement." But Hejinian argues

that Stein “wanted generally to understand the qualities of things, in themselves (their color) and also as they color our feelings and thoughts” (101). Hejinian does not linger on this point, although earlier in the essay she cites a connection to Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception* and his idea that “ ‘philosophy puts essences back into existence’ ” (97). Hejinian’s suggestion that Stein was interested in the “quality of things” seems to draw from Merleau-Ponty and the interest in what is “visible” in the object. However, Hejinian, though looking at color in Stein, does not mention any of Merleau-Ponty’s discussions of color, and Hejinian’s link to color is surprisingly oversimplified here.

In Chapter Two, “The Balance of Color, Collapsing, Folding, and Not Confusing: Gertrude Stein’s *Tender Buttons*,” I look at how Stein’s use of color goes beyond the emotive power objects have on us and how they “color” thoughts and feelings. Rather than use color to reveal the “depth” of the object, Stein uses color to expose the surface of our thinking. Stein’s use of color does not so much bring the object and the reader “in tune” with each other, as her use of color makes us aware of a Wittgensteinian grammar through color. Her use of color serves as a kind of punctuation or preposition to a new grammar we have yet to learn how to read.

What is the function of color in *Tender Buttons*? Amid Stein’s Objects, Food, and Rooms in *Tender Buttons* one finds “A Red Stamp,” “A Red Hat,” “A Blue Coat,” “Red Roses,” “A Brown,” “A White Hunter,” “It Was Black, Black Took,” and “Orange,” “Orange,” “Oranges,” “Orange In.” Stein’s unusual and “ungrammatical” employment of color illustrates, as I will show, not the “nonsense” of her text, but an alternate grammar that relies on instability and movement to illuminate the surface of

language, and a use of color and syntax that is very close to the problem of how “our grammar lacks surveyability.” Using the established method of color and Wittgensteinian grammar examined in Chapter One, Chapter Two will look at how this unique practice of language manifests in *Tender Buttons*, and how Stein blurs poetic conventions, such as stanza and line, paragraph and stanza, as well as color references to create similar contrasts that exist in the idea of simultaneous color and Wittgenstein’s breakdown of everyday color logic. Stein’s use of instability of specific meaning and standard syntax reveals a framework in language because it displaces our conceptual anticipation of an idea, not through metaphor or simile, but through the movement of the surface context of the poem. Stein’s instabilities are situated within the ordinary grammar of language. It seems possible that what is so often characterized in Stein scholarship as “nonsense” is simply an alternative or subversive grammar that potentially already resides within the grammar we ordinarily understand to be the order of language. Because of the way in which color may move between genres and is potentially destabilizing, I’m suggesting that poetic practices, like Stein’s subversive grammar, are a kind of color of grammar. Color may be movement if it is the contrast of similarities. Rethinking color as a new kind of grammar within the established structure of grammar allows for a multiplicity of language to be read simultaneously because of how it slips in and out of view.

Color becomes a function in the work of avant-garde poets such as Blaise Cendrars and Mina Loy that we must reexamine in light of what I propose to call the ability to read the surface of language through simultaneity and color. Cendrars directly collaborated with Sonia Delaunay, creating what they christened “*le premier*

*livre simultané*; Cendrars wrote, “the simultaneous contrast of colors and the text form depths and movement of novel inspiration.” *La Prose du Transsibérien* is a highly visual text as an artwork and a poem, and it is not only a Technicolor kind of poem in terms of its descriptions, but, in the collaborative art piece illustrated by Sonia Delaunay in 1913, the poem *is* color. Each section of the text is given a color and blocks of color intermingle as if they were stanzas or paragraphs. In Chapter Three, “The Geography of Color and Simultaneity Revisited: Blaise Cendrars and Sonia Delaunay-Terk’s *La Prose du Transsibérien*, I study the way in which the simultaneous color of *La Prose du Transsibérien* as an original “simultaneous book,” in light of Wittgenstein’s critique of color, illustrates not just an experimental moment in the avant-garde, but the complex intermediating work color can achieve in a text. *La Prose du Transsibérien* uses a variety of forms of color, from the color inks of the actual printed text, to Delaunay’s color composition, to Cendrars’ use of color words.

However, most scholarship on the poem neglects the use of visual color and Cendrars’ color references. While Marjorie Perloff and Jay Bochner have noted that both visual and textual elements should be considered together, little scholarship rigorously examines the relationship between color in the verbal and visual. Only recently, in 2012, has one essay emerged—from Katherine Shingler—but even in her attention to color in both the verbal and the visual, she comes to characterize color as a way of highlighting already seemingly established meanings in the poem. What my work seeks to examine, as in Stein, is how the use of color actually destabilizes meaning and structured form to illuminate the very constructedness through which we read and experience a text. An examination of Wittgenstein’s various forms of color

helps to inform our understanding of the multiple forms of color in *La Prose du Transsibérien*. And Cendrars' and Delaunay's use of color changes our perception of color because of how it is used in the avant-garde text.

The work between genres that Cendrars and Delaunay practice, Mina Loy's work also engages in, though more so with regard to her examinations of light as it pertains to color. Trained first in the visual arts as a painter, Mina Loy worked in many mediums. She started writing poetry in the nineteen-teens, acted briefly in New York, designed lampshades in the '20s, and worked on small inventions in the 1940s. Her poetry always employs a strong sense of color and movement and a certain breakdown of stable concepts, particularly in connection with her views on sexuality and the body. Loy also theorized the function of light in much of her unpublished work, often connecting light to physical intensity and the body. Influenced by Futurism, and its own fascination with speed and movement in time, Loy engages certain Futurist elements while also countering the misogyny of the Futurists. Her "Feminist Manifesto" is often cited as a response to F. T. Marinetti's "Futurist Manifesto." Frequently sexually explicit and daring, many of Loy's color references are used in conjunction with explorations of the body, particularly in her early poems.

In Chapter Four, "Mina Loy and Surface Color and Transformative Lighting," I examine Loy's focus on light and surfaces that let light in and also transform light to forge the connection to color. Color is in many senses connected to light. Looking at Loy's first published work, *Lunar Baedeker* from 1923, I examine the original sequencing and revisions to this text as a means of revealing a more avant-garde gesture in the ordering of the book itself. The two-part structure of the book, I suggest,

is not a linear chronology, but a kind of reflection of past and present against and through one another. Loy in her poetics uses both imagery of light and color to suggest something of the shiftable and changeable in her language.

Her ideas of reflection and surface are also made apparent through her descriptions of her inventions which demonstrate a similar fascination with the transformative properties of light. Loy's poetry, far from being just winsome or imaginative as some scholars find it to be, tackles the complexity of language through her unusual syntax. Loy's use of mirroring between poems brings us to a different understanding of the surface of accepted notions of femininity and sexuality. But rather than focus primarily on issues of femininity and sexuality as the primary motivation of her poetics, I approach Loy from the idea that her language achieves an effect that unravels normative conceptions of femininity and sexuality primarily through the poetics rather than talking "about" concepts. This reading requires that the darker and more fanciful aspects of her work be reconsidered not for what they say at face value, but for how the accumulation of language makes these tropes recognizable as a framework of normative thought.

## **Conclusion**

The work of this dissertation is two fold: the first goal is to reexamine Wittgenstein's enigmatic *Remarks on Color* not for what they tell us about color but for how they create a visible example of the ways in which language is both constructive and limiting. While this may seem obvious at first, it is the paradox that we must gradually come to see that is the framework and limitation for how we view

the world. Color becomes the primary link because it exists in the objective world but is also fundamental to my subjective way of seeing. The double nature of color allows it to become a catalyst that enables linguistic critique, and that cannot be neatly contained. The philosophical interests of this dissertation look at color as an intermediary mediator that opens a kind of “between” space in oppositional thinking; the work on the avant-garde examines the poetics of avant-garde as the exemplar of how color as a “between” may be put into praxis. The second goal lies in my intention to recast how we think about the work the avant-garde is doing, and how what is often perceived as fanciful or fantastic experimentation actually accomplishes specific and critical work with regard to language and notions of description and representation. The poetic avant-garde is not just an “anti” or “non” movement, but really emphasizes the necessity to understand and reimagine the world through a different kind of “sense.” These particular avant-garde texts must be read alongside of their material existence (as notebooks in the archive for Stein, as the artists’ book for Cendrars and Delaunay, and as an experiment in content and sequencing for Loy) because it is with and through the text-as-object that these works create a particular unbuilding of linear reading of the book as codex. Through the unbuilding of the text, a “surveyable representation of grammar” is brought into view. The use of color signals this change in grammar, and so it is not in any sense that these works are “about” color, but rather color highlights how to read these unusual texts, becoming a part of the poetics of the works themselves.

Color may not be primarily linguistic, but that does not mean that we do not have linguistic ways of talking about it or that it is not subject to our language. Color

may be outside of language, but it is also within it simultaneously.

Simultaneity is needed for its employment of paradox because color is within language and outside of it. The exteriority of color to language is also contained within language itself. Only this is not the language we normally use. This other “use” of language exists within language but outside of our understanding; consequently, we come to classify it as only nonsense. Precisely at this seeming impasse, the color of grammar must be understood as simply a different kind of “sense” within, and even fundamental to, the structures of our language, a framework we can only see by recognizing language as a surface.

The methods set forth in this dissertation, while particular to these specific texts as I have situated them, may also have other applications in literature. The work of Samuel Beckett’s theater of the absurd, though a later avant-garde, for example, might serve as a different example of how we not only read, but experience a text. His late trilogy, *Not I*, *Footfalls*, and *Rockaby* and the specifics of the staging of these texts to be performed in almost total black-out are yet another example of how a more material aspect of the text affects the experience of how one “reads” it. The current experimentation in the contemporary work of the language poets Susan Howe, Charles Bernstein, Keith Waldrop, and Rae Armantrout could also serve as exemplars for continuation of this particular kind of work that challenges not only how we approach and read a text, but the very contours of our thinking as well.

## CHAPTER ONE: SIMULTANEOUS LANGUAGE AND THE COLOR OF GRAMMAR

### The Question of Color

Humans see in color. Color is. But color also is not. While the physics of color relies on wavelengths of light and this is what we perceive, human perception of color is never an actual property of the object. What is seen is always an unstable collection of reflection, refraction, and absorption. While color is measurable, and we may know it through other means, mathematics, for example, the precision of color humans can never completely, accurately perceive because color perception itself is inherently unstable. However, color is basic to what I *see*.

Goethe in his introduction to *Theory of Colours* (1810) writes, “We observed that all nature manifests itself by means of colors to the sense of sight. We now assert, extraordinarily . . . , that the eye sees no form, inasmuch as light, shade, and color together constitute that which to our vision distinguishes object from object” (xxvi). It is from Goethe that Ludwig Wittgenstein takes up the subject of color in his *Remarks on Color*; although, Wittgenstein is not in agreement with Goethe on many points. As Wittgenstein scholar Zeno Vendler notes, Wittgenstein “is interested in color as a sensation, as an experience” (401). Color as both inherent to *how* I see and as part of *what* I experience positions color uniquely. Color is fundamental to my experience of the world that simply seems a given, and I can never be sure if other humans perceive color exactly as I do. Color’s existence in the world, and my experience and sensation of it attests to its unique characteristics. Unlike hardness, shape, or objects themselves that I can physically and tactilely encounter in the world, color is limited to what I can

perceive and see. While I can see objects and shapes, color is the only entity limited by visual perception. Some synesthetes can hear color or taste sound, but there is no uniformity to these experiences and they are not a universal human experience. Color in general human understanding and experience (which we will also critique later) seems limited to my visual perception. Following Wittgenstein, the assumed perception and experience of color leads us to align color with language. Language too carries with it an aspect of expectation or general belief that I can “say what I mean.” In this sense, color is like language because language often seems to inherently exist in my ordinary world, and yet I can never be sure that someone understands exactly what I mean. Both color and language are so completely graphed into my experience of the world that the constant change they undergo, I am often no longer able to see. Color for Wittgenstein in his *Remarks on Color* becomes a visible example of grammar. The question of color as a visible grammar in the avant-garde and its function in poetics is the question this dissertation takes up.

### **Simultaneous Color Contrast**

Robert and Sonia Delaunay, both avant-garde abstract painters in the early nineteen-teens and twenties, were interested in Michel-Eugène Chevreul’s 1839 work *The Law of Simultaneous Color Contrast* because of the possibility of movement through the juxtaposition of color. The idea that color is not static, but perceptually appears different based on what surrounds, is the basis of Chevreul’s theory. Color itself may even be thought of as a kind of movement. Color, like sound, is measurable

in terms of wavelengths that are a certain kind of movement,<sup>5</sup> but I do not wish to try to make direct correlates to sound or science in either case. My primary interest in color is not in defining color, but is in looking at how color may be used to “see” other facets in language itself because of how we perceive and commonly talk about color.

The idea of simultaneity in color, first developed by Michel-Eugène Chevreul in *The Law of Simultaneous Color Contrast*, theorizes complementary colors and their affect on our perception when placed in opposition. Chevreul’s main principle proves that “In the case where the eye sees at the same time two contiguous colors, they will appear as dissimilar as possible, both in their optical composition and in the height of their tone” (61). In other words, complementary colors in contrast to each other affect how we perceive them. Some will appear brighter when held side by side, others darker and more saturated. Grey, for example will actually appear to take on different shades when contrasted with various colors despite the fact that it is the same shade of grey. Our perception is affected by what color surrounds another color. Color creates a kind of context, but it is a context that shifts depending on which individual color is used. In one of his experiments using grey strips of paper held against different backgrounds, Chevreul concludes, “Now as these modifications make the stripes appear different from what they really are, I give to them the name of *simultaneous*

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<sup>5</sup> There is not yet a direct correlate between sound waves and color waves: “All visible wavelengths are quite small on a human scale, being measured in nanometers (billionths of a meter abbreviated nm)” (14). Audible sound exists at a much lower frequency. Measured in Hertz, the visible spectrum of light is around  $10^{14}$  Hz while audible sound is roughly between  $10^6$  and  $10^1$  Hz. Sound wavelengths are slower than the wavelengths in the visible color spectrum. The measurement of wavelengths in visible light follows the spectrum of violet, blue, green, yellow, orange, red. Based simply on the frequency of nanometers, we could hypothesize that blue would be a higher/faster pitch based on its range of 450 to 490 nanometers, while red with a range of 630 to 760 nanometers would be lower/slower. Violet is the fastest with a frequency 380 to 450. It might be possible to find a way to accurately convert color into a sound correlate with the proper equation; however, I will leave that to the physicists. Waldman, Gary. *Introduction to Light: The Physics of Light, Vision, and Color*. Prentice-Hall: Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1983.

*contrast of colours*; and call contrast of tone the modification in intensity of colour, and contrast of color that which affects the *optical composition* of each *juxtaposed* colour” (59, emphasis added). In short, Chevreul proved how our color perception is not constant.

In the introduction of *The New Art of Color: The Writings of Robert and Sonia Delaunay*, Arthur Cohen notes, “one suspects that Chevreul gave the Delaunay’s simultaneity. Modern life helped; the dynamism and explosive polemics of the futurists helped also, but Chevreul gave the Delaunay’s and the 20th century a term that was essentially scientific, while permitting considerable rhetorical extension” (xvi). I am interested in rhetorical extension because of how it relates to poetry, language, and grammar. It is not a theory of colors or the physics of colors, but color extended to a dimension of signification that is at the utmost boundary of that signification. The Delaunays, of course, also put simultaneity into practice, experimenting with what is possible beyond scientific principles. Both Robert and Sonia did not write extensively; *The New Art of Color* has collected unpublished papers and the essays that they did publish during their lifetime. In a short essay written around 1913 titled “Historical Notes on Painting: Color and the Simultaneity,” Robert Delaunay writes,

It was the inspired Chevreul who observed the laws of simultaneous colors in his theoretical studies. Seurat was aware of them, but Seurat did not have the audacity to push composition to the point of breaking with all conventional methods of painting. In his work there is the retinal image, the image in the popular sense of imagery. Line and chiaroscuro are still

the plastic basis of his art. (52)

Part of the work Delaunay undertook was a break with the traditional concept of art. Working against the idea of the line, which historically had always been primary with color secondary, he located the necessary shift in a new development of color, line, and a break with the past that did not just invert it, but transformed it. He saw that transformation as the movement of color through simultaneity.

What Delaunay describes here, closely echoes Peter Burger's thesis in his book *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* and the specific work the avant-garde historically accomplished in relationship to what he demarcates as the ideology of aestheticism and the idea of autonomous art. Basing his argument on the history of the social development of art and ideological function, Burger locates the limits of the development of art as social function coming to an impasse in the 19th century, because the function of art in society had come to a point where its content was "functionless." According to Burger, "functionless" art was the viewpoint of bourgeois art. The only way for art to regain a function in society would be to return to a praxis of art in society that "art for art's sake" and the aesthetes had eschewed. It is the avant-garde's position and "manifestation" (carefully distinguished from "work" in Burger) that poses an interesting paradigm shift. For Burger, art's self-critique of art as institution and ideology, in relationship to historical progress, is made possible by the avant-garde's position in history and approach to the art object. Burger argues, "what is negated is not an earlier form of art (style) but art as an institution that is unassociated with the life praxis of men" (49). The avant-garde critiques the ideology of aestheticism because it returns art to life rather than functioning in a realm of ideals.

However, “life” is defined not as integration into the bourgeois life, but a praxis of life in the work itself. Art into life and not life into art would end up a continuation of ideology and not a method of critique at all. To quote Burger, “on the contrary, [the avant-gardistes] assent to the aesthetes’ rejection of the world and its means-end rationality. What distinguishes them from the latter is the attempt to organize a new life praxis from a basis in art” (49). This movement towards authentic self-critique only occurs for Burger in relation to a dialectical critique *because of* aestheticism itself. As part of a dialectic, the revolutionary work of the avant-garde would not be possible without the existence of aestheticism.

It was his idea of transformation over inversion that Delaunay claims he also breaks with cubist methods:

Since cubism shattered the traditionally conventional line . . . . One could not return to archaic methods. Cubism has not succeeded, despite its wish, in creating volume, because it was within its destructive transition. It issues from the old (and with the old, one cannot make the new); cubism is the shattering of the old. Cubism heroically makes that phase of art which in its desire for a purely pictorial reality thrusts historically toward novel means and a universal goal. (38)

While cubism established an important break with the traditional line, according to Delaunay, cubism did not take that break far enough, and later fell back too closely on traditional methods of art. In another essay on the development of art, written between 1923 and 1924, Delaunay discusses other artists who had “germs of destruction” in their work. He claims they “recognize the necessity of a new language, but their wish

is far from reality. They confine themselves because they have not ventured forth and created the syntax, the vocabulary of this language” (41). The idea of destruction and a “new language” in painting tells us something about the visual. The painting itself becomes a language through a creative attempt that seeks to break completely with all tradition. This mode of avant-garde painting is perhaps no longer a “picture that is a mute poem,” but color that is a new language.

Delaunay gives the example of his use of color in the 1912 *Fenêtre* series as an example that “establishes . . . in 1912, at the center of cubism, the necessity for formal color in opposition to all cubism. [And it is the] first step toward architecture of new art.” Delaunay criticizes cubism and its use of color, claiming “they [the cubists] have used coloring like decalcomania”<sup>6</sup> (41). While this statement might be a bit self-aggrandizing, Delaunay claims that simultaneous color is not just simple color transfer, as in the decorative arts, but focus specifically on the function of color in a painting. For Delaunay, color is primary not secondary. Since color philosophically had often been thought of as decorative and secondary, Delaunay’s admonishment of cubism arises from the idea that, although, experimental, it still was not *primary*. Only through the erasure of a recognizable subject or object is a “new language” possible. Philosophically speaking, the idea of a shift in subject matter will also prove important to Wittgenstein where the primary nature of the “subject matter” will take a secondary role to *how* we talk about or distinguish subject matter to begin with.

While Robert Delaunay is by no means arguing for a dialectical critique as part of his work, as Burger does, what Delaunay suggests in the idea of a “new language”

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<sup>6</sup> Decalcomania is a type of overlay; “The process of transferring designs from prepared paper onto glass or porcelain. Origin mid 19th century: from French *décalcomanie*, from *décalquer* ‘transfer a tracing’ + *-manie* ‘-mania’ (with reference to the enthusiasm for the process in the 1860s)” (*OED*).

reverberates with the different praxis Burger theorizes in the avant-garde. What Delaunay locates in simultaneous color is an idea of color and movement that is connected to an urgency in life.

In his 1912 essay “Light,” that was written in poetic lines and later translated by Paul Klee into German, Delaunay writes, “simultaneity in light is the harmony, the rhythm of colors which create men’s sight. Human sight is endowed with the greatest reality since it comes to us directly from contemplation of the universe. // The eye is our highest sense, the one that communicates most closely with our brain, our consciousness, the idea of movement of the world, this movement is simultaneity” (195). Delaunay’s theorization is not just of color in general, but the “rhythm of color.” In modernist scholarship, movement is often theorized as the movement of the modern world. Edna Duffy, in *The Speed Handbook: Velocity, Pleasure, Modernism*, writes extensively on speed in the modern world, the popularization of the automobile, the moving picture, trains, and airplanes, and how we experience space” (18). For Duffy, speed “is not only a pleasure that has a politics; speed it turns out, is politics: the expression of a new order of the organization of global space” (19). Technological advances changed the way people both thought and interacted with the world. But I think we must also be careful to not over-simplify Delaunay’s use of movement. The idea of movement as connected to sight emphasizes perception, and sight is not an object of stasis, but movement itself, contemplation, and consciousness. The parallels Delaunay draws in his essay-poem are complex, connecting on multiple sensory levels. “Harmony” and “rhythm” are unusual to pair with the visual, but it is in this reworking of divisions that “new language” and simultaneity become possible. Movement itself

then is a kind of attunement between dissimilar forces, hearing and sight, subject and world, language and abstraction.

A few lines earlier in Delaunay's essay-poem we read, "the movement is provided by the relationships of uneven measures, of color contrasts among themselves and [it] constitutes reality" (195). Simultaneity is both connected to movement and contrasts in the world that constitute reality. However, the movement that Delaunay is interested in, while connected to an idea that reflects on what exists in the world, rests not on physical speed or the depiction of mechanical speed, but the movement that impresses the viewer through the experience of color and how that affects perception. Delaunay's movement is primarily perceptual and experiential instead of physical.

While Delaunay never really explains his term "reality" or what exactly he means by it, one can infer that it pertains to a connection with life and what humans perceive in the everyday world. Art historian, Gordon Hughes, in a careful study of Delaunay's use and "engagement" with modern optical theory, notes how the correlation between the retinal image in the brain's perception is worked out in Delaunay's painting. Hughes argues, "Delaunay is intent on showing not simply the structure of painting, but how it relates to the structure of the viewer's vision" (95). Delaunay's simultaneity returns to an emphasis on the viewer's vision and perception in relationship to the object. The work of something between both viewer and object carries with it echoes of phenomenology, and more specifically the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology where the "visible" is something that exists beyond a simple division of subject and object dualism.

Color for Merleau-Ponty in *The Visible and the Invisible* functions as a kind of bridge between what is seen in the world and the way in which we see it. For Delaunay, the alteration of perception is always connected to an idea of movement in color. The possible similarities to phenomenology here tell us something about the sense in which Wittgenstein uses color. While Wittgenstein specifically writes in *Remarks on Color* that “there is no phenomenology, but there are phenomenological questions,” his positioning of color to a re-examination of perception *vis-à-vis* how we think in language shows resemblances to phenomenology and also gives color a more primary significance in 20<sup>th</sup> century thought.

Delaunay’s color as movement differs from other artists at the time writing on color who locate color and its significance elsewhere. For example, in Kandinsky’s *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, color is connected to the spiritual. Kandinsky argues blue is the “most spiritual while yellow is the most earthly” (191). Delaunay’s repeated emphasis on “reality,” one could also argue exemplifies Peter Burger’s notion: “what distinguishes [the avant-gardistes] from [the aesthetes] is the attempt to organize the life praxis from a basis and art” (49). Rather than the idea of “art for art’s sake,” the avant-garde locates life *in* art. Life is not separate from art, nor is it the collective social use of art that uses art *for* life, but rather life must find its location in art to be able to achieve authentic self-critique. Self-critique for Burger is the only means through which any critique of dominant ideology is possible, and fosters progression in the historical trajectory of art; the avant-garde’s critique is unique work in its time because of how the avant-garde is positioned historically. In relationship to Delaunay, his emphasis on “reality” through simultaneity is a critique of the static

depiction of things in the world that had previously been the “content” of art. The idea of “reality” versus subjects as “content” also changes the relationship and position of subject and object. No longer is a subject simply viewing an object, but the emphasis on reality suggests an attunement with the world, and a kind of participation and sympathizing that is itself an aesthetic experience. I would also add that change in “reality” along with our linguistic relationship to the world. Delaunay’s radicalism, perhaps, also caused the break with cubism, because he saw the cubists as practicing another mode of Impressionism returning too much to one idea of content and subject matter even if it was an abstracted one.

Donald Kuspit in an essay explains the transformation of the subject in Delaunay’s *peinture pure*: “Such transformation achieves its climax in *peinture pure*, when the import of the subject matter is altogether abstracted and separated from its naive givenness and perception, as distinct from its simply being differentiated but not detached from it [the subject], as in Delaunay’s representational styles” (110). It is the detachment from *a clear subject matter* that differentiates Delaunay from the cubist painters. Kuspit also notes, “with the Cubist school, subject matter was pertinent, if not in the conventional school manner” (109). In examining the difference between Delaunay and the cubists, the idea of what is meant by “reality” in Delaunay becomes clear. If cubism was interested in transposing reality by flattening and abstracting it, simultaneity was interested in transforming it entirely to provide not a refigured subject, but a totally new construction of perception, and hence a “new language.”

Arthur Cohen writes in his introduction to *The New Art of Color* that Delaunay sought to extend the rhetoric of complementary colors (xvi). In extending the rhetoric

of complementary color and simultaneous contrast, and if color becomes a kind of language, new facets of language itself might emerge through this extension. Delaunay, of course, did directly work on language, but we can use the idea of color and simultaneity to approach the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein never mentions simultaneous color and there is no evidence that either party knew anything about the other; however, *Remarks on Color* engages color, not as a clear argument or theory (which is never his method), but as a simultaneous contrast of grammar and color logic. Engaging color in an almost eccentric fashion, Wittgenstein illuminates a kind of movement in language that unravels stable, static concepts of color through ordinary language. Wittgenstein creates a kind of movement in language where the stability of an ordinary sentence slips away like sand: “How can one have a transparent red, but not a transparent white?” (I: #174). The building of Wittgenstein’s propositions are a kind of unbuilding of our logic.

Between Wittgenstein’s unbuilding of logic and Delaunay’s nonrepresentational subject through simultaneous contrast exists a similar critique of rhetoric and grammar. The movement in Delaunay through color that alters the viewer’s perception is a comparable movement to Wittgenstein’s examination of color that alters the reader’s perception of how color is constructed in language. The simultaneous movement in Wittgenstein illustrates what I am calling the color of grammar. Grammar in this discussion is used in the manner of Wittgenstein and not as the text book kind of grammar we use in school. For Wittgenstein, grammar is not simply sets of rules, but a survey of how language functions and is used which does not conform to sets of rules, particularly when we deal with semantics. The reach of

Wittgensteinian grammar is so great that he also writes in *Philosophical Investigations* that it is not entirely visible for us. The color of grammar is something of the unseeable made visible through a critique of structure. Simultaneity or juxtaposition allows for movement, and the movement itself makes visible the color of grammar.

One could argue Wittgenstein unbuilds logic in most of his late works. However, what distinguishes *Remarks on Color* from his other works is that Wittgenstein takes up a subject (which is also never his subject) that directly correlates to perception which is quite different from his use of the builders or family resemblances in *Philosophical Investigations*. Delaunay in his essay “Light” writes,

Our comprehension is cooperative with our *perception*. *Let us try to see.*

Auditory perception does not suffice for our knowledge of the universe; it has no *depth*.

Its movement is *successive*, it is a kind of mechanism; *its principle is the time of mechanical* clocks which, like them, has no relation to our perception of *visual movement in the Universe*.

*This is the evenness of things in geometry.*

Its character makes it resemble *the Object conceived geometrically*.

(195, emphasis original).

Color rhythm and movement are not successive but simultaneous. Delaunay is against succession and the linear. While Delaunay, perhaps, unfairly privileges what is seen over what is heard, the idea that comprehension has something more in common with the simultaneous and not successive suggests a complexity to our perception. The world is not a unity or succession of logic, but a complex layering and networking of

multiplicity, the simultaneous composition of that which we can see and sense. It is movement of more than one entity at once, and, as Delaunay states earlier, part of “uneven measures.” The difference between successive and simultaneous, between auditory and visual, is the difference between a simple linear concept or perspective and the difference between paradox where two contradictory concepts or perspective can be held simultaneously. Simultaneity expresses more than a paradox; it is a movement. As movement, simultaneity is not the concept of paradox, but the movement of “uneven measures.” It is the moment of our perception that occurs within the complexity of thought and perception that happens alongside teleological thought that ends in an idea.

Poet Blaise Cendrars, writing on Delaunay and his method of painting, better explains how simultaneity occurs in perception when he describes the perspective Delaunay makes possible in his painting of the Eiffel Tower:

There are so many points of view from which one can examine the phenomenon of the Eiffel Tower. But Delaunay wanted to interpret it plastically. He succeeded at last with his world-famous picture. He disarticulated the tower in order to get inside the structure. He truncated it and he tilted it in order to disclose all of its three hundred dizzying meters of height. He adopted ten points of view, fifteen perspectives—one part is seen from above, another from below, the surrounding houses are taken from the right, from the left, from the height of a bird in flight, from the depths of the earth itself. (175)

What Cendrars observes here in Delaunay’s simultaneous painting is not the

articulation of one concept or perspective, but the *disarticulation* of ten. No one can be rested on, for all are continually in motion. If the color of grammar is the movement of language created through the juxtaposition of “uneven measures,” the uneven measures would have to be a sort of movement of sense or sense-making in language. Description of objects and the “evenness” through which we assume language accurately pictures and represents concepts seems parallel to the “evenness of things in geometry.” Traditional grammar describes patterns within language, but grammar itself is a kind of ideal normative concept. Traditional notions of grammar cannot account for or address such things as breaks and fissures in the system of describing the rules of language. The breaks and fissures that happen through a particular kind of movement are embedded within language itself, and can be brought to the foreground through certain juxtapositions (that may include concepts, syntax, and/or phonetics) to create movement and a different way of reading. Wittgenstein’s unusual discussion of grammar is crucial to understand a different surface and sense of language. Recognition of Wittgensteinian grammar becomes possible not through discussion but example. Color is the critical and visible example of Wittgenstein’s grammar.

This method of reading is inherently avant-garde because it works against institutionalized, normative concepts, not by opposing them, but through juxtaposition. Juxtaposition is significant because as in Burger’s characterization of the avant-garde, it is not the shift of the content, but the shift that interrogates the system that critique becomes possible. If concepts were critiqued as individual concepts, they would be replaced by more of the “same” because of how ideology functions. This is why movement is also important. Only through movement is critique possible; once stasis

is achieved, the danger of returning to a fixed concept arises.

### **Wittgenstein's *Remarks on Color***

*Remarks on Color* was not finished in manuscript form until three days prior to Wittgenstein's death in 1951. The title is, perhaps, deceptive. *Remarks on Color* anticipates a theory of color or a discussion. But in keeping with Wittgenstein's *oeuvre* and other work in *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein on color gives us no rules, no definition, and no new theory in a traditional sense. *Remarks on Color* has a relatively small body of scholarship surrounding it, as it was not published posthumously until 1977. One of the primary early studies of *Remarks* is Jonathan Westphal's 1987, *Color: Some Philosophical Problems from Wittgenstein*, that was republished in 1991 as *Color: a Philosophical Introduction*. Westphal's ambitious project takes on Wittgenstein's remarks color by color, methodically giving scientific accounts of where Wittgenstein's propositions are verifiable through physics. However, Wittgenstein often says he is not concerned with physics, and later scholars have found Westphal's study not entirely useful in understanding the actual work Wittgenstein is doing. Wittgenstein scholar Marie McGinn offers a useful study of *Remarks on Color*, pointing out the problem with first and foremost trying to argue that color is objective as Hacker does.<sup>7</sup> Working against the idea that the *Remarks* are just strange little puzzle propositions, as Westphal suggests, McGinn argues, "we summarize that 'Wittgenstein's fragmentary remarks' are intended to bring us by degrees to a clearer vision of the language-game in which we describe the colors of the visual world, of the relation between this language-game and the "geometry of color"

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<sup>7</sup> See Peter Hacker's *Appearance and Reality*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1987.

as it is represented by the color wheel, and the relation of both of these to normal vision” (442). We are brought to “clearer vision” through the construction of the propositions that contrast these various concepts by calling them into question through their juxtaposition. Wittgenstein’s method that is an example of simultaneous language “brings us by degrees” because it is not direct argumentation but multiplicity of examples. Wittgenstein always brings us first to ways of “looking” rather than “thinking.” As Wittgenstein scholar Eugene Troxell emphasizes,

One feels as though the fact that a word is used meaningfully is sufficient to show that it stands for something. A major portion of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy can be regarded as an attempt to dislodge this seductive idea. Actually dislodging it is considerably more difficult than merely explaining why it is wrong, however. We cannot dislodge the idea merely by thinking about it— or about the language. Even when one understands that words need not function as symbols in order to be meaningful, the basic notion behind the old idea of language being symbolic will continue to influence one’s thinking, unless the understanding is rooted in careful observation. (6)

The idea of observation and looking are key in understanding the work of late Wittgenstein. In his method, he does not *explain* things because he cannot, and must instead use examples we can “look” at. Color becomes an example of a happening within language and our grammar that must be observed rather than thought about.

In *Philosophical Investigations*, when discussing how one understands what a game is, Wittgenstein writes it is not one set of rules that clearly defined a game, but

rather that there are similar qualities between games that simultaneously exhibit rules that are also not common to all games. How do we understand this? Wittgenstein tells us, “don’t think, but look” (#66). Our relationship to an object of study must undergo a radical change. The change in perspective also enables Marjorie Perloff to forge a link between Wittgenstein and poetry. The way in which Wittgenstein writes the familiar subject or concept we think we know has a definite kinship with the way poetry is often not “about” a topic, but takes us to a kind of limit of language through its method and execution. Perloff states, in *Wittgenstein’s Ladder*, that the post-Romantic age of poetry is less “expression [of language] than of sensitivity to the language pool on which the poet draws in re-creating and redefining the world as he or she has found it. It is in this context that Wittgenstein himself may be considered a poet” (187.) “Redefining and re-creating” is made possible by simultaneous language. I would add it also goes further than “redefinition” alone because even new definitions are still definitions that attempt to encompass an object or idea. I may redefine something and it may be true or false; you may believe me or you may not.

What Wittgenstein does is not through redefinition alone, but through contrast. What is then “redefined,” so-to-speak, is not arrived at through a new definition, but by moving the ground on which the old definitions or the framework of language rested. McGinn notes of Wittgenstein’s *Remarks* how “there can be no substitute for reading the text itself. For only in that way can the reader be led to cross and re-cross the landscape of our ordinary language-game, and only in that way will Wittgenstein’s aim of giving us a sense of vision of that landscape, which outstrips our ability to put it into words, be achieved” (443). The idea that “a sense of vision” must be achieved

rather than “put into words,” suggests that Wittgenstein works against specific kinds of sense making. A landscape is something that must be surveyed, has different contours at different times of day, and changes with the seasons. Were I to describe a landscape to you, it would “show” something, but it would be my particular perception of that landscape. “To cross and re-cross” touches on the idea of “surveyability,” because to “see” the landscape, you must encounter it not once but several times from different starting points, and in both light and shadow. Wittgenstein’s examples in *Remarks* are a “crossing and re-crossing” of the landscape of language made visible through color. The *Remarks* enables not the ability to understand color theory, but to “see” the multiplicity of grammar through color.

McGinn states, “one of the most important motifs of *Remarks on Color* is the idea that the grammar of the language in which we describe the colors of objects in a natural scene diverges quite radically from the grammar of color concepts . . . . Wittgenstein thinks of the latter language-game as equivalent to a ‘mathematics of color’” (443). McGinn’s observation of grammar is significant because grammar from a linguistic perspective is not prescriptive but descriptive.<sup>8</sup> What happens when descriptions diverge? And yet, this is exactly what Wittgenstein does. The description of colors and concepts of colors are both grammatical and inconsistent. Grammar, despite being based on rules and patterns does not produce consistency of meaning. Wittgenstein is more interested in the inconsistencies of grammar because this is closer to how language actually functions. The divergence of grammars occurs both in the progression of propositions and *within* propositions on a semantic level, such as in

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<sup>8</sup> See *Contemporary Linguistics*. Eds. William O’Grady and Michael Dobrovolsky. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993.

an early proposition on white: “White as the color of substances (in the sense in which we say snow *is* white) is lighter than any other substance-color; black darker. Here color is a darkening and if all such is removed from the substance, white remains, and for this reason we call it “colorless” (I: #52). Unlike the *Tractatus*’ attempts at truth propositions, the propositions in *Remarks* are a kind of “untruth” proposition because they often contain an element of paradox. To limit white as a color of substance seems logical, but the idea of “darkening” suggests that there is a spectrum of light and dark that applies to substances that have color. If the darkest colors are all colors, then the lightest would be “colorless.” This seems logical, but it presents a problem because “white” *is* a color and we would never say, “snow is colorless.” If we try to understand this as a proposition *about* color, we are misled or painted into a paradoxical corner. What the proposition shows us is that my thinking through color concepts (here the examples of white and substances with color) does not have a consistent truth logic to it. My language predicates what I think I am objectively observing in the world even while I am observing it.

Zeno Vendler draws a parallel to this problem through Wittgenstein’s famous beetle in the box analogy which comments on the idea of “private sensations.” To reiterate, Wittgenstein says in *Philosophical Investigations* that everyone has his/her own beetle in a box, but no one ever actually sees another person’s beetle, and yet we all talk about beetles as if we knew we were talking about the same beetle.

Wittgenstein uses this example to illustrate the difficulty of talking about our experience of private sensations. Color, I would argue, is different than private sensations because of *how* we perceive it. Vendler writes,

It was easy for [Wittgenstein] to dismiss the experience of pain as a “beetle in the box” (which might as well not even be there) for his language games; behavior will carry the burden of anchoring the term. But with colors behavior looks far less promising, and there is the added task of accounting for the Goethe propositions: those timeless truths we all know about colors in themselves. This beetle, just like some real bugs, glows in iridescence, and cannot be ignored.... No wonder Wittgenstein feels spurred to philosophize, and is tempted to believe in phenomenology: a central tenet of his *Investigations* is at stake. (395)

Color shifts the problem of a private language to one that is both private and also public, something that is both perceptual but also something that appears to be in the world. Color occupies a kind of double space, and like Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology where color is a kind of resonance between the things I see and my seeing, Wittgenstein is tempted by phenomenology. But Wittgenstein takes this seeming double nature of color not to primarily comment on perception, but on our language and the difficulties of grammar that arise in *Philosophical Investigations*.

In *Investigations* Wittgenstein writes, “A main source of our failure to understand is that we do not command a clear view of the use of our words.— Our grammar is lacking in this sort of perspicuity. A perspicuous representation produces just that understanding which consists in ‘seeing connections.’ Hence the importance of finding and inventing *intermediate* cases” (#122). We get the sense that even when things are said “clearly,” that they are not actually clear at all. “A perspicuous representation,” Wittgenstein scholar Hans Sluga translates as, “a surveyable

representation.” The German word, *übersichtlich* literally translates as “over-view-ly.” Wittgenstein’s idea of representation also links to the idea of what can be seen, what *is* observable through example rather than through description. As cited earlier, Sluga concludes, “[Wittgenstein] goes on to suggest that we need ‘a surveyable representation’ that can generate comprehension that consists in ‘seeing connections.’” The concept of a surveyable representation, he adds, ‘signifies our form of representation, how we see things.’ And he closes the section with the somewhat puzzling question: ‘Is this a “world view”?’” (99). Wittgenstein’s grammar is then far removed from our ordinary conception of grammar as rules and syntax. Grammar here is something that we cannot quite clearly see, but we may see it in other examples.

Later in *Investigations*, Wittgenstein writes, “Essence is expressed in grammar” (#371), which is curious. It appears as a truth statement, but if grammar is also “unsurveyable,” then it follows that essence is also visibly illusive. What we cannot see or the full expression of our use of language *is* the essence of things. Grammar as a concept that encompasses is something that is at the heart of the matter. In her essay on “Grammar in the *Philosophical Investigations*” Marie McGinn writes,

Insofar as his concern is with ‘use of words’ (PI 90), Wittgenstein describes his investigation as ‘a grammatical one’ (PI 90), but it is clear that his investigation does not share the traditional grammarian’s concern with a systematic classification of semantic categories, or with a comprehensive description of the structure of a natural language.

Wittgenstein’s investigation is concerned with ‘looking into the workings of language’— the topic of traditional grammars— but his investigation is

distinctive as it ‘ gets its light, that is to say its purpose, from philosophical problems’ (PI 109). (647-648)

Wittgenstein’s approach to both grammar and philosophy is unique. If *Investigations* is considered “grammatical,” it is a grammar that is visible only through example. The work of *Remarks* changes this grammar because of the dual position of color both within perception and in the world. Color is the visibility of our grammar. For Wittgenstein, grammar is more a method than an object.

What surfaces is an instability *within* grammar that may be brought out *through* examples of grammar. One can see how this is different from Derrida’s sliding signifier that brings multiple meanings along with it; rather Wittgenstein’s examples and what I call the color of grammar is a different kind of sliding that elides meaning rather than replacing it with a new meanings. One might say, it is a multiplicity of meanings, except the multiplicity is not interpretation or association, but dissolution of conceptual stability. The Saussurean chain of signifiers leads to association where “terms in an associative family occur neither in fixed number nor in a definite order” (976). The shift of the concept in logic and its variance and movement are different from Derrida’s *differance* because it is not the play of presence and absence, but the clash of two ideas that are simultaneously present.

The color of grammar is also not a repetition of the Derridian notion of play because play is functional within the context of meaning. In Derridian play, it is not one sign that has meaning, but also the absence of signs whose meaning is brought into the presence of the sign simultaneously with its absence. From “Structure, Sign, and Play” in *Difference*, we read that

Besides the tension between play and history, there is also the tension between play and presence. Play is the disruption of presence. The presence of an element is always a signifying and substitutive reference inscribed in a system of differences and the movement of a chain. Play is always play of absence and presence, but if it is to be thought radically, play must be conceived of before the alternative of presence and absence. Being must be conceived as presence or absence on the basis of the possibility of play and not the other way around. If Levi-Strauss, better than any other, has brought to light the play of repetition and the repetition of play, one no less perceives in his work a sort of ethic of presence, and ethic of nostalgia for origins, an ethic of archaic and natural innocence. (189)

Derrida writes, “The presence of an element is always a signifying and substitutive reference inscribed in a system of differences and the movement of a chain,” but this idea assumes that the elements within the chain hold a certain significance or signification. Play works on a principle of signification, and I would argue play is a particular kind of signification that exists and attempts to create sense. But what is the signification of nonsense and where is its place in language? Nonsense carries as much potential as sense to affect our perception of the world, so placing the two in opposition is problematic. What occurs in the everyday world often does not make “sense.” Events and situations directly affect us, and we try to make sense of them even when there is no sense in them. Our use of language is always trying to make sense of things. What does it mean to read not based on sense making? What happens when we are asked to read against our anticipated understanding of concepts and our

normativized understanding? What then is it that we would read, and more importantly what is it then that we would see?

The color of grammar is movement, not within the signifying chain, but movement that breaks the chain. If play is the possibility of both presence and absence within the signifying chain, and even precludes the duality of presence and absence, the color of grammar and simultaneous language is movement that breaks the chain not through alternative conceptual significations but through nonsense. “A carafe, that is a blind glass. A kind in glass and a cousin, a spectacle and nothing strange a single hurt color and an arrangement in a system to pointing” (9) writes Stein. “Play is the disruption of presence” which may well be. But the color of grammar is a different “kind” of disruption. It is not the multiplicity of meanings simultaneously at play, but the breaking of normativized meanings through the simultaneity of concepts in juxtaposition; what is heard in syntax that is beyond sense? (There *is* something there. Wittgenstein teaches us this.)

This is not to say that we have gotten “outside of the text,” that very well, indeed, may be impossible. Rather it is to say that we have broken some of the contours of the text at least momentarily. It is not signification within language that is the color of grammar, but the breaking of signification through the juxtaposition of conceptual language. The color of grammar is the anamorphic spot in Derridian play; from a different perspective, it is the death of signification. And yet language *is* language. It is the juxtaposition of concepts without sense.<sup>9</sup> The color of grammar is

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<sup>9</sup> This might appear to be a reiteration of Merleau-Ponty’s notion of indirect language; however, what happens in indirect language is primarily based on the silences within language. Merleau-Ponty writes, “It is between them [the words], in the hollows of space, time, and signification they mark out, as movement at the cinema is between the immobile images which follow one another”

not the multiplicity of meaning (though that still exists in a different sense), but the movement of meaning, meaning removed, meaning reduced to surface, and surface illuminated in a different light. After all, color is only perceptible through a surface, and its reflection and refraction spans a whole spectrum. Does that mean everything is without meaning? Yes and no. Language still exists, as does signification, but the color of grammar calls into question how we read, and the way in which Western rational philosophy and thought has assumed to make meaning in the world. The color of grammar does not throw away meaning. It is not nihilistic. But it continually breaks what has been established, making what seems so fundamentally real, perhaps an unreality through a rereading and juxtaposition of concepts and meaning. It is not an end in itself, but a means through which we may continually learn to reread.

The color of grammar is not semantic possibilities or even vertical paradigmatic substitutions as in Saussure but semantic dissolution. The question then is what use is the loss of meaning? Does that leave us with nothing? Yes and no. These two questions are only true if we play the language-game that something must “mean,” that something must be distinguishable and clear. The logic of meaning is only one type of language game. Wittgenstein’s grammar and the color of grammar is recognizing or “seeing” the movable “parts” of the game rather than focusing on the game itself. Color in its mutability makes the contours of language visible.

The idea of concept and system in relationship to Wittgenstein’s *Remarks*, McGinn unpacks: “The question of whether this abstract system records the *correct* relations among color concepts makes no sense; the system itself is what determines

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(76). The color of grammar is a break, not a silence. It occurs not in the absence of what is said, but rather in an overabundance of what is said through direct juxtaposition.

the structural relations between the elements of the system. The pattern within the system does not record relations between colors that were already there to be discovered. Rather the system itself constitutes the grammar of these concepts in the same way that arithmetic constitutes the concepts of addition, multiplication, etc.” (443-44). In *Remarks* the question becomes not what is the “correct” understanding of color relations, but rather what is it that constitutes our understanding and thinking about color as a concept. For Wittgenstein, color is not the object of study, but the way we discuss and conceptualize the object. If there is any “subject” in Wittgenstein’s work, especially his late work, it is our language as a system. In this regard, we also see why Goethe’s *Theory of Colours* “spurred him to philosophize” as Ray Monk has noted. Scholars have not known what to make of this statement since much of *Remarks* actually comments very little on Goethe’s text. In section one of *Remarks*, Wittgenstein writes “Someone who agrees with Goethe believes that Goethe correctly recognized the *nature* of color. And nature here is not what results from experiments, but it lies in the concept of color” (I: #71). Wittgenstein’s characterization of “nature” is telling. The idea that if we are in agreement with something it appears to be “natural.” The “natural” is not found in the world, per se, but in our thinking. What makes “sense” seems “natural.” Only through contrast that is similar do we begin to see the framework of language.<sup>10</sup>

Wittgenstein opens section two of *Remarks on Color* with a seemingly straightforward statement: “we might speak of the color-impression of a surface, by

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<sup>10</sup> One might also ask if our inability to accurately and grammatically describe color has something to do with our perception (experience) of color. Does my inability to see exactly the same thing in color inadvertently affect my ability to describe it? Wittgenstein’s statement in *Philosophical Investigations*, “The rule governed nature of our languages permeates our life?” reinforces this idea.

which we wouldn't mean the color, but rather the composite of the shades of color, which produces the impression of a brown surface" (#1). Wittgenstein here introduces the context of color and surface, but because these remarks are on color, we might not immediately take the context into account. He also highlights our "color impression" and the sense in which we perceive color. The problem of a color surface is conceived in a particular way with an emphasis on our color impression. The following proposition reads "blending in white removes the coloredness from color; but blending in yellow does not.— Is that the basis of the proposition there can be no clearer transparent white?" (#2). The idea of a surface remains the context as this first part of the proposition examines "blending" of colors as one might blend paint colors. But then the em dash interrupts, and the question turns to the idea of a "clear transparent white." Wittgenstein shifts the context from surface to transparency, but the idea of color remains the same. There is no such thing as a transparent white and the question strikes us as an oxymoron. The contradiction is made by the comparison of what seems the same, "white," in different contexts. The word has not changed, but its meaning and logic is radically different and inconsistent. What this tells us is not something about color, but how our structures of "truth" in the world are not based on universal uniformity of our language. I am not suggesting that meaning is irrelevant, but rather Wittgenstein gives us a way to notice how we construct conceptual ideas that make "sense." We also come to see what possibilities and changes occur when we recognize these structures; in relation to poetics, Wittgenstein makes visible not only what grammar "is," but how when made visible, grammar alters what we see. The particular, or peculiar way Wittgenstein writes his propositions does not build one

concept up, but rather tears down what we thought was a static concept, i.e. a surface color is a composite, mixing white removes the coloredness, and “there can be no clear transparent white.”

Wittgenstein continues in proposition three, “but what kind of proposition is that; that blending in white removes the coloredness from the color?” The question is, in what context are we asking these questions? The sentence “white removes the coloredness” makes sense and seems logical. But Wittgenstein says, “it can’t be a proposition of physics.” So we are not playing the language-game of physics. Physics would say white light is a composite of all colors, or adding white changes the saturation, but Wittgenstein is not interested in physics as he states five other times throughout *Remarks*. Wittgenstein’s answer to his own question is more than just a rhetorical question because it is also the statement about what he is not doing. The seemingly simple propositions held in juxtaposition move the stability of ordinary concepts, and the ordinariness of a statement in a single proposition has a greater context in the whole text.

In proposition three, we arrive at a tantalizing possibility of a way out of contradiction: “here the temptation to believe in a phenomenology, something midway between science and logic is very great” (#3). Wittgenstein then asks, “what is the essential nature of cloudiness? For red or yellow things are not cloudy; white is cloudy” (#4). Given Wittgenstein’s emphasis on “color-impressions” it would seem phenomenology could possibly speak to the “betweenness” of logic and physics. But for Wittgenstein phenomenology cannot be the answer because he does not think we can achieve the essence of a thing, object, or concept. Proposition four gives us a kind

of definition, but propositions five and six immediately calls it into question: “is cloudy that which conceals form, and conceals form because it obliterates light and shadow? (#5) Is it white that which does away with darkness?” (#6) “Cloudiness” has something to do with light and white is cloudy; this is a statement of transparency. However, “white does away with darkness” in proposition six is a statement of colored light. Again it is not the idea that has moved, but the context of the color terms. Wittgenstein is logical and grammatical; however, the rules of the game he is playing with *are not* the rules of the game we anticipate. His rules both use and break down logic, and it is in this sense that we could look at what Wittgenstein offers us as ten simultaneous views of color much like Cendrars’ description of Delaunay’s multiple views of the Eiffel tower.

The question of context gives way to the idea of *how* we see rather than what we see. Wittgenstein’s remarks on color blindness serves a double function that connects both the notions of context and also our ability to recognize context with the terms we use to speak about color blindness. The color blind for Wittgenstein do not “see” what we see, but there is also a question of what it suggests to demarcate someone else’s difference. Not only does color blindness raise the question of the “normalcy” of what we see, but it also seems a kind of metaphor for our own difficulty to recognize the inconsistency of color concepts and the complexity of our language. We are “color blind” because we do not see the example of our grammar within the examples of our color use. This is to read color blindness then as metaphor and not only as an actual and literal example of color blindness that pertains to visual perception alone. Wittgenstein highlights the ideas of what it means to *call* someone

color blind. The emphasis on what it means to *call* something suggests an element to the idea of color blindness that is not only rooted in the idea of perception but *how* different modes of perception get named in language and the affect naming has on our thinking about such topics. Wittgenstein's discussion of colorblindness does not establish any determination of the "truth" of color, colorblindness, or "normal" vision, but rather both says and does more than it says.

In section three, proposition thirty-one, we read, "we speak of color-blindness and call it a *defect*. But there could easily be several differing abilities, none of which is clearly inferior to the others.— And remember, too, that a man may go through life without color-blindness being noticed until some special occasion brings it to light" (#31). Wittgenstein calls into question what it is to be colorblind, but the proposition also calls into question language, "we *call* it a *defect*." The idea of what we *call* things is highlighted. What and how we see is highlighted too. The idea of blindness comes into question when it is described as "differing abilities." The question of colorblindness does not explain how we see color or what it is, but rather the proposition questions color and the particular privilege that goes along with the assumption of what color is "normally," a privilege that gradually becomes more and more arbitrary, since "a man may go through life without his colorblindness being noticed." The idea of what is brought to "light" obliquely references color itself, which, from a scientific viewpoint, is predominately light; although, from a phenomenological perspective, color exists as an autonomous entity in the world independent from scientific categorizations and explanations. One should recall that Wittgenstein is working neither with scientific methods nor logic while also resisting

the urge to turn to phenomenology. Light continually changes color as in Wittgenstein's example of the dark room: "Look at your room late in the evening when you can hardly distinguish between colours any longer— and now turn on the light and paint what you saw earlier in the semi-darkness.— How do you compare the colors in such a picture with those of the semi-dark room?" (I: #67). The example of light in Wittgenstein's room changes, but the emphasis here falls on our perception of the color of the room not the room itself. Rather than referencing the reality of what color the room may be in itself, this proposition highlights what happens when the light changes. The idea of the picture, in this proposition, also suggests that we are being directed to think about what we see, how we represent, and how that representation may change based on our perspective.

The simplicity in proposition #31 calls into question color as subject. Since there are no definitions of color, since color is ever changing, and since it contradicts logic (remember here how we might have a transparent blue or green or red, but not a transparent black or white, according to Wittgenstein), proposition #31 cannot really only be about colorblindness. There is a certain irony in saying someone lives with a condition and never knows it. The irony is oblique commentary on our own inability to see ourselves and the world. Wittgenstein makes apparent that our grammar that "lacks surveyability" has a resemblance to the relationship of color and the idea of one's ability to recognize color blindness. Not only does the proposition question the concept of colorblindness, it questions the concept of the concept, and what the "normal" concept or ability to "see" is. If we are blind, or if we have some other condition, how then do we recognize that which is too close to us? In this sense, we

may understand what Wittgenstein says when he suggests the improbability of saying “there are people who see.” (I: #87), which suggests almost a tautological statement because it appears obvious. Observing what is close to us seems absurd. And yet, the second half of the proposition is also true. One may be colorblind and not know it. What I *see* and what I cannot see are like the difference between making sense and nonsense in language. Wittgenstein maintains, “it is possible then for different people in this way to have different color concepts?— *Somewhat* different ones different with respect to one or another feature. And that will impair their mutual understanding to a greater or lesser extent, but often hardly at all” (#32). Again, this sentence of Wittgenstein’s seems to employ a kind of double-meaning. The statement about color is perfectly true in talking about color, but by extension also seems an observation about grammar. Here the specificity of color concepts illustrate or make visible our “grammar.” Often our meaning is clear, but sometimes the gap between our concepts causes difficulty. What is “somewhat different” suggests the commonality we share in language not because of linguistic unity, but because of our shared human experience. As in Wittgenstein’s language game, there are always some features that allow the game to be played. The chess pieces may be made out of plastic or stone or wood, but they still function as chess pieces.

In proposition #34, Wittgenstein states, “we can obviously speak of intermediary colors, in a language-game in which we do not produce colors by mixing all, but only *select* existing shades. Yet *one* use of the concept of an intermediary color is to recognize the blend of colors which produces a given shade” (#34). Wittgenstein highlights our ability to ‘speak’ about intermediary color, while only using existing

shades. When I speak about something, I cannot use only part of a concept. The moment I invoke one idea, the chain of ideas attached to it follows. This effect has more to do with my use of language than reality itself. Both “selects” and “use” are italicized in the original, indicating that the “truth factor” about things, here color, is not found in the object itself, but is created in our explanation of it. The language-game, or Wittgenstein’s grammar itself, brings with it multiple concepts. What Wittgenstein makes possible is the recognition of our “grammar.” This is not quite Derridian play—there is no binary of presence and absence to work against, but rather it is a net work of assumptions (not semantic meanings) that gets pulled along with the concept. What if the sentence were rewritten, “The use of intermediary language is to recognize the blend of language which produces the shade of language”? Wittgenstein chooses color and not language, the question remains, why? The re-written sentence suggests something of the idea that Sluga translates in proposition #122 in *Philosophical Investigations* as a “surveyable representation.” The blend and the shade could possibly have something to do with grammar and shades of meaning as well. The rewritten example is not what Wittgenstein writes, but color reveals another dimension to *Remarks* when considering language and grammar as a kind of substitute. Color makes visible because, unlike texture or objects, color exists in my visible perception.

The question becomes, what are we blind to or “color-blind” to? Is it possible that we need color to see where we are blind? To question color is to question our concepts and what we see, and the thing I think I see clearly or what I know. The changing colors of the traffic light, the blue of a favorite sweater (which some say is

purple), the grey sky, the green of summer I cannot remember in winter, the white cold of winter that seems impossible in summer. The changing of color is the changing of my world<sup>11</sup> and the fluidity of language. What I hold today vanishes tomorrow, and yet the persistent picture of memory insists that it is real, just as the definite name of red, blue, and green, makes me believe they exist outside of what I can no longer remember.

In section I of *Remarks on Color*, Wittgenstein asks, “do normally sighted and the color-blind have the same concept of colorblindness? The colorblind not merely cannot learn to use our color words, they cannot learn to use the word “color-blind” as a normal person does. They cannot, for example, establish color-blindness in the same way the normal do” (#77). The relationship of language to color emerges in this proposition because it is not just color words and perception, but also includes “color-blindness” which is not color at all, but our ability and recognition of something perceptual. The element between “color words” and “color blindness” that connects them is not “color,” but what is *seen*. Wittgenstein does not say this, but show us through the example of his propositions. Wittgenstein’s comments on color are not so much on color itself, but on our experience of color, and through that, he questions the stability of what we think we see, and ideas that seem fixed and inherent in our grammar:

there could be people who didn’t understand our way of saying that orange is a rather reddish-yellow, and who would only be inclined to say something like that in cases where a transition from yellow to

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<sup>11</sup> Wittgenstein in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* says, “The limits of my language are the limits of my world” (#5.6).

orange to red took place before their eyes. And for such people the expression reddish-green need present no difficulties. (#78)

As in the example of substance, surface, and light, here the concepts and context are what changes what is said about color. The first part of this proposition focuses on the idea of how people “didn’t understand our *saying*.” The second part examines a different context where it is not the idea of color blending, but a “transition that takes place before their eyes.” The first example is the idea of blending colors, the second example is experiential, but the color words are the same.<sup>12</sup>

In reality nothing is really the fixed picture we think we see. The following proposition then becomes perfectly clear: “Psychology describes the phenomena of seeing— for whom does it describe then? What ignorance can this description eliminate? Psychology describes what was observed” (#79-80). The emphasis on description reinforces the problem of how one “understands our way of saying” from the proceeding proposition. Psychology which would seem to study the mind, Wittgenstein critiques as description because it is in the past tense, it “was observed.” Ironically, observation is also a way of “seeing” or perception, the very phenomenon that psychology attempts to describe. We only have language to describe language. We can only observe seeing. The question then is, can we ever actually see?

The problem for Wittgenstein, at least in part due to psychology, is partially answered in the following proposition: “can one describe to a blind person what it’s like to see?— Certainly, the blind can learn a great deal about the difference between the blind and the sighted. But the question was badly put; as though seeing were more

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<sup>12</sup> It might be interesting to note that scientifically speaking, reddish-green are near complementary colors used to produce white in light, according to Helmholtz (92).

an activity and there were a description of it” (#81). Through the progression of propositions, Wittgenstein shifts the subject from colorblindness to blindness itself. Through reading the shift, we *see* played out the movement that occurs within concepts. Wittgenstein’s subject is both the topic of discussion *and* what the text itself is doing. Wittgenstein does not describe observations to us, but instead he makes us *see*, and the subject of the propositions comments obliquely on our experience of the text. In #78, color transitions before the eyes, but here the text itself has transitioned before the reader’s eyes from color to seeing. Again in #81 the description only teaches the “*difference* between the blind and the sighted,” but the “question is badly put,” because seeing is not something that can be described. Seeing is not like a game with rules. Seeing for Wittgenstein seems to have characteristics of our language or “grammar” (grammar in the Wittgensteinian sense and not the traditional sense). Just as “our grammar lack surveyability,” seeing is not something that can be described.

Wittgenstein writes in proposition #82, “I can, of course, observe color-blindness; then why not seeing? I can observe what color judgments a color-blind person— or normally sighted person, too—makes under certain circumstances” (I: #82). The difference that arises has to do with our assumptions of color rather than our perception alone. The proposition addresses *how* we make assumptions about color, but not sight. A few propositions further, we read,

How can it be nonsense to say, ‘There are people who see,’ if it is not nonsense to say ‘There are people who are blind?’ But suppose I had never heard of the existence of blind people and one day someone told me, “these are people who do not see,’ would I have to understand this

sentence immediately? If I am not blind myself must I be conscious that I have the ability to see; and that, therefore, there may be people who do not have that ability? (I: #87)

The difference Wittgenstein suggests here is the obvious nonsense of the statement “there are people who see.” Wittgenstein is not commenting on blindness or sight, but rather the logic behind our assumptions of truth statements. The first statement on sight seems silly or a truism; the comparison reveals that the first is redundant, while the second, that is not, illustrates something about our assumptions of what is “normal.” The emphasis is not on what the statement says, but how we have already categorized it in our thinking. These two propositions exemplify Eugene Troxell’s discussion cited earlier on thinking in late Wittgenstein: “We, in effect, think we are “looking at,” “noticing,” “observing,” how the language functions, when we are actually just thinking about what we are already convinced is there to “see.” “The more narrowly we examine actual language, the sharper becomes the conflict between it and our requirement. (For the crystalline purity of logic was, of course, not a result of investigation it was a requirement” (107). The question that Wittgenstein proposes in the second half of his proposition, “would I have to understand this sentence immediately,” suggests that one would not because the preconception of the idea of blindness does not exist to inform my “understanding.” It could be understood, but most likely would be difficult, hence the emphasis on “immediately.” Language that we “understand” does not tell us about what we do not know; what we think we may come to understand easily exists because we already have some idea of it; language

repeats what we already know. What we do learn anew seems from a shared human experience and not what language tells us.

The last part of proposition #87 is telling: “Must I be conscious that I have the ability to see?” Posed as a question, the answer appears to be, no. The crux of the matter is precisely that I am able to do much without really being conscious of it. In my ordinary use of language, I no longer see how I have come to believe in something because it is a belief I already hold because of how I use language. If the colorblind may live with colorblindness and not “know” it, how might it also be possible to hold a worldview of something that seems “normal” and actually be entirely misinformed? Wittgenstein implicitly suggests that my assumption about how “things are” is a particular “blindness” in itself, and it is my own blindness to my language that allows me to call something like “color blindness” a “defect.” Violence, perhaps, begins first and foremost with an assumption of “the way things are” and how language seems to repeat that those “truths” to us. In *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein says, “A picture held us captive and we could not get outside of it because it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably” (#115). The weight of this proposition rests on the “seemed” or in the German “schien” which also suggests the idea of appearance. Language presents a particular picture or view of the world. But if we learned to look a little differently, what would we then see? Wittgenstein’s admonishment, “Don’t think, but look!” (#66), takes on new meaning in this light. The work of particular practitioners of the avant-garde then operates on bringing to light what we cannot see. Like Wittgenstein’s *Remarks* that focuses on color to make visible our lack of surveyability in grammar, the unusual use and experimentation with

color makes visible a particular construction of ideas and even concepts of how we read and think. Color in the avant-garde marks a dynamic shift in understanding the contours of language.

There often is an assumption of knowing with seeing. If someone gives me instructions, and they are clear I might say, “I understand” or “I see,” meaning that I “know” what he means. But the assumptions that presuppose these phrases, Wittgenstein problematizes. I may know what I see, but then what exactly is it that I think I am seeing?<sup>13</sup> Do I see the world as it is? Or is my view “tinted” by a prior concept? In a similar way I might ask, “is the red or yellow I see really identical with the red or yellow I name?” When we think we are describing something, what is it we really describe, or more importantly what is it that we have missed?

Moreover, color and seeing are wrapped up together, but not in any sense that we can “know” color concepts. In part I of *Remarks*, “Looking does not teach us anything about the concept of color” (#72). Looking and seeing are separate from concepts. In this proposition, it is the “*concept* of color” not simply “color,” and Wittgenstein is very specific about this distinction throughout *Remarks*. Wittgenstein asks, “Doesn’t the person who has learned the game understand the word ‘chess’ differently from someone who hasn’t learnt it?” (#75). Someone may explain the concept of the game to me, but the actual play of the game will always be different, and my experience will alter my concept. Within the game there are infinite combinations and moves, none of which can be represented by a single concept or even many concepts, and so my ability to play outweighs my knowledge of the game. The undoing of color concepts is the work of *Remarks*. The inconsistency in which we

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<sup>13</sup> See example of Wittgenstein’s duck-rabbit here.

talk about color, Wittgenstein brings to light even when we might assume that color itself is a unified concept. Color does exist, but a unified concept of color does not.

The paradox of color ironically, or most appropriately, is brought out through Wittgenstein's discussion of black and white in relationship to color. Wittgenstein discusses in part one how we can imagine transparent colors, but we cannot imagine a transparent black or transparent white, and yet all seem to fall under the concept of color. More importantly, Wittgenstein brings into view the problem of how we picture these things. The fact that color is transparent, while black and white are not, is not incidental. The contrast between the two might be a metaphor, but it seems Wittgenstein suggests something more fundamental to human thinking. Black and white, or that which exists as a dichotomy and in opposition to one another, cannot be transparent, as if thinking and language that are black and white cannot be transparent. That which is oppositional cannot have the transparency of color. The slipperiness of these statements is the different contexts that surround color and transparency or color and surface or substance. The ironic undertone to the idea of opposition (black and white) and transparency is also at work. If we are reading Wittgenstein's propositions as examples of grammar, the rigidity of black and white cannot be transparent. The color of grammar is something that is transparent or makes visible.

Color is not then in opposition to black and white, but rather the movement that allows us to see the transition of reddish-green. Color runs along side black-and-white or in and out of it: "black-and-white themselves have a hand in the business, where we have transparency of color. Substitute white for red and you no longer have the impression of transparency; just as you no longer have the impression of solidity if

you turn this drawing  into this  one” (III: #24). In this late proposition black and white affect transparency of color because of what they are not. Transparent red cannot be substituted for white, so by omission, it is still connected. If we think about Wittgenstein’s propositions as the visible example of grammar, the question of transparency versus opacity and the solid figure versus the flat figure illustrate the structure of language itself if we are rethinking grammar. What is apparent is dependent on what is not, or what is opaque is dependent on what is transparent. Depth and flatness are not mutually exclusive but constitute each other based on their contrast. In the example of solidity versus surface, the lines themselves are the same, but their arrangement changes how they are perceived dimensionally. I am reminded of Stein’s opening poem from the Object section of *Tender Buttons*, “a single hurt color and an arrangement in a system to pointing” (11). The shift in the arrangement I am reading in the avant-garde as color draws from the work of Wittgenstein’s example of color. Just as in painting, the line and color are inextricable, but the dominant aspect may slip and shift. In avant-garde, abstract art, color often overtakes the line. What changes in the content is similar to what changes in the concept in language. The shift is inextricable from the black-and-white of things, but provides contrast, in Blaise Cendrars words, “It is contrast with similarity.”

Color is not collapsible into only black-and-white; consider the following proposition: “let us suppose that people didn’t contrast color pictures with black and white ones, but rather blue and white ones. Couldn’t blue too be felt (and that is to say, used) as not being a color?” (III: #38). One’s immediate reaction might be “of course not, because blue is a color.” And yet, it is possible to imagine a world where the

names of colors were different. But this would require a different use of language.<sup>14</sup> In our use of language the concept becomes opaque, or is fluid and transparent. The color of grammar is harder to render because it does not have a clear grounding in the black and white rules of “normal” grammar and concepts. The “grounding” is still there of course, for “we cannot get outside of language,” but the movement of the color of grammar causes a trembling in the foundations we imagine stand on that ground. The fixed steady function of ideas is a specific use of grammar. The stable foundation needed for meaning and concept are a grounding, but as Wittgenstein says in his *Philosophical Investigations*, we are clearing up a ground: “Where does our investigation get its importance from, since it seems only to destroy everything interesting, that is, all that is great and important? (As it were all the buildings, leaving behind only bits of stone and rubble.) What we are destroying is nothing but houses of cards and we are clearing up the ground of language on which they stood” (#118). In this metaphor, what appears as important, “all the buildings,” is really only “houses of cards.” Implicitly, Wittgenstein also suggest here something of the idea of games, and that it is what appears established, “houses of cards” that he is clearing away with his method. The avant-garde with its connection to military language (it literally means before-the-guard) can be argued equally to “clear” a particular kind of ground through its experimentation. Experimentation that is not just for the sake of working against tradition, but that it actually strives to accomplish new methods of producing work and critiques of language.

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14 The idea of another language here might correlate somewhat to Wittgenstein’s Martian example in *Philosophical Investigations* where the drawing of a stick figure pushing a block up a hill, we are asked that isn’t it possible that the picture could look like a figure sliding backwards down the hill to a Martian who saw it. Elsewhere in the *Investigations*, he also asks, “If a lion could speak, would we be able to understand him?”

## Conclusion

The poetic avant-garde has often been critiqued and examined on its basis of experimentation, its break with bourgeois values, its radicalism, its brazenness, its shock value, its challenging of grammar, and its often graphic depiction of everyday life. However, what I am calling the color of grammar does not look at the avant-garde's subject, but rather its specific moments of movement within established concepts. The poetic avant-garde works within language and concepts of the everyday to disarticulate and unbuild what appears apparent. Here I turn to Gertrude Stein and her linguistic "strangeness" that has been commented on through multiple interpretations as to what she might "mean." However, I am interested in the potential of meaning breaking through the color of grammar and not meaning or even multiplicity of meaning alone. Stein's use of Objects, Food, and Rooms in *Tender Buttons* and the use of the domestic space are often commented on. What I will turn to next is how the concept of those objects is broken and what that breaking critiques in terms of social and political norms. How does the juxtaposition of concepts through the displacement and reworking of actual color references allow the reader to *see* and read something different? In particular relationship to color concepts, how does Stein, like Wittgenstein, break down logic and cause us to see differently, or make "visible" what "lacks surveyability" in our grammar? In addition to her unusual syntax, and blending of poetry and prose, Stein's actual use of color reference "breaks" color by breaking a concepts of it, and thus, illuminates the function of the color of grammar.

**CHAPTER TWO: THE BALANCE OF COLOR, COLLAPSING, FOLDING, AND NOT  
CONFUSING: GERTRUDE STEIN'S *TENDER BUTTONS***

**Overture**

§3. Charles Bernstein has written a poem, "Thank You for Saying Thank You," with, clear, grammatical sentences. The first three sentences are: "This is a totally / accessible poem. / There is nothing / in this poem / that is in any / way difficult to understand. / All the words / are simple & / to the point."

§11. What I know is "correct" is emphasized by these "wrong" sentences. "Either way, my grammar allows me to read them because I know how to read correctly first." But in what way did you come to know this first?

§31. All concepts may be explained in grammatical logical sentences. "Looking teaches us nothing about the concepts of color." Wittgenstein.

§7. The grammar of a language is clear and logical. Language is logical someone might say. Prepositions are for. Nouns verb themselves. Articles color syntax. Semantics the grammar sound. "These sentences are nonsense," someone might say. And yet, you still read them. "For" is a preposition, but is used as an object. "Verb" is not a verb but a noun. How do articles have color? And syntax is sentence structure. "The" is an article and not a verb. "Utter nonsense!" Except

that the ability to read the “correct” grammar also allows for the possibility of nonsense.

§1. “Linguistics focuses on the mental system that allows human beings to form and interpret the words and sentences of language. This system is called a grammar . . . . Although no two languages have exactly the same grammar, there are no languages without a grammar.”<sup>15</sup>

### **Reading Through the Public Eye**

In a folder of collected clippings at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale, is the front cover page of the *Daily Mail* dated March 12, 1913. The cover headline reads, “‘Poetic Persuasion’ v. Arson. Methods of the English and American Suffragettes Contrasted.” On two sidebars, photos illustrate the “English Method” with images of burned out buildings and women being dragged away by the police; in the center panel are two photos of a parade of women in vaguely classical style dress dancing on the steps of the American Treasury. On the left hand side of this clipping is a note in Alice Toklas’ hand, most likely added at a later date when numerous papers were shipped to the Beinecke’s archive, stating, “G. S. had kept this over the years in her box.” Stein kept this for some reason, although, we can only speculate why. Was it general interest in the suffragettes, or was the sentiment that Americans used the power of “Poetic Persuasion”? Was it the contrast of English and American style, or the idea of poetry versus arson? We can never know definitively, but it seems plausible that it was perhaps some combination of these that prompted

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<sup>15</sup> See p. 4 *Contemporary Linguistics*.

Stein to hold on to this particular piece of ephemera. This was also 1913, which corresponds to around the time *Tender Buttons* was near completion or just recently completed, and also around the time that Stein dramatically shifted her writing style from the use of simple syntax to more experimental syntax. What could one say was Stein's poetic persuasion, and did she see it as revolutionary with the ability to change politics in the world?

In contrast to this clipping, it is interesting and ironic, or perhaps, appropriate, that on July 11, 1914, in the Boston *Transcript*, Robert Emons Rogers hailed Stein's work as a "New Outbreak of Futurism: Tender Buttons, Curious Experiment of Gertrude Stein in Literary Anarchy." Rogers, quoting the Claire Marie book catalog on its readers' interests in beauty, counters the idea stating that Stein's work, "seem[s] to try to do for the art of literature what has already been done in painting, sculpture and music, that is, to express anarchy in art. Boston has seen some of . . . [these] paintings . . . which created such a stir of amazement and contempt last spring." Was Stein trying to participate in the "anarchy" of the arts? Or was she following the more American "style" of poetic persuasion?

Prior to the publication of *Tender Buttons* in 1914, much of Gertrude Stein's written work was not readily available or in wide circulation. *Three Lives*, whose printing was paid for by Stein, was published in 1909, had a small print run of only five hundred copies, and was not well known at the time. Stein herself as a public figure along with her importance to the art world was known, however. *Tender Buttons*, despite a still relatively small print run of only a thousand copies from Claire Marie press in New York City, was widely reviewed in over fifty newspapers across

the country ranging from Chicago to Pittsburg, Louisville to St. Paul, Detroit to New York, and St. Joseph to Providence between June 6, 1914 and December 26 1914.<sup>16</sup> However, few of these reviews were actually positive. Out of over fifty, not more than two or three actually seriously reviewed the book as having any real or significant merit. Typical classifications of *Tender Buttons* concluded it was “word salad” (New York, June 6, 1914), “a dictionary shot to pieces” (St Joseph, Aug. 8, 1914), warned that reading it “will put people in insane asylums” (Detroit, June 18, 1914), and that the book was simply “a waste of paper” (Toronto, July 11, 1914). The list goes on and on. As Stein recounts in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, *Tender Buttons* “had an enormous influence on all young writers and started off columnists in the newspapers of the whole country on their long campaign of ridicule. I must say that when the columnists are really funny, and they quite often are, Gertrude Stein chuckles and reads them aloud to me” (2464).

A surprising trend amidst these early reviews is the widespread comparison of Stein’s work to cubism and futurism. It is fairly common in Stein scholarship to make comparisons between Stein and Picasso, but most of this work comes with the revival of Stein and a resurgence of interest in her work in the 1970s. Most notable and often cited among these studies is the work of Wendy Steiner’s *Exact Resemblance to Exact Resemblance*, and William Gass’ “The Geography of the Sentence.”<sup>17</sup> But such

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16 Some critics have noted the wide reception of *Tender Buttons*, but do not further elaborate. Kirk Carnutt’s *The Critical Responses to Gertrude Stein* selects a few reviews that spent significant time discussing *Tender Buttons*, but his book is only a collection of selected pieces ranging across Stein’s career, and does not address the multitude of reviews that met *Tender Buttons* at the time. Only one article included in this collection is on *Tender Buttons* specifically. (Greenwood Press: Westport, CT, 2000). My citations, unless otherwise noted, all come from my own research at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale, Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas archive.

17 Other studies that discuss cubism and Stein include, Randa Dubnick, *The Structure of Obscurity: Gertrude Stein, language and cubism*. Urbana: U of Illinois Press, 1984; Stephen Scobie,

comparisons are not at all a purely contemporary invention. Out of the fifty some odd clippings reviewing *Tender Buttons*, which are part of the Beinecke's archives at Yale, seventeen alone dubbed Stein's *Tender Buttons* as cubist work, while a staggering twenty-one called it futurist, including Rogers' fairly long article discussing the ideas of anarchy and futurism in relation to the book. Stein herself was not fond of futurism, recounting in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* that the futurists hung around Picasso, but "everyone found the futurists very dull" (1963). But one wonders if the motivation behind this statement made retrospectively in 1933 and in the persona of Alice Toklas, doesn't have something to do with the way in which futurism came to be characterized at the time.

While these reviews all hail from 1914, the first exhibition of actual futurist works did not actually come to America until the following year in 1915 in San Francisco. Futurism, of course, was well established in Europe by 1914. Futurism began with Marinetti's famous manifesto first published in *Le Figaro* on February 20, 1909<sup>18</sup>, but the sense with which we have come to understand futurism today was most likely not well known in America in 1914. With regard to Stein's work, the comparison to cubism and futurism the papers drew from most likely did not come from actual knowledge and understanding of either movements, but from the noise that had surrounded the Armory Show (and the paintings that Rogers mentions

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"The Allure of Multiplicity: Metaphor and Metonymy in Cubism and Gertrude Stein," *Gertrude Stein and the Making of Literature*, Macmillan: London, 1988; Bettina Liebowitz Knapp, *Gertrude Stein*. Continuum: New York, 1990; Renee Riese Hubert, "Gertrude Stein, Cubism, and the Postmodern Book," *Postmodern Genres*. Ed. Marjorie Perloff. University of Oklahoma Press: Oklahoma City, 1995; and Jamie Hilder, "After all one must know more than one sees and one does not see a cube in its entirety: Gertrude Stein and 'Picasso' and Cubism," *Critical Survey*. Vol 17, No. 3 (2005). 66-84.

<sup>18</sup> See *Italian Futurism 1909-1914*. MoMA: New York, 2014. 7.

“caused a stir and contempt”) that had been on exhibit the previous year in the spring of 1913. Berghaus, in a book length study on futurism and modernism explains,

The introduction of European modernism (but not Futurism) at the 1913 Armory Show in New York and the subsequent development of the term ‘futurism’ served to complicate the American reception and definition of Futurism. Accounts of the Italian movement and its manifestos were available to the American public the year before the works themselves could be seen. Especially in the years surrounding the Armory Show, the American conception of Futurism was confused by non-Futurist works that were taken to represent the Italian movement.” (223)

The often cited example of this is Marcel Duchamp’s “Nude Descending a Staircase” which is not actually a futurist work at all, though its attempt to capture the body in motion bears resemblance to one of the hallmark ideas that futurism represented.

The Armory Show travelled from New York to Chicago and then to Boston and was one of the first truly “modern” exhibits in America comprised of both European and American painters and sculptors. The Armory Show proved shocking and was met with an astonishing number of reviewers and articles that parodied and mocked the work. In Elizabeth Lundy’s *The Modern Art Invasion*, that celebrates the centennial anniversary of the Armory Show, she notes, “newspaper artists relished transforming art at the show into caricatures, and an abundance of mock cubism flooded the papers” (81). The widespread fun the papers had with the new art works seems a typical response for the time. The widespread coverage also made the terms

cubism and futurism household names; nevertheless, the publics' actual understanding of these movements did not ensue. Amidst the flurry of coverage, Lunday also notes that "other publications ran articles about Gertrude Stein and her connection with the French modernists." Mabel Dodge's essay in *Arts and Decorations* helped aid the Stein/Cubism connection in the public view as well (79). Dodge's essay appeared in March 1913 a few weeks after the Armory show had opened. The often cited sentence, "Gertrude Stein is doing with words what Picasso is doing with paint" comes from Dodge's essay. The title of the essay is "Speculating or Post-Impressionism in Prose." There actually is no reference to cubism at all, unless one wants to read Picasso's name as synonymous with cubism. Dodge's essay champions that Stein's work "induces new states of consciousness," and that "every word lives, and apart from the concept, it is so exquisitely rhythmical," and that it "contains agony and movement and conveys a vicarious livingness" (2-3). While these attributes could describe aspects of cubism, there are several other art movements that these ideas could be applied to as well. It seems clear that the reception of the Armory Show helped pave the way for the reception of *Tender Buttons* the following year, even while engulfing it in vague ideas of cubism and futurism.

While it makes sense that newspapers would work from whatever information they could find at the time to explain the phenomenon of *Tender Buttons*, I think the historical reception is indicative of something that *Tender Buttons* itself was working against. The need to conceptualize and rationalize is, of course, how humans make sense of things, but the application of the concepts, here the newspapers' use of cubism and futurism, illustrates a deeper problem with concepts and language that

Stein herself critiques. What Ludwig Wittgenstein illustrates in his *Remarks on Color* as the instability of our color concepts through use, Stein similarly illustrates through a kind of “vibration” of language that functions like the simultaneity found in some of the avant-garde artworks of the same time period. It seems significant that Dodge describes Stein’s work as early as 1913 as a “new state of consciousness,” “every word lives,” and that words “convey vicarious livingness.” Wittgenstein, in his 1950 *Philosophical Investigations*, writes that “language is a form of life” (#241). The accepted concept of “things as they are” seems antithetical to the very vitality of language that Stein is aiming at. In the *Autobiography of Alice B Toklas* in 1933, Stein writes that *Tender Buttons* “[Was] . . . The beginning of mixing outside with the inside. Hitherto she had been concerned with seriousness and the inside of things, in these studies she began to describe the inside as seen from the outside” (2460). Stein’s work is often noted for the use of surface and the importance in, not the depth of meaning, but the buoyant surface sound. William Gass explains, “the problem is that in *Tender Buttons* the unconcealed surface usually makes no sense . . . . Since many of the meanings of *Tender Buttons* are etymological, the covert text can be said to be sometimes *inside* the surface of the text” (105-106). Gass’ inside of the surface seems to correspond to Stein’s description of naming the inside from the outside that she discusses in “Poetry and Grammar.” However, Marianne DeKoven finds a problem with this approach because “There is no reason to struggle to interpret or unify either the whole of *Tender Buttons* or any part of it, not only because there is no consistent pattern of meaning, but because we violate the spirit of the work by trying to find one” (76). Most recently, Astrid Lorange has argued against the desire to interpret Stein for

meaning in favor of the idea that Stein's work, "proposes . . . that the compositional practice of reading and writing are constructive experiences that produce and investigate the contexts and relations of language in a specific occasion" (10).

Bridgeman's classic study of Stein, *Gertrude Stein in Pieces*, highlights the objects in *Tender Buttons*; Lorge highlights the reading of those objects. The significance of reading is, indeed, at the forefront of Stein; however, the complexity of Stein's grammar is more than "not making sense" or just reading itself. All we can ever read is a surface. When I write a sentence to communicate a thought, you can never know the interiority of my thought, but only the surface that I have given you in language. This is what is most remarkable about Wittgenstein's work. Wittgenstein, like Stein, only ever gives us a surface, but it is always with the caveat that language is *only ever* surface; the depth we think is inherent in meaning or in representation or in the direct correspondence of language to saying is as flimsy as a "house of cards."

What Wittgenstein does differently is that he makes the invisibility of surface visible. Stein's inside seen from the outside is similar work, but the significance of that work is not in the novelty of its creation. What is invisible are our assumptions about any given thing or object that runs ahead of our experience of it. What seems our perception tends to be assumptions, and perception is never "pure" or "clear." Human perception is always already clouded or colored with past experiences and ideas that we have both learned and ones we have been told. Color then is both *what* I see and *how* I see. Quite literally, I see in color, but what I am seeing, experiencing, understanding is also colored by my concepts before I see it. In *Remarks on Color* Wittgenstein illustrates the way in which we anticipate something before it happens

when he asks, “Let us suppose that people didn’t contrast color pictures with black and white ones, but rather blue and white ones. Couldn’t blue too be felt (and that is to say, used) as not being a color?” (III: #38). Stein also asks in the Rooms section of *Tender Buttons* “Why is a pale white not paler than blue” (69).

In “Poetry and Grammar” Stein states, “language as a real thing is not imitation either of sounds or colors or emotions it is an intellectual recreation and there is no possible doubt about it and it is going to go on being that as long as humanity is anything” (331). If language is a “recreation” how can it not be an imitation? The difference lies in the split between the “inner” and the “outer” as referenced in the *Autobiography*. More simply put: what is my perception of the outer world and what shapes it? Keith Waldrop, in a short essay titled “Gertrude Stein’s Tears,” addresses the idea of what he notices as “inner speech” in Stein. Starting with the idea that much of Stein’s work is non-descriptive, Waldrop draws on psychologist Lev Semenovich Vygotsky’s *Thought and Language*. Vygotsky concludes, “in inner speech, the predominance of sense over meaning, the sentence over word, and of context over sentence is the rule” (as cited in Waldrop, 241). Vygotsky’s idea becomes a bridge for understanding Stein’s unusual use of syntax for Waldrop. Waldrop explains that he is not “suggesting Stein was talking to herself” (241), but concludes that understanding Stein’s method as “inner speech” illuminates an important facet of Stein’s idea of the “continuous present.” Stein’s “villain is ‘memory,’” Waldrop concludes, “which binds us to past interpretation, making us repeat endlessly actions and perceptions that are dead and prevent us from finding our potentialities in the present . . . . [T]he point is not not to know, but not to be held captive by what one

knows— or thinks one knows (242). While Waldrop never cites or mentions Wittgenstein, the last sentence echoes Wittgenstein’s famous proposition from *Philosophical Investigations*, “a picture held us captive and we could not get outside of it because language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably” (#115). According to Waldrop, engaging the continuous present is an antidote in Stein to the picture that holds us captive. There is more at work in Stein than just the difficulty of memory and the continuous present as it first appears. Language accumulates, it holds us up, and creates the world as we know it. But what if there were more than just what I knew? How does one account for unknowing? Not knowing or the “unreality” of things that is not structured by what I am told may be a kind of alternative reality, or at least an alternative grammar that is the color of grammar. The Steinian sentence contains the “continuous present,” but I would also say it contains the color of grammar and this is specific to how the language of avant-garde poetry functions.

Early on in “Poetry and Grammar,” Stein differentiates between nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and prepositions. While she initially says nouns themselves are not very interesting, she later discerns that “poetry is doing nothing but losing, refusing and pleasing and betraying and caressing nouns” (327), asking, “was there not a way of naming things that would not invent names, but mean names without naming them” (330). As Waldrop points out, the difficulty in language is with those things we already think we know, but this is a problem of both memory and language itself. As Wittgenstein shows us, we think there is something that is the consistency of our color concepts; and yet through humans’ various uses of color concepts, the consistency and stability produced is an illusion. The belief in consistency and

stability actually inhibits humans from seeing the reality and complexity that is our concept of color, and more importantly our use of language. The complexity and potential of language is lost in our ability to think we “know.” For Stein, the prose noun is a stable way of knowing. The potential in poetry with “language as a real thing” is not in the noun but in the “losing refusing and pleasing and betraying and caressing” of language.

What is remarkable about *Tender Buttons* is the way in which every section enacts the color of grammar through every element of its structure. It is the complexity of syntax and semantics that is the color of grammar, because it is these simultaneous elements that allow language to move. In the opening of “Poetry and Grammar,” Stein discusses the complexity of the balance of sentences and paragraphs in the way a paragraph is emotional while a sentence in prose is not. Working between the opposites of these two poles, Stein alights on her own use of both in her prose. She similarly reworks poetry, I would argue, in *Tender Buttons*, except it is not the balance of the sentence and paragraph, but the balance of the stanza and the line. Stein never discusses the line and stanza in relationship to *Tender Buttons*, but her inversion of structure becomes more apparent if one reads the text beginning with the last section, *Rooms*, rather than the traditional opening section on *Objects*.

Many scholars have commented and questioned if *Tender Buttons* is poetry because it is written in prose. If Stein’s balance of the sentence and the paragraph can be applied to her poetry, Gass is possibly mistaken in his characterization of *Tender Buttons* as “extraordinary pieces of prose, which Gertrude perversely called poems” (77); unless, we want to discuss how the new balance of the sentence and stanza, as I

am arguing, is a queer one because of how it inverts normative concepts through grammar. If one starts reading *Tender Buttons* with Rooms as the beginning section, the text opens differently. Lyn Hejinian comments on the functions of containers in *Tender Buttons*: “The carafe in *Tender Buttons*’ first poem is only the first of a number of various things that can be thought of as containers or enclosures. With regard to language (signification, sense), the concept of containment is one that opens questions regarding words’ and sentences’ ability to hold meanings” (102). While there are numerous containers, I wonder if their abundance has to do with structures rather than containment; it would seem the stress would fall on the surface of language and its grammar rather than on meaning if we replace container with structure. Meaning is always equivocal and this is always the difficulty of language. Our ability to understand meaning has little to do with language pointing at things as Wittgenstein illustrates. We must also remember that the room is also the stanza itself. In Italian, a stanza is a room. The *OED* gives the definition, “Italian *stanza*, standing, stopping place, room . . . Portuguese *estence* dwelling, room . . . Old French *estance* stay, support.” Besides being a room, the stanza is a support or position, a dwelling place, suggesting a new meaning to what Heidegger said about language being a dwelling place for humans. If language is approached as a structure and a grammar, the construction might then also be viewed as a certain point of view or perspective. Stein’s Rooms are not written in stanzas but in paragraphs.

My suggestion to begin by reading the Rooms section rather than the Objects section is not an arbitrary decision. There is no evidence that the order of *Tender Buttons* as it was published is the order in which it was written or even intended. In the

2014 centennial edition, editor Seth Perlow notes that in the Beinecke's typescript, the original typescript is bound as Rooms, Objects, Food. But Perlow fails to note this is not the only occurrence of a different ordering. The manuscript notebooks at the Beinecke of Rooms, Objects, and Food, also suggest otherwise. Each section is written in separate black notebooks. The manuscript for Objects and Food are almost identical in terms of size, red endpapers, and page edge color. The Rooms notebook is slightly different, slightly larger with no colored endpapers and page edges in a different shade of red. None of the manuscripts are dated and the order they were written in is not known. However, the difference in notebooks perhaps suggests Rooms was written separately from Objects and Food, although we cannot be certain which came first the Object or the Room.

In the *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Stein writes that “after the return to Paris she described objects, she described rooms and objects, which joined with her first experiments done in Spain, made the volume *Tender Buttons*” (1865). However, DeKoven claims Stein contradicts herself in her account of when she composed (note 76). On the flyleaf of the Rooms notebook is written “Rooms. ~~Number One~~. Rooms ~~No I. No I.~~ Rooms, Number One” no less than four times and then later crossed out. In the Beinecke's unpublished notes from Stein, there is a fragment on which Stein appeared to be working out possible titles. *Tender Buttons* appears at the top and below it. It reads: “General Title / Tender Buttons. / Three sub titles. / Food with its list ~~don't used Studies in Description at all.~~ / Rooms / Objects.” It is also known from the correspondence between Donald Evans and Stein that she never received proofs of

the book nor is Claire Marie's manuscript copy known to be extant. We may never know what exactly was sent to Evans.

In addition to the order of sections, there are a number of other small variances not noted in the 2014 centennial edition. Where every version of *Tender Buttons* in print prints the titles in Objects in all caps followed by a period, both the Beinecke's manuscript copy and typescript copy have the titles written out with only the first word capitalized, allowing the titles to be read more like sentences themselves, although they are hardly ever proper sentences and often lack verbs. Stein's sentences/titles are usually mostly nouns sometimes with an adjective and very often with an article. The only exception is *Glazed Glitter* and *A Colored Hat*, where all words are capitalized in manuscript, typescript, and print. If the title is a name and a noun, the title as a sentence, perhaps, changes the "balance" of the stanza, here paragraph, and therefore is a new kind of "room." The title as sentence is no longer separate but a part of the whole stanza which is no longer based solely on the line. As Ulla Dydo writes in *Gertrude Stein: The Language That Rises*, "Trying to come closer to what she wrote, I discovered how she wrote. Abandoning the printed texts, often full of errors, and reading in manuscript, I learned new ways of reading. I not only followed the moving hand and its shapings but also came upon unexpected contexts" (6). However, Dydo begins her careful textual analysis of Stein's writings starting in 1923 when Stein began to publish more widely. The notebooks and manuscripts of *Tender Buttons*, Dydo leaves unexamined.

In "Poetry and Grammar," Stein addresses the poetic line as attached to the love of the name and its repetition, "inevitably you express yourself in that way, in the

way poetry expresses itself that is in short lines in repeating what you began in order to do it again” (329). Dydo suggests for Stein “Both ‘beginning’ again and ‘using everything’ involved similarity and difference. Repetition, never twice the same, creates difference and newness, not mere likeness. [Stein] associates her growing interest in difference with description, with the exercises in minute observation of *Tender Buttons* and with natural phenomena” (95). Dydo’s observation on repetition echoes Kirkegaard’s long-standing philosophical dictum in *Repetition* that authentic repetition can only occur forward and not backward as in the instance of recollection (189). Stein’s repetition is of a different order since she is not interested in the noun but the way in which there was a “way of naming things that would not invent names, but mean names without naming them” (330).

If the line is connected to the repetition of the same (the name and the noun), might the line in the stanza as paragraph change the “balance” as Stein would call it? If Stein’s examination of grammar is to find a new “balance,” the importance of the sentence and the paragraph she discusses earlier in the essay seems equally important to a new poetry and poetics. The “balance,” as she continually refers to it, is incredibly significant because of movement in time and space: “with the balance of their own that they had they had become something that was the whole thing and in so being they had a balance which was the balance of the space completely not filled but created by something moving as moving is not as moving should be” (323). Even within this quotation, Stein enacts the thing or rather specifically the “movement” she describes. As Dydo puts it, “Stein incorporated the act of writing into what she was writing” (43). “Moving as moving is not as moving should be” is a confusing sentence

if we read it as a final resting thought. Read as simultaneous language, it is the color of grammar because it enacts a grammar that is beyond our understanding. The ability of grammar to shift is like the shifting of color that appears to be different shades throughout the day because of shifting light. Stein's phrase juxtaposes what is not while simultaneously saying what should be. Both phrases are based in a kind of ontological reality/unreality. "Is" is the state of to be; "is" is always being. (The opening of *Being and Time* tells us this.) But Stein's "is" *is not*. It is immediately negated, and yet simultaneously, this evocation and retraction is also the conditional "should be." It has not been, is not, but "should be." Thus, the sentence itself, through its "ungrammatical" construction is dependent on our grammatical knowledge of what is correct or "should be," pulls the very idea of movement into a kind of space where it "vibrates" and will not stand still as a concept. We cannot quite steadily grasp it, and the sentence itself makes us dizzy because we want something static to hold onto, but simultaneous language like simultaneous color, is not static but continually dynamic.

The very structure of *Tender Buttons* relies on this dynamic principle in every aspect. The integration of titles as sentences makes them already a part of the text. The lines of the poem are gone and replaced with what at least looks like on the page, paragraphs. Reading the manuscript itself reveals another layer to Stein's reworking of the balance of the poem. The composition of *Tender Buttons* is unusual. Stein was particularly fond of small notebooks, and the very orientation of the way in which the manuscript was written is inverted. Instead of writing pages as one would read a book, Stein flipped the notebooks on their side writing against or across the very line of the page. She only wrote on one side, until she reached the end of the notebook at which

point the book was flipped again, and the writing process was reversed. Thus when reading the notebooks, what is physically the end of the notebook is actually the middle of the text, and the end of the text is actually the beginning of the physical notebook. One might want to attribute this to a mere idiosyncrasy, like Roland Barthes composing almost entirely on index cards, but numerous other notebooks from around the same time or right after, do not exhibit this exact mode of composition.

The manuscripts themselves also reveal something interesting in terms of the line. When looking at a page of the manuscript, the physicality of the page and where the breaks are on the page demonstrate something that feels far more like the poetic line. This movement is lost in all typescript and printed versions. While it does not seem that Stein intended the sections and paragraphs to be written as poetic lines, it does seem possible that what would be a stanza with line-breaks has purposely been embedded in the paragraphs. The traditional use of poetic line-breaks on the page embedded in a paragraph alters the paragraph's rhythm and causes the reader to read the repetition differently. It alters both the line and paragraph. For example, the manuscript version of "Roastbeef" in *Food* is telling in its visual repetition:

Roastbeef.  
 In the inside there is sleeping,  
 in the outside there is reddening, in  
 the morning there is meaning, in  
 the evening there is feeling. In (1)

The ending repetition of "in" and "the" reads differently here at the beginning and ending of line breaks and the repetition of words accumulates differently. The

highlighting of the preposition and articles is folded into the prose line in printed versions, but in the manuscript, it is far more visually pronounced, as is the repetition of “there is” and the rhyme of “morning” and “evening” and “meaning” and “feeling.”

The same is true of the manuscript version of Objects:

A carafe, that is a blind

glass.

A kind in glass and a cousin,

a spectacle and nothing strange

a single hurt color and an (1)

The repetition of the article in this version becomes prominent, whereas, it is embedded in the prose paragraph. The placement of the title is also unusual with the word “glass” ending on the next line as if it were more of a sentence and not a title. If one were to look at this page alone without knowing what it was, one might think the whole thing was a list of sentences not a paragraph with the title. It then seems the juxtaposition of structures, poetic versus prosaic, sentences versus paragraphs, titles versus sentences, lines versus sentences, and paragraphs versus stanzas are all employed to create a different kind of dynamic and movement. It is the juxtaposition of anticipated elements within the poetic structure and the prosaic structure that creates the kind of “new balance” or movement that Stein addresses in her essay “Poetry and Grammar.”

It is this dynamism that I call simultaneous language because it is more than one anticipated element employed simultaneously with another. There is always an overabundance at work, and it is this syntactic (and later semantic) overabundance that

allows for the breakdown of what is anticipated by a reader. Concepts cannot hold because language itself is moving, and we must then learn to “Act so that there is no use in a center.”

Returning to the idea of structure, if we use Rooms as a starting point, we are given a different way into the text. The stanza is a room, but what is the color of that room? In *Remarks on Color*, Wittgenstein writes in part one, “look at your room late in the evening when you can hardly distinguish between colors any longer—and now turn on the light and paint what you saw earlier in semi-darkness.—How do you compare the colors in such a picture with those of a semi-dark room?” (#67). Wittgenstein does not answer his question. It is enough to ask it. The colors are not compatible. The color I see in the light is not the same color I see in the dark, but the room that I am looking at is the same. Both room and objects have not changed; what changes is how I see them when the light is turned on. The light does not create a dichotomy of light and dark as a metaphor for understanding versus misunderstanding. The proposition does not say anything of this sort. It simply shows there is a difference in the room and the objects when the light is turned on.

The simplicity of the sentence should not be overlooked. Wittgenstein always writes about language through language, which for him, is always an ordinary subject; here, it is color. Our perception of the colors of the room and objects is what changes in the proposition, not the room or objects themselves. The way the light changes the color of the room is like the way the grammar of Wittgenstein’s sentences change what I think about color. I am not writing *about* rooms and objects and neither is Wittgenstein. I am writing *through* them. When the light is on, my perception of color

changes. I am *not* writing about color. I *am* writing about color because I am writing about language. Stein's Rooms are a stanza that is not a stanza because it is a paragraph, and the movement of the structure/form is the color of her language but at times it is also color as we see it in the world.

Wittgenstein's proposition is true, but his sentences isolated from each other alone are ordinary. It is the arrangement or rather rearrangement of his form of writing that makes something happen because of the building of contradiction between the sentences in any given proposition. The contradiction is the "truth" of concepts. The stability of a concept is actually an illusion. Stein's Rooms rebuilds the stanza through the paragraph and hinges on contradiction, not as nonsense, but as a change in the color of how one reads her language. Stein like Wittgenstein, turns on the light in the room. Stein's grammar changes the color of the room we are reading. The vibration of our concepts is the color of grammar.

The famous opening line of Rooms, "Act so that there is no use in a center" (63) is often cited and written about. Rachel Blau DePlessis notes, "the remark in *Tender Buttons* is often isolated as a key instruction for experimental writing" (49), while Lyn Hejinian understands it to be a kind of flattening of perspective as in a landscape where the focus is constantly shifting: "To 'act so that there is not use in a center' proposes landscape with its perspective spread over a largish surface, located in innumerable nonisolating focal points. In terms of writing, this meant, for Stein, that the vanishing point might be every word" (106). The vanishing point in perspective is correct; however, perspective can be expanded beyond landscape and word to the effect of structure and grammar on perspective and perception. The center

of the origin is called into question. The center that would give us a starting point is no longer needed. Three paragraphs down we read, “any change was in the end of the center” (63).

Writing some 50 years before Jacques Derrida, Stein’s phrase seems to echo the discussion of the center and structure in “Structure, Sign and Play,” where “classical thought concerning structure could say that the center is, paradoxically, within, the structure and outside it. The center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality has its center elsewhere” (279). The center for Derrida is necessary to the idea of play because it “permits the play of elements inside the total form” (279). Play, however, as discussed in Chapter 1, functions between what is absent and present. The possibility of substitution is only possible through what is both present and absent. For the structure, form, or system, to have play, the center or origins must be outside of the structure because only through the center’s absence, (which also gives coherence) that play is possible. But the belief in a center *somewhere* becomes the necessity that enables the possibility of play. Stein’s structure or room is *without* a center. And it is this un-centered structure that makes Stein’s work radical.

As examined in Chapter 1, the color of grammar is not play within meaning, but meaning breaking; Stein’s room or structure has no center, or at least no “use in a center” because with the lack of a center there can be no infinite substitution as Derrida would have it. Numerous Stein scholars who have read her work as continually being open to multiple interpretations must be reexamined. Interpretations and meanings, even various and multiple, are still based on the signifier and sign and

on the infinite possibilities and substitutions therein. One of course can read Stein this way. But something more radical and innovative actually opens up if we think not about the possibilities within language and meaning, but the functions of language itself. The use of grammar becomes vastly important because the focus of the text is not multiple meanings within language but the surface of language itself. Surface and grammar are intimately connected because grammar describes the use of the structure. In linguistics, grammar is always descriptive not prescriptive. Derrida suggests, “even today the notion of a structure lacking any center represents the unthinkable itself” (279), and yet it is the unthinkable that is Stein’s *Rooms*.

It is unthinkable because Stein’s use and function of grammar is contrary to our conceptual thinking. Stein, of course, still has concepts. A room is a concept, so are objects and food. Because she is using language, it is impossible to escape language completely. The difference is that these concepts are used to break concepts, and what is revealed is a different color of language. There are echoes of statements: “if the center has a place then there is distribution. That is natural. There is a contradiction and naturally returning there comes to be both sides and the center. That can be seen from the description” (63), but their logic, like Wittgenstein’s propositions, is contradictory. The center distributes or it seems to make possible some kind of order. Some sort of structure comes back when “naturally returning there comes to be both sides and the center.” “A wide action is not a width” is brought back with the “sides and the center.” The return of the structure is “seeing” or so it seems through “the description.” Studying the manuscript itself shows that in Stein’s notes, at one point, *Tender Buttons* had the subtitle, “Studies in Description.” This subtitle appears

in notes and on the flyleaf of the Food notebook. In an undated draft of a letter to “Miss Marie” (Donald Evans), Stein specified to “leave out the place that I used *Studies in Description*.” Although, as Perlow notes, it makes one appearance, “in the first edition . . . on a rear flyleaf, where an advertisement for Claire Marie’s list of *Belles-Lettres* includes [it]” (95).

Why remove the subtitle “*Studies in Description*”? Critics have noticed how the sections of *Objects* and *Food* could be read as descriptions. Christopher Knight writes, “Stein is obsessed with questions of definition, of defining what is and what is not an object. *Tender Buttons* is nothing if it is not first an exercise in definition, Stein’s ambition being to translate into one language that which is found in another” (101). It seems “*Studies in Description*” attaches the text to the usual definition that a description describes a thing as Knight seems to characterize it, which I think is an oversimplification. In the color of grammar that is without a center, what work is the description doing? In “*Poetry and Grammar*,” Stein claims she was trying to write about things without naming them. The above paragraph from *Rooms* reads, “there is a contradiction” but to what this contradiction refers remains unclear. Stein embeds contradiction within the statement that also contradicts the opening paragraph. Thus, meaning/contradiction are blurred in the same fashion as the stanza/paragraph, sentence/title, line/sentence structure is blurred elsewhere in her work. The contradiction throughout produces an effect that is much like Wittgenstein’s ordinary statements that build through contradiction, disrupt ordinary description, or even puzzle the pieces of an argument. Language comes to masquerade as simple sentences, but the duplicity of contradiction that multiplies reveals the movement inherent within

language. It seems we often do not see this movement or contradiction because we simply no longer see the surface and think language describes the depth of things. The movement of ideas or concepts through contradiction and simultaneity is the color of grammar.

We read in *Rooms*, “a fact is that when the place was replaced all was left that was stored and all was retained that would not satisfy more than another. The question is this, is it possible to suggest more to replace that thing. This question and this perfect denial does make the time change all the time” (65). If Stein is working both with description and against description (naming things without naming them), it naturally seems that description alone is lacking. If the boundaries and the center can be seen from the description (63), the question is not “what am I describing, but how does language move beyond description? More than an exercise or experiment, Stein’s project carries more weight because of its transformative potential. “A fact is that when the place was replaced all was left that was stored and all was retained that would not satisfy more than another” (64) suggests the fact is something that brings language to a kind of stasis. Language becomes too small, “all was retained that would not satisfy” (64). The object or thing, idea, or fact that is replaced by language that “points” always ends up being something less. What Stein seeks is a potentially alternative way of thinking and writing, and if it is “possible to suggest more to replace that thing” (64-65). The thing cannot be described as it is because language does not “point.” Wittgenstein illustrates this facet of language once again, becoming an indispensable thinker in helping us read Stein. Concepts and their descriptions are not consistent because their everyday use shows us this. The possibilities to suggest

more goes beyond the ordinary concept because the overabundance and even contradictoriness of meaning is not static. In the impossibility to rest comfortably in a thought, or concept, we are required to change our thinking. Whatever habits and patterns we cling to, the jolts of too much, of “more to replace that thing” (65), and the contradiction of ideas forces us to read and think differently, it forces us to reach beyond what we understand and believe to be true.

Far from stating things or only arguing for them, Stein also enacts the moving contradiction in the last sentence of this early paragraph from *Rooms*: “This question and this perfect denial does make the time change all the time” (65). She asks the question as if there were an answer, but then also says it is a denial. The logical progression to a final result or thought unravels. The final answer is suspended in the movement of questioning and denial. The movement of the sentence through contradiction “does make the time change all the time” (64). The question and denial suggests time never stands still, but may also suggest the “continuous present” that Stein addresses in “Composition as Explanation.”

In “Composition as Explanation,” Stein claims that

the only thing that is different from one time to another is what is *seen* and what is *seen* depends upon how everybody is *doing* everything. This makes the thing we are *looking* at very different and this makes what those who *described* it makes of it, it makes a composition, it confuses, shows, it is, it *looks*, it likes it as it is, and this makes what is *seen* as it is *seen*. (emphasis added, 3)

The emphasis on “seeing” and “looking” is useful in how it pertains to composition and potentially grammar and even grammars. The composition is what is seen, but seeing also makes the composition. What does the composition look like when what I see is moving? I would say it looks like *Tender Buttons*.

Stein, here, is being more than clever. If we approach grammar philosophically through Wittgenstein, the structure of the sentence is the structure of our thought which is why in the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein states, “A picture held us captive and we could not get outside of it for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably” (#115). We are held by the concepts and ideas that are in our language, but Wittgenstein questions this with the use of “seems” which in the German, *schien* also suggests the idea of appearance. Seeing, looking, appearance, and perception are all brought to the forefront, which informs the preoccupation with color in *Remarks on Color*. What is it we are seeing? But more importantly, what is it we are seeing *in* or *through* language? While it seems impossible to think without language, what Wittgenstein shows us, and what I believe Stein does, that still has not been fully recognized by scholars, is that while there is a grammar and an order to our language that we assume is inherent, there is also a disorder or different movement within language. We only ever recognize this other order (even disorder, contradiction, and misunderstanding) through the way in which our assumptions fail. Wittgenstein’s unbuilding and Stein’s contradiction become paramount. If the structure of grammar is inherent to my thinking, the color of grammar is the alteration of my thought.

What is remarkable is that the unthinkable may reside in language itself. Recall how you think of an idea, and yet is it ever entirely clear until you explain it to

someone else or write it down? Does not the explanation and the writing of it somehow change it and make it clearer? The only way to change the thought is to change the grammar; if I keep thinking the same saying nothing will ever change. The color of grammar is the contradiction of thought that changes the grammar of my thinking. This is what Stein and Wittgenstein both do (and to a lesser extent, any number of poets). The change is often one we then read because it is already in the grammar of language, but the change is not the grammar we already know. This is why it is the color of grammar, because like color, I perceive it and read it at times. But also like color, change is a kind of abstraction, it is never the same, and it continually shifts depending on how I look at it. I cannot point to it and say this patch of blue is the same as one I saw last week because it changes with the light. This subtle grammar within “ordinary” grammar is the color of grammar because what I see as “color” is actually the instability of my thought made visible. Through my perception, color is unstable, (the colors in the room at morning are not the same colors at night); the color of my grammar is the instability or shifting of my ideas and concepts through a shift in grammar. Instability as color is also the power of language, just as a black and white world would be a rather dull one. Thinking of color as metaphor for the alteration of thought and perception within and through grammar is illustrated in the importance of Stein’s use of color, shadow, glitter, shimmer, and other allusions to light and what we see. In “Composition as Explanation,” “the only thing that is ever different . . . Is what is seen” (3). The question is what do we see and does the grammar we read change what we see?

In the seventh paragraph of *Rooms*, we read “the shadow is not shining in the way there is a black line” (63), which can be read in multiple ways partly due to the lack of punctuation and unusual syntax. Shadows do not shine, but it seems the black line becomes the obstruction. The line may be the line of the poem, or the sentence, or reading in a linear way. Shadows do not shine, but they do affect color as Wittgenstein’s room at twilight shows us. Things that shine also change color for Wittgenstein when he writes about the light part of an object that shines and is a highlight: “The bucket I see in front of me is glazed gleaming white; I couldn’t possibly call it grey or say ‘I really see grey.’ But it has a highlight that is far lighter than the rest of its surface, and because it is round there is a gradual transition from light to shadow, yet without there seeming to be a change of color” (III: #248). The shadow and shining, on one level, are contradictions, and the statement is illogical. But it also seems possible that the black line or that which is clearly defined is “in the way” because it is not contradiction, but clear definition. If the grammar of the sentence and its logic works against a “normal” understanding of what it means, it seems possible this is due to a new balance of grammar, and the new kind of sentence explained in “Poetry and Grammar.” The concept of the sentence is not *one complete* thought but *several competing* thoughts. The composition or contradiction, depending on whether it is read in the light or in the shade, is the possibility of the simultaneity of language. Like the colors in a Delaunay painting, the composition causes the idea or thought to vibrate.

While Stein’s early critics would have characterized such a sentences as nonsense, it is only because they did not know how to read it. Their adherence to try to

make Stein fall in line with other cubist or futurist works of the time (which they also did not understand), was an attempt to collapse the dynamism of Stein's grammar into a ready-made (no pun intended) concept that would transfix it. The purpose of Stein's grammar here is not to fix ideas but to break and move them, not absorbing ideas into already established ideas. Through language and grammar, something shimmers and glitters, and changes color depending on what light you look at it in. I am speaking metaphorically, but the movement is the same. The reference to a black line is not incidental either, because if we are speaking of the movement of language as color, black is the color that absorbs all colors. In a certain sense, black is both a color and is not. Wittgenstein suggests as much with his example of a black and white photograph cited earlier: "Let us suppose that people didn't contrast color pictures with black and white ones, but rather blue and white ones. Couldn't blue too be felt (and that is to say, used) as not being a color?" (III: #38) We contrast black and white to color, but at the same time, a different use of blue would perhaps create a different concept of it. But thinking *through* the logic of our ordinary concepts of color, the question seems a ludicrous one. The line and the concept or thought that would make an idea stable is a black line because it absorbs all possibility of shimmer or glitter and simultaneity of color. Simultaneity in painting is possible only through complementary colors; we might even say contradictory colors. But that which absorbs everything leaves no room for contrast. We must also remember historically that the line has always been privileged over color and color was always secondary. Merleau-Ponty finds the discounting of color the phenomenological problem with Descartes' concept of painting and the line:

If [Descartes] had examined that other, deeper opening upon things given us by the secondary qualities, especially color, then—since there is no rule-governed or projective relationship between them and the true properties of things, and we understand their message all the same—he would have found himself faced with the problem of a conceptless universality and opening upon things. He would have been obliged to find out how the uncertain murmur of colors can present us with things, forests, storms—in short the world. He would have been obliged, perhaps, to integrate perspective, as a particular case, into a broader ontological power. But for him it goes without saying that color is an ornament, mere coloring. (133)

The historical use of color and the explosion of color that began in painting and arts around the *fin-de-siècle* in the turn-of-the-century suggests more than simply an inversion or turning away from tradition as often interpreted, and Ezra Pound's dictum, "make it new." The nuance, not simply of tradition, but the complete challenging of "normal" or "ordinary" ways of thinking is more complex than often characterized. The revolution of color in the visual arts, and what I am calling the color of grammar, is not just changing the idea, but rather it changes the way the idea is structured. The change in structure seems a facet of what Peter Burger recognizes as the novelty and revolutionary power of the avant-garde.

The ability to change the structure or the grammar is profound because it is not just the instantiation of a new thought, but rather the way we think. In *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein gives us a picture: "I see a picture; it represents an old

man walking up a steep path leaning on a stick.— How? Might it not have looked just the same if he had been sliding downhill in that position? Perhaps a Martian would describe the picture so. I do not need to explain why we do not describe it so” (#139). What the picture illustrates is the automatic way in which our perception of something is already structured in a particular way, and this is why language “works” so to speak. Words do not point at things I do not know. Words and language that “points” only points to things and concepts that I only really already understand. It is not my language, but my understanding/thinking that makes the ordinary world comprehensible. That which goes against my ordinary understanding possesses a different structure, or in language, perhaps, a different grammar, and alters my understanding because it breaks my habitual patterns, even if the immediate effect is misunderstanding or non-comprehension.

Stein is often characterized as writing “nonsense,” apart from the early reviews of Stein, numerous contemporary scholars have still acknowledged the use of nonsense in her work as DeKoven does. But I think this is a mischaracterization altogether because it is not nonsense, but a grammar that must be read for a different “sense.”<sup>19</sup> Stein’s “indeterminacy,” as Marjorie Perloff argues, “is by no means equivalent to nonsense or automatic writing. Indeed, here ‘ordinary’ language constructions, like Wittgenstein’s are always in dialogical relation to the language of the world in which they exist, providing a powerful satire of its presentations” (110). While I am not arguing for satire, I think Perloff’s recognition of something beyond nonsense and something that challenges the presentations of language is useful. In the

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<sup>19</sup> When Wittgenstein’s first writings were made more readily available, similar claims about “nonsense” were made.

Food section, the idea of sense is drawn out. In the middle of *Tender Buttons*, the section on “Food” closes with the sequence, “Orange,” “Orange,” “Oranges,” “Orange In.” The phonic repetition recalls the “origin” or beginning, except that the beginning is at the end of a middle sequence; although, if we read it in the order that we find in the typescript, this is the last section, and this sequence would actually be the end of the book. The final “Orange In” ends with, “A no, a no since, a no since when, a no since when since, a no since when since a no since when since, a no since, a no since when since, no since, a no, a no since, a no since, a no since” (38). By the end the reader hears, “no sense,” “nonsense,” “since when,” “no since when,” “I know,” “I know sense,” “I know since when.” What one immediately hears is the repetition of “nonsense,” as the numerous early critics recall the opacity, indecipherability, and difficulty of Stein. Perloff recalls how these early critics of Stein read her in terms of how one typically thinks grammar exists and how “sense” is made. Perloff, reading Stein through Wittgenstein, presents us with a new view, where “*Grammar*, in this context means a set of prescriptions which all ‘acceptable’ sentences must follow in contrast to Wittgenstein’s conception of grammar as the description of how sentence are actually formed” (36).

The idea of “nonsense” expands through Stein’s punning on “no.” Since when? Since the beginning of time, perhaps, or since the no of the father, the no of the law, or the no of patriarchal power. “Since when” alone is repeated five times. “Since” also carries with it the homophone “sense” as in the senses or to sensate. Is it nonsense? Perhaps only under the “no” or prescribed grammar. However, there is also “know” in “no.” What do I know? A no. I know. What is perceived differently and what might I

know beyond the “no”? While scholars often note Stein’s unusual grammar and syntax, I would like to take a different grammatical turn. If we do not reduce Stein’s writing to a simple binary of sense and nonsense, the effects the sentence has on the reader suggest the poignancy of grammar, and in a certain “sense” color of our perception.

Beginning with the structure, the grammar, and the room, then, are absolutely paramount to critique how we are oriented in the text. In *Rooms*, Stein writes “no eyeglasses are rotten, no window is useless and yet if there will not come in there is a speech ready, there always is and there is no dimness, not a bit of it” (66). Anyone familiar with *Tender Buttons* knows that there are numerous references to glass and glasses. Eyeglasses and windows are ways of seeing, but they are also things I look through. In this sense, grammar is also something I look through. If open air and perhaps movement occurs with something that is open, something happens to the perception when “air will not come in there is a speech ready” (66). Without a change in the structure, the room and the window in the room are closed, no air comes in and because what is already known is all that is said “there is a speech ready.” The speech is already ready because this is the grammar of our thinking that comes out in language. What is ready-made in language is a presupposition of my understanding in a particular way. “There is no dimness” because everything is “clear” but clarity here is not the goal rather that which is not dim does not have shadow or shine. Clarity then is also stable and does not move, i.e. “air will not come in” (66). But the means with which we see or perceive, or perhaps even read, is not limited by our perception alone, “no eyeglass is rotten, no window is useless” (66). Through multiplicity and movement, we arrive at color.

Three paragraphs before we read, “alike and snail, this means chinamen, it does there is no doubt that the right is more than perfect there is no doubt and glass is confusing it confuses the substance which was of a color” (66). Stein’s seemingly odd elocution presents us with a “new” balance of paragraph and line, and sense and nonsense as contradiction that is the movement of the paragraph. “Alike and a snail” have nothing in common, but it is the very unbalancing of what we expect from the word “alike” that creates a new balance or what I am calling the color of grammar. The further alteration of meaning with the phrase “means chinamen” further alters our anticipation of what is “alike” and what can “mean.” The structure of Stein’s sentence accomplishes the effect of simultaneity through our anticipation and then disassociation. The effect of Stein’s grammar colors our understanding through its movement, because it alters the structure through which we are looking. Rethinking the function of grammar on our perception illuminates the second part of the sentence where, “is there no doubt and glass is confusing it confuses the substance which was of a color” (66). It would seem we see through glass, but here glass confuses. Not only is it confusion, but “the substance which was of a color” (66). If glass is a metaphor for perception, and more importantly, how we see or think/understand, the glass confuses the “substance which was of a color” because the substance is the reality of things, and “a color” is a facet of our perception. The *way* in which we see, and the way in which we are accustomed to seeing is a color. Our perspective or perception is a certain view; it is not all colors. When I look at the world, perception in the most physical sense of the word, is many colors, not just a color. Even for the color blind, this is true. The glass of perception or our understanding and thinking “is of a color,”

and the singularity of color is a grammar. The substance itself is multiple. The question then is what is the glass that does not confuse substance?

Further on in *Rooms*, we read, “is there an exchange, is there a resemblance to the sky which is admitted to be there and the stars which can be seen. Is there. That was a question” (67). The structure of the sentence is not that of a question, but a statement. Following the logic of contradiction, the question/statement enacts two ideas at once. With two parts of the sentence employed at once, there cannot be a resemblance because there never was a description of anything. It is only through the juxtaposition and the inversion of the sentence itself that we are able to read it for its contradiction. Resemblance to something would suggest a description and a correspondence, but without the linear thought, without the contemplation of the line which is black, there can be no resemblance. For something to resemble something else there must be a kind of “system in pointing” which is clearly called into question in the opening of the *Objects* section where “a carafe, that is a blind glass” is now read differently.

Color then is not of *a piece*, not of *a substance*, not of *the description*, but part of *everything*. What is abstracted from color as a piece is only a particular way of looking at something. The grammar which we think we understand is a similar abstraction to a single color. If one had the ability to see without grammar or were to look at things without “understanding,” the contradiction and colors of things, which is many and not singular, would be recognized: “all the coats have a different shape, that does not mean that they differ in color, it means a union between use and exercise and a horse” (67). Stein perhaps puns on the colloquial phrase “a horse of a different

color.” Stein’s use of difference William Gass addresses. However, it doesn’t seem that the difference here would be the same as a Derridian kind of difference as deference. The shape is different, the colors are the same. The idea of a coat seems illogical, except a coat is a covering. Hejinian explains that there are numerous enclosures and coverings in *Tender Buttons* (104). But the idea of the covering as concealment is not what I’m aiming at. Stein’s references to coats and dresses, fabric, curtains, and table covers, while having a specific function in terms of how the ordinary everyday world is rethought, may also have a connection with the old 18th-century dictum that, “language is the dress of thought.” If we characterize our thought as the “grammar” that precedes language, language would indeed seem to “dress” thought. One is reminded that a dress without a body is empty. If color is not singular, but a multiplicity, and if grammar has multiple possibilities in language beyond the one we understand and use, it would then seem that language may take many shapes, but the color is the same because it is always language itself. Color as language is the reality of language. The grammar through which we ordinarily understand things is a singular picture or view; it is a singular color. But the language and grammar that is beyond my understanding, that is more than what I can at first glance understand, and that alters my understanding is not *a* grammar, but is the *color of grammar* and the radical potential within language. The color of grammar is the multiplicity of grammars even those outside my understanding.

We may then reread the work of simultaneous poetry that avant-garde poet Blaise Cendrars wrote, as not simply the playfulness of color, but color as a specific function within grammar that alters the grammar I think I “understand.” *The Prose of*

*the Transsibérien*, when considering the collaborative art work, may then have similarities in its rethinking of structure like Stein even though its structure is nothing like Stein's.

**CHAPTER THREE: THE GEOGRAPHY OF COLOR AND SIMULTANEITY REVISITED:**

**BLAISE CENDRARS' *LA PROSE DU TRANSSIBÉRIAN***

In the Cooper Hewitt Design Museum on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, somewhere near the top of the ornate staircase behind a layer of glass, I experience first hand the avant-garde work of poet Blaise Cendrars and visual artist Sonia Delaunay-Terk in the form of the *La Prose du Transsibérien et la Petite Jehanne de France* (1913) (fig. 1). To encounter the text as it was intended as a two-meter long accordion-folded artist's book, and not as it is reprinted in a traditional 6 by 9 inch book, is an experience radically different from any ordinary sense in which one might read a standard text. I was first overwhelmed by Delaunay's color, which mesmerized and made me dizzy simultaneously. Then there is the text of the poem itself. I jumped in reading somewhere in the middle of the poem because that was what was at eye level. The full text unfolded and framed was difficult to read because the top was above my head even though I am a tall person. I read in fragments as if I were reading Sappho. The text itself invites nonlinear reading and abstraction with the overwhelming and intermingling of color and text, abstract painting and colored type combined into one object.

From the text itself, I gathered the narrator is a poet, there is a journey at hand, and the narrator keeps repeating that he is a bad poet and has failed. But I also did not read to the end of the text's 444 lines lest a guard wonder why I was kneeling on the museum floor. The experience was like falling into color, the kind of sensation one

might have staring up at the sun through a mass of autumn leaves, or looking through a foggy window at night at changing traffic lights. When I am pushed beyond my senses, and my habitual experience of the world deferred, I am no longer reading, no longer remembering, I am only here or there, suspended in color, in time, and in the present. Perhaps that is something of what Gertrude Stein means by the “continuous present.” Perhaps that is something of what Robert Delaunay meant when he refers to “color rhythms” in simultaneous panting.

### **Cendrars meets the Delaunays**

The striking original 1913 printed versions of *La Prose du Transsibérien et la Petite Jehanne de France* is one of Swiss poet Blaise Cendrars’ (born Frédéric Sauter) most celebrated and often studied poems. Cendrars’ own poetry career was short-lived, beginning around the late 1910s and ceasing in the mid 1920s. Born in Switzerland, educated in Naples, and apprenticed in Russia to a watchmaker from 1904-1907, he finally moved to Paris in 1910 often claiming this date and place as the birthplace of Blaise Cendrars. The pseudonym of Cendrars, prominent Cendrars scholar Monique Chefdor explains, connects to his fiery and somewhat erratic existence that cannot be divorced from his writing:

The very choice of a pseudonym that sums up his creative formula is significant. A phonetic mutation from “*braise*” (“embers”) to Blaise and the combination of “*cendres*” (“ashes”) and art or arson has been frequently mentioned. For him not only “to write is to burn alive” but “the process of writing is a conflagration which sets ablaze a whole confusion of ideas and

makes associations or images that flare up until it reduced them to crackling embers and falling ashes. (24)

Chefdor notes that between December of 1910 and June of 1912, Cendrars travelled to New York, before returning to Paris again in October 1912 (19). Cendrars would continue to travel extensively his whole life, but it was this stint in New York that gave rise to what is now considered his famous first poem, *Les Pâques à New York*. In a 1950 interview, reprinted in the *The Paris Review* in 1966, he claims to have written *Les Pâques* all in one evening, publishing the poem exactly as it was written with only three edits. On returning to Paris in October of 1912, he did not find a publisher but chose to self-publish the poem:

I found a printer, an anarchist who had a little clandestine press installed in a piano crate, at the Buttes-Chaumont, rue Botzaris, Villa des Boers. I worked with him to earn a little money against the cost of the edition. I profited from the occasion to undergo my apprenticeship in typography. I composed more than half of the text myself. The little book was published with an ugly picture of me. The thing cost me something like a hundred francs. There were one hundred twenty-five copies published. I offered them for sale at twenty sous. I never sold one. (8)

The printing of *Les Pâques à New York* not only marks the real start of Cendrars' poetry career, but also presumably gave him an interest in typography and printing, which was influential in his founding of a press and journal and the self-publication of his early works, including *La Prose du Transsibérien*. It seems possible that Cendrars' unique conception of different size fonts, different types, unusual layout, which are

significant in *La Prose du Transsibérien*, were a result of his learning typography for *Les Pâques à New York*. The fact that Cendrars' conception of revolutionary typography was learned from an anarchist is only too perfect. Chefdor recounts that in "September of 1912 [Cendrars] founded with Szitya and Marius Hanot the review *Les Hommes Nouveaux* . . . on 4 Rue de Savoï" (19). The press remained at this address for a few years and served as Cendrars' permanent address while he travelled widely. Chefdor notes, "*Les Hommes Nouveaux* was discontinued, but Cendrars maintained a publishing house of the same name and himself published his first poems *Pâques*, *Séquences*, and *La Prose du Transsiberien*" (20). It was also around this same time in late 1912 that Cendrars met Robert and Sonia Delaunay-Terk through Guillaume Apollinaire. While Cendrars never sold one of the one hundred and twenty-five copies of *Les Pâques*, he did give a copy to Sonia who in-turn covered the cover and flyleaf with a simultaneous collage. Cendrars' collaboration on *La Prose du Transsibérien* with Sonia Delaunay-Terk who hand water-colored approximately sixty versions of the text using pochoir technique<sup>20</sup> (although only seven or so are now known to exist) is perhaps one of the reasons this particular Cendrars poem has received much

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20 Pochior is a form of using stencils. It was largely used in the 20s and 30s for illustrating because color reproduction was not of high quality at the time. The process of pochoir is described: "Separate stencils were cut, sometimes in thin sheets of copper, zinc, or aluminum, for every color component. Later stencil materials were made of celluloid or plastic and contemporary stencil materials are made of coated paper or acetate. Each successive color layer, using watercolor or gouache, was applied to the stencil with a brush called a pompon. Pigment on the brush could not be thick or runny, as paint could easily slide underneath the stencil and change the shape of the image. Therefore, it was necessary to really blot the pigment on the brush before applying it to the stencil, and in the case of watercolor images, this was even more critical. Skilled printers could achieve incredibly subtle details using gradation and stippling, spattering or even simply drawing additional details with a small brush on the final layer. Sometimes as many as 100 stencils were used to recreate a single image, and the resulting print was surprisingly rich and detailed." "Pochoir: Art of the Stencil: Pochoir: History and Techniques," *Fleet Library: Rhode Island School of Design*. <http://risd.libguides.com/pochoir>. (2011).

attention from scholars and art critics alike. Even at the time, *La Prose* created a stir with its claims to simultaneity.<sup>21</sup>

Sonia Delaunay-Terk has just as diverse a background as Cendrars himself. Born Sarah Ilinitchna Stern in Ukraine, raised by her uncle in St. Petersburg, she changed her name to Sonia Terk taking her uncle's last name. She traveled widely across Europe, attended art school in Germany, and moved to France in 1906. Sonia Terk was briefly married to gallery owner Wilhelm Uhde to gain independence from her parents, before divorcing and marrying Robert Delaunay in 1910. Sonia's experimentation with abstraction and the Delaunays' development of simultaneity burgeoned in their work in 1911 and 1912. At The Modern Museum of Art's 2012 – 2013 exhibit *Inventing Abstraction 1910 – 1925*, Delaunay-Terk's collaged copy of *Les Pâques à New York* was on display along with several versions of *La Prose du Transsibérien*. In the exhibition catalogue for MoMA, an essay by Matthew Affron describes *Les Pâques* as the first book Sonia read of Cendrars and then “covered its binding with patchwork of triangles cut from metallic and colored papers and endpapers with grids of colored rectangles” (84). She also similarly collaged covers of works by Guillaume Apollinaire and Pierre Jaudon (84). At this same time, Cendrars began to work out ideas for *La Prose*. Out of this early work, the collaboration on *La Prose du Transsibérien* most likely arose.

While Cendrars knew both Robert and Sonia, Sonia ended up collaborator because, as Antoine Sidoti recounts from a 1971 interview with Sonia, “Robert discutait, mais il n'était très inspiré. Il était plutôt un inspirateur. Puis Robert at

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21 For a complete record of the articles and correspondence surrounding this controversy see *Genèse et Dossier d'un polémique La Prose du Transsibérien Blaise Cendrars and Sonia Delaunay*, (Paris: *Lettres Modernes*) 1987.

Cendrars voyaient en moi, je crois, le côté russe. Aussi, ma collaboration avec Cendrars s'est imposée naturellement car elle était née dans le foyer du simultanéisme et de nos affinités. [Robert discussed it, but he wasn't very inspired. He was an inspirer. It was then, I believe, Robert and Cendrars saw in me my Russianness. Also, my collaboration with Cendrars came naturally because it was born at the threshold of simultaneity and the affinities in our work]"<sup>22</sup> (18). While Sonia's Russian heritage was important to the collaboration, it is interesting to note that she cites her "birth" at the threshold of simultaneity, not in Russia, which perhaps suggests that the ideas of movement were more primary than those of geographic place or a singular symbolic function. Sonia's name change, like Cendrars' that corresponds to his "birth" in Paris, suggests these artists privileged the begetting of ideas over the physical primacy of a natural "birth" place alone. In the same interview, she also insists that not a lot of the poem was actually planned in advance, but "Cela nous était possible parce que nous sentions, nous vivions. Nous voulions rendre cette vie dans le poème et dans l'illustration. Ce sont des choses qui ne s'expliquent pas. [This was possible because we felt, we lived. We wanted to render this life in the poem and in the illustration. It is these things that cannot be explained]" (18). It is also important to note that she claims, "Le sujet du poème relate un voyage sur la transsibérienne, et nous créions dans la plus pure spontanéité. [The subject of the poem recounts a journey on the Transsibérien, and we created it in pure spontaneity]" (18). While the poem recounts a journey, Delaunay-Terk's emphasis here falls on the idea of spontaneity and that it was never intended to be a realistic account of travel.

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<sup>22</sup> All translations from French texts here are my own unless otherwise noted.

The two meter long work is unusual in its combination of visual and printed matter. In the right hand column is the printed version of Cendrars' poem; the print itself occurs in irregular fonts, is printed in four different colors of ink, shifts between right-hand and left-hand justification, and often lacks proper punctuation. The blank spaces between the text on the right side have been filled in with blocks of watercolor. In the left-hand column is Delaunay-Terk's painting that is a series of abstract curves and shapes in what she called simultaneous color combinations that play off of each other from their sharp color contrast. Affron writes that the collaboration and the very form *La Prose* took on was highly unusual for the time:

The innovation of *La Prose du Transsibérien* began with its unusual format. Abandoning the ordinary concept of the bound book, it takes the form of a vertical sheet, over six feet tall (to make it, four smaller leaves were joined together) and foldable like an accordion into twenty-two panels. The title page, which is at the top left serves as the book's cover when it is folded up. At the top right is a Michelin route map of the Trans-Siberian Railway. The remainder of the sheet consists of two columns divided by a vertical fold. Cendrars' long prose poem occupies the right side and Delaunay-Terk's abstract composition . . . the left side, though her colors also enter the right-hand zone of the text as irregularly shaped blocks of hue placed in the space between Cendrars' words. (83)

Affron's detailed account is a useful description of the work; however, any explanation always pales in comparison to the actual experience or viewing of the text because the visual and spatial relationship of color is lost. Affron claims the great

achievement in *La Prose* is the “productive relationship between painting and poetry” (84), but such a quick summation seems somewhat reductive, not discussing the significance of technique and what that relationship accomplishes alongside of the poem. As I consider a more philosophical perspective of how language potentially frames our experience of the world and of a text, I believe *La Prose* illustrates a much more complex reframing of narrative and the object as it is described in Cendrars’ poem.

Like Stein’s *Tender Buttons* that reframes our expectations of poetry and prose, stanza and sentence, description and sense, Cendrars and Delaunay-Terk produce a similar unmooring of framework through the interplay between visual color and color words, the fragmenting and collaging of seeming linear narrative, homophony of objects and colors. Cendrars and Delaunay advertised *La Prose du Transsibérien* in 1913 as the “first simultaneous book” creating quite a controversy with the Futurists and Barzun who also had laid claims to the term, and illustrating the significance of simultaneity at the time (Cohen, 50). Most scholars and critics of Cendrars tend to examine one column or the other with little in-depth discussion as to how and why both visual and text work together. The exceptions to this rule is the work of Jay Bochner, Marjorie Perloff, and most recently an essay in 2012 by Katherine Shingler, but most work tends to look at the poem as only a black and white print text.

Marjorie Perloff writes in *The Futurist Moment* how the fragmentary nature of Delaunay-Terk and Cendrars’ text jumps almost continuously in a cinematographic fashion. I suggest that Cendrars’ “bad” poetics produces fragmentation that is simultaneous because it combines descriptions and objects so that they bleed into one

another or overlap simultaneously. Continuity and unity in the poem dissolve because it is as if we are given over-lapping images on a screen. The idea of fragmentation is not simply dissolution of form, but fragmentation that multiplies ideas or objects, and is in keeping with Cendrars' definition of writing that his own pseudonym embodies. Cendrars' use of simultaneity is the "conflagration which sets ablaze a whole confusion of ideas" that he cites as integral to the writing process, or as Sonia claimed, they arose from "pure spontaneity."

While Gertrude Stein, I would argue, alters our linguistic framework through language and syntax, Cendrars and Delaunay-Terk alter both the expectation of the visual and the textual, so that the framework through which we would normally approach a text or image is skewed. Not one medium or the other shifts in *La Prose*, but both the visual and the textual together shifts the way one reads the text. Color, I would argue, becomes the mediator between the visual and the textual. Delaunay-Terk's color almost explodes off the page, but also adds an element of movement that is multiplied by the color inks of the text as they play against and with the curves and colors of Delaunay-Terk's color abstraction. In the same 1971 interview, we discover the idea of using color inks was Sonia's idea; she states the two parts of the text planned in advance were the font type and the colored inks: "Nous avons commencé avec une recherche sur les lettres, la typographie, dont j'ai eu l'idée de proposer le caractère coloré. [We began with research on the letters and typography, when I had the idea to propose the use of colored characters]" (18). The colors, red, green, orange, and blue, used in printing the text of *La Prose* are pairs of complementary colors and are not incidental. Apollinaire interpreted Delaunay's simultaneity in *Fênetres* through

his cubist use of language. While Apollinaire's images invoke the color of Delaunay's work and also its fracturing, there is no physical visual accompaniment. The use of visual color then in *La Prose* creates a new level of simultaneity that truly is different from Apollinaire's "Fêtres" that was inspired by Robert Delaunay's *Fêtres* series of paintings in 1911.

Moreover, *La Prose du Transsibérien* with its deceptive Michelin map at the top is unique because it is not so much a map of the Transiberian Railroad as it is a kind of anti-map. If language is a map through which we create meaning in the world and a straight road or track, *La Prose* is working within these discursive boundaries while simultaneously unraveling them. If a map gives us our bearings and our ability to read an expansive terrain, the descriptions of *La Prose* disturb the very mapping ability of language through the disruption recounting objects similar to Stein's unusual objects in *Tender Buttons*. The objects in *La Prose* exist as a kind of title or header that blur into other ideas and abstractions of color rather than representing or describing just objects. Cendrars' poetic use of objects is similar to the deceptive material quality of *La Prose* which resembles a book at first but then unfolds like a map. The text itself is equally deceptive because it is not a linear narrative, but multiple narratives that jump and interrupt the linearity of time and place more akin to the contours of the fold of a map and its creases, rather than the representational places a map is supposed to embody. The object of *La Prose* speaks to this disorientation.

The Beinecke Library at Yale houses one of the few original copies of the text with its cover intact and the text still folded in its original form. When folded, it appears book-like, but there is no title or print on the cover, only Delaunay-Terk's

geometric shapes that tell a reader nothing about how the book “should” be opened (fig. 2). Open the cover one-way and it opens to the end of Delaunay-Terk’s image with the Eiffel Tower (fig. 3). But flip it over and open it the other way, and it opens to the beginning of Cendrars’ text (fig. 4). While the image and text seem to correspond to each other, the reversal of orientation in both examples not only challenges the traditional notion of reading a book, but also reverses and complicates the notion of beginnings and endings. If the text begins in two opposite places, how does one locate a “real” beginning” or is there even one?

It is not even until the book is unfolded that the direct correspondence of word and image can be seen. Resembling a traditional book at first glance in its folded state, the image and the text are opposed to one another, literally occupying opposite sides of the paper. But unfolded, the relationship changes, and they are now side by side. The accordion folds are what at first make *La Prose* appear to be a book, but unfolded, the object reveals that it is something else entirely. The middle fold at first seems a separation of text and image, but unfolded, it reveals that the text and image are actually the same surface, which is further emphasized through the correspondence of the colors of the text on the left to the washes of watercolor on the right. *La Prose du Transsibérien* if anything is a map of our experience of the text and the colors of language as we are enmeshed in the very folds of the text object.

### **The Fold and the Surface**

Cole Swensen in a short essay on “The Fold” discusses, in relationship to the physical and the visual aspects of *La Prose*, how the “fold” becomes the site of “a

between” space that she finds characteristic of modernism (93): “The whole project of the *Transsibérien*, not just its product, is a between. Its inception and production lie in conversation between two people, while the actual object lies between the visible and the legible, between spatial and the linear, between abstraction and representation” (93). Indeed, Delaunay-Terk herself said of the text, “ Je puis dire que nous nous influencions l’un l’autre, si l’on peut parler d’ influence. [If one wants to speak of influence, I can say that we each had an influence on the other]” (trans. mine, 18). Swensen suggests that the use of between space has to do with the idea of the text as a simultaneous poem, and it is this very sense of “betweenness” in the text that leads to the contradiction that also becomes the text’s movement. If something is not definitively one thing, then its position is inherently unstable. Instability becomes a particular kind of movement.

Through the idea of the between and the fold itself, we can also come to a better understanding of what I call the color of grammar; color as a visual representation of a spectrum does not fall into any one category of naming or even perceiving. The blue I see changes with the light and the time of day. If I tried to remember what color I saw yesterday in a flower or on a billboard on a color card today, I would probably misremember it. What constantly shifts in color is an effect of my perception that is not static. As Wittgenstein points out, there is no consistency between my use of color words and concepts, nor the psychological, physiological, or phenomenological aspects of color. The same is true of language, although in an ordinary sense and use of language, it seems we often forget that language is not static or very closely tethered to what we mean. But it is our forgetting that perhaps enables

Wittgenstein's language game to be played at all. The use of language that draws attention to the rules of the game and the shifting of the rules is a different game altogether than just "playing the game." The idea of simultaneity and the use of the color of grammar is a particular use of language that highlights the rules of the game that *Transsibérien* immediately recognize by bringing them to the surface of language. The rules themselves are the frame we see through, but do not notice. The seeming stability of the naming of nouns and use of description are but a few of those rules. As discussed in Chapter Two, the surface of language is predominant in Wittgenstein and his unraveling of meaning that appears to have depth, but often is only a surface we do not recognize. Stein too is known not for her focus on in-depth meaning of language, but for her focus on the surface of language.

We can then draw a parallel to what Swensen notes as the surface of Cendrars' text as it is made apparent through her discussion of the fold:

The very phrase 'accordion fold' emphasizes music, and is a way of making the music inherent in the poetry, and the musical imperative of poetry, a physical, structural element. The book has become a musical instrument. That's just a pun, of course, and there's always something superficial in a pun, but it's precisely that superficiality that makes it appropriate to the *Transsibérien*. So much in the *Transsibérien* keeps us on the surface, from the vivid color to the nonfigurative language. It's a text that insists on surface, and its folded structure both emphasizes and enriches that, for the layers inherent in an accordion fold multiply the surfaces, create seriality of surface that amounts to an elaborate refusal of depth. (94)

The fold that “multiplies” surface, I think, becomes apparent in the physical unfolding that suggests the traditional book, but then unfolds to something outside of ordinary expectations. The book is no longer a vehicle, but an “instrument” as Swensen puts it, and we are moved beyond the meaning of color alone and must also consider the medium. Swensen’s idea of how surface functions in the text helps us see how Delaunay’s colors interrupt the way one would ordinarily read and highlight the surface of the text, or perhaps, the “prose” that Cendrars himself invokes. The fold for Swensen is a complex fold. It illustrates the surface, but surface here is not equal to a simple, apparent meaning of a text. The text “refuses depth” but is still “elaborate.” The complexity of the accordion fold makes the idea of surface anything but facile even while language itself is “nonfigurative.” The question becomes, how does one understand something that is complex, but that also refuses the depth and representation that we normally associate with complexity and meaning? It seems the difficulty lies in the binaries of complex and simple, depth and surface, and how we assume meaning. If the frame of language is like a surface that we see through, the complexity of that surface may very well exist, but it is our assuming it is simple that limits language and our perception. Color is always on the surface. The way in which the eye perceives color is actually a surface reflection not a physical property. However, the ways in which we use color terms are always multiple and not necessarily all the same.

The fold and the surface of *La Prose* suggests the particular tactile nature of this text. It was after all an artist’s book, book being used in a very loose sense of what we understand to be a book. When one thinks about surface, the materiality of the text

also comes into play. Johanna Drucker in her 1994 book *The Visible World* examines in-depth the relations of the material nature of typography through several avant-garde poets, mainly those practitioners of Dada, Cubism, and Futurism. The grounds for Drucker's study arises from the somewhat binary classifications of theory that has helped structure or frame the way one reads the avant-garde text. Beginning with the two camps of Saussurian linguistics and Derridian deconstruction, Drucker concludes that both theories foreclose the significance and importance of the material nature of the sign. She returns to the materiality of the sign as it manifests in avant-garde typographical experiments to examine the critical and complex work these texts were doing at their particular historical moment. For the sake of boundaries within this prolific time of artistic output, Drucker specifically limits her study to the work of predominately English and French works with a "strong link to symbolism" (7), and the work of Blaise Cendrars is not included here. While Saussure is only interested in signification attached to a closed system of meaning, and Derrida finds the significance of difference on the inherent absence that is also always already present in the sign, both of these models do not take into account the historical and social productions of a text according to Drucker. For Drucker, what makes the moment in the avant-garde unique, with its radical use of typography and unusual methods of layout and design, is the way in which these methods are able to create a critique of the social, political, and ideological structures of that time even while employing some of the same material techniques of popular culture at the time i.e. printmaking, typography, lithography.

Drucker tracks the difficulty of representation that emerges at the beginning of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and the emphasis on truth value as inherent within a given sign or form rather than the art form representing a truth somewhere “out there” in the world. Drucker writes, “both visual arts and literature as nonreferential, replete, and autonomous was dependent on the concept of materiality: the relations between form and expression, between matter and content, were assumed to depend largely on the capacity of the image, the poem, the word, or the mark to *be*, to exist in its own right on an equal stature with the tangible, dimensional objects of the real world” (49). The insistence on the necessity for things *to be* also gave rise to the dominance of presence, which becomes one of Derrida’s major points of critique. But what Drucker notices is that even while the privileging of presence encourages binary thought, the original movement towards this idea was in the between work of multiple mediums. However, there did seem to arise at the same time a lessening of linguistic value over the value of the image because without linguistic reference the visual was often conceived of as “more pure”: “The truth value is assumed to lie within the sign, [ . . . ] This applies to both visual and verbal signs since the structures of those internal relations is similar—though one could argue that visual artists would insist that their ‘truth’ was even more pure for needing less translation, for being self-evident” (63). Language becomes secondary to the primacy of the image. But the assumption of an inherent, universal truth also became a difficulty at that time. Again, for Drucker, what came out of the midcentury critique of the avant-garde was the foregrounding of presence. It is from this idea of presence that midcentury modernist theorists would come to fully characterize the divide between the *logos* and the *imago*. But these divisions that come

later in critical-theory are more or less constructs for Drucker that do not address the earlier significant work of the avant-garde that emphasizes “between” practices and what was accomplished through the radical use of material culture of the time:

The precise manner in which typographical experimentation challenged the division between literary absence and visual presence made it unsuited to the critical and historical categories used by midcentury modernists to describe the activities of early modern art. This typographic work embodied and manifests a complex attitude toward the materiality of visual and verbal aspects of signification—one in which there was a continual interplay of reading and seeing, linguistic referential functions and visual phenomenological appearance, as well as traces of social context and historical production evidenced in materiality. (89)

The textuality of the avant-garde, as demonstrated in the typographical experiments of Guillaume Apollinaire’s *Calligrams*, Stephen Mallarmé’s *Un Coup de Dés*, and F.T. Marinetti’s various works, does not fit the easy division of linguistic referentiality or pure visual object, but works in a complex field between these elements. This multimedia way of working recalls the idea of the between that Swensen draws on when examining the idea of the fold in Cendrars’ *La Prose*.

Drucker, in *The Century of the Artists’ Books* (1995), notes that in *La Prose*, “The color unites the two realms, the bright ink turning the words into a painted form, and the sheer length of the work mimics the long stretch of the Transsibérien railroad referred to in the title” (51); *The Century of Artist Books*, however, is more of a catalog of works, and Drucker’s discussion of *La Prose* is not extended and is limited

to these brief remarks. What I find significant in Drucker's theorization of typography in *The Visible World* is the important work these avant-garde texts accomplish because they operate *between* the binary construct of what became later semiotic theory and a duality of presence and absence. The work made possible through the "betweenness" of two modes that engage the dominant ideology of the social, for Drucker, is found in the text's methods of book production themselves, and functions as the critique of representational language produced by much of the avant-garde. Swensen says Cendrars' language is "nonfigurative." However, I do not think the poetic avant-garde's critique merely produces an autonomous object that is the thing in it self, but that, at least for some practitioners of the avant-garde, the modes they work in can be read as a method that function to recast our expectations and assumptions in the ordinary and the everyday. These avant-garde practitioners challenge not just the fundamental concepts of form, but challenge a practice and use of language that works to critique the expected and assumed tropes of poetry and poetics. The inherent and ideological ways in which we presume to understand the world through language is called in to question by the figures that I have chosen to examine here. These poets have not altered the object, but the very frame through which we see the object.

The ideology of an absolute sign and one that escapes signification completely is a dialectics of ideology— a singular idea always turns into its opposite through direct opposition even while both maintain the same ideological structure (i.e. the place of privilege of one thing over the other.) Drucker argues that materiality, here in the form of the use of typography, unmoors the stability of a closed system because part of its value is contingent on understanding the historical and cultural values and

materials from which it is produced. Since the material is linked to the changing and shifting values of history, it also has greater potential for critiquing those systems in which it is enmeshed rather than transcending them in an idea of a universal or autonomous art.

A later study of how ideological critique is created in Cendrars, Carrie Noland (1997) has argued in *PMLA* in relation to its usefulness teaching cultural studies in the classroom. Noland's position of *how* critique is made possible is useful; however, my methods use critique in the poetic text not for an examination of culture, but for the critique of the structure of language itself. Focusing her critique on Cendrars' use of advertisements and commodity culture, Nolan analyses how simultaneity and the use of contrasts as a way to produce cultural critique:

As a relational aesthetics, *simultaneité* suggested a way of celebrating the contrasts of modern life while recognizing the implication of one form in the cultural identity of another. Applying color contrast theory to the cultural domain, Cendrars intimated that the dynamic of contrast was itself productive of cultural values; according to simultaneous contrast theory, elements of high culture and of commercial or popular culture—like colors set off by juxtaposition—define their cultural positions and symbolic valences only through contrast with one another. (42-43)

Nolan frames Cendrars' use of contrast, that functions somewhat like a dialectic, as a method of cultural critique that makes apparent the commodification of poetry. While Noland offers an insightful reading that links Cendrars' avant-garde

poetics to a more contemporary way of performing cultural critique, it is the theorization of how critique is made possible that I am interested in. Noland recognizes the idea of contrast, but then through close reading of *Nineteen Elastic Poems* establishes the potential of simultaneous contrast. Noland's analysis is much like Peter Burgers' *Theory of the Avant-Garde* that establishes how and why the avant-garde was effective in altering the framework and historical position of art that was discussed in Chapter One. What Noland finds as a cultural dialectical method through simultaneity, I interrogate as a dynamic within language that alters normative methods of reading and understanding. The dialectic that Burger and Noland examine makes cultural critique possible because it changes the structure; it is the change in structure that makes possible methodologies of critique because it alters our understanding of semantics. If the structure of "ordinary meaning" is revealed, the surface of language and our assumptions about language become apparent.

I propose that color, in its more abstract visual nature, destabilizes the "closure" of the signifying function of language because its visual aspect is unstable. Color too has a material quality to it in how it is reflected off of a substance or object in the world. Color permeates the world, but is also contingent on our perception of it. In this way, color straddles multiple places like the materiality of typography drawing on both the visual of the image and referential meaning in language. My interest in color here is not in, to use Drucker's terms, the idea of *logos* and the *imago* as oppositionally different, but in the instability of colors as demonstrated through our various uses of them. The visual is also already inherently unstable within language,

grammar, and syntax because words do not really point to objects as Wittgenstein suggest in the opening of *Philosophical Investigations*.

The instability of the logic of color concepts Wittgenstein gives us in his *Remarks on Color*. Where a concept or unified system of signification or naming would seem to exist, color for Wittgenstein is inherently unstable because our use of color concepts has no actual consistent use. This instability may indeed be true of all language in some respects, but Wittgenstein's discussion of the difficulty of color in its visual form draws a bridge between the visual and the linguistic. Wittgenstein writes near the end of *Remarks on Color*, "Our color concepts sometimes relate to substance (Snow is white), sometimes to surfaces (this table is brown), sometimes to the illumination (in the reddish evening light), sometimes to transparent bodies. And isn't there also an application to a place in the visual field, logically independent of a spatial context?" (III: #255). Substance, surface, illumination, transparent bodies all possess different contexts, and yet we reference them using the same logic of color, but it is the color itself that reveals the differences. The importance, though, is not in the difference, and finding the correct difference, but, rather, it is our color concepts that make apparent the seeming consistency and the actual difference. I am not saying that color is simply a different way of seeing, but that color makes apparent the possibility of seeing differences, because even what I see in my visual field is also different from any and all of the contexts of substance, surface, or illumination. The immediacy of what I see may be different from any concepts of color that I think. Color across fields reveals the very constructedness of my "understanding."

Color's existence on both sides of the visual and the linguistic, reveals the unstable and problematic nature of each side. While I agree with Drucker's argument that Dada, Cubist, and Futurists employed a materiality of the page that subverted the easy binary of language and image at the time, I believe that particular works of the avant-garde did more than this, particularly those figures who don't quite fit the framework of exemplary Cubists, Imagists, or Futurists (respectively here, Stein, Cendrars, and Loy). While Cendrars' interests in simultaneity resemble Futurism's ideas of movement, it is important to remember Cendrars is not a Futurist and to note where the departure from Futurist notions of simultaneity lies.<sup>23</sup>

### **Simultaneity and the Movement of Color**

The work of the figures I have chosen use the very structure of contemporary ideologies to subvert them from *within*, rather than commenting from without; Stein does not use clearly descriptive metaphor, but subverts syntax through syntax. Cendrars' straightforward narrative subverts narrative with the dissolution of the very objects that would depict and describe the elements of narrative through the function of color. The element of subversion from within the structure is also why these authors cannot be dismissed as exploiting nonsense purely in relation to sense. Color, because it is both visual and linguistic, highlights the different structures or grammars within a dominant ideology. Cendrars' *La Prose* is very visual in its collaboration with Sonia Delaunay-Terk, and while the image and the text blend in unusual ways, it is through

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<sup>23</sup> For more on the argument from the time surrounding the controversy and claims on simultaneity see *Genèse et Dossier d'un polémique La Prose du Transsibérien Blaise Cendrars and Sonia Delaunay*, (Paris: *Lettres Modernes*) 1987.

the juxtaposition of color in *both* text and image, printed word and painted image that the framing of the “narrative” and naming of object is altered. It is certainly plausible to argue that the visual and the textual are both complicated by the inclusion of each, but I think the real power of Cendrars and Delaunay-Terk’s work is that the division between the abstract and the concrete, the image and the text, are critiqued not only by the materialism of the object as Drucker might suggest, but through the use of color. Color bridges different mediums the way that the materiality of the text for Drucker does. Color becomes a method of subversion because of how we read and encounter it in the text.

While *La Prose du Transsibérien* is called “simultaneous,” there has been much debate in the scholarship that surrounds the poem as to what simultaneity actually means and how a viewer is supposed to read it. Similar to arguments that surround Stein’s use of sense and nonsense, there is little consensus regarding the function of simultaneity in Cendrars’ work. While the Delaunays illustrate simultaneity in painting, simultaneity in poetry is left to much debate. Various critics have commented on the ways Cendrars perhaps worked with and practiced the idea of simultaneity in *La Prose*. Dore Ashton in a biographical account of Cendrars notes at the time of composition of *La Prose du Transsibérien*, Cendrars “was seeing a lot of both Delaunay’s and no doubt hearing about Robert’s elaborate theories on simultaneous colors, and about simultaneity in general” (8). In an essay specifically examining the relationship of Robert Delaunay and Cendrars, scholar Eric Robertson writes that, “*La Prose du Transsibérien et la Petite Jehanne de France* (1913) anticipates the elliptical, ‘telescopic’ syntax and fragmented, telegraphic style of the

‘Dix-neuf Poems Elastiques,’ written mainly between the summers of 1913 and 1914. This progression from an essentially traditional narrative mode towards a poetic form based on simultaneity stems largely from his close acquaintance with Delaunay, who was striving towards a new aesthetic of ‘contrasts simultaneity’” (883).

Eric Robertson characterizes in his essay the standard interpretation that prevails in Cendrars scholarship: “Begun around November 1912 and published one year later, [*La Prose du Transsibérien*] bears the unmistakable influence of Delaunay’s theory of ‘contrastes simultanés’: not only is it intended to be read and viewed simultaneously, but indeed the text itself is built upon a series of contrasts. Set in the overtly modern age of rail travel, the poem refers implicitly to an age-old heritage of oral narrative in its epic length and even title” (891). The contrast of visual and text, ancient and modern, high and low art are characteristics often noted in Cendrars’ text to create contrast.

However, Robertson does not recognize the subtle shifts in framing and materiality, even while he notes that the idea of distorting sequence was one Cendrars was interested in: “the possibility of attaining ‘pure poetry,’ and overcoming sequential modes of representation within the poetic framework, preoccupied Cendrars” (887). Robertson discusses Robert Delaunay’s use of abstraction in painting to create simultaneity and compares this to Cendrars, but argues that, “such a degree of abstraction is made especially difficult for the poet by the verbal nature of the genre, and suggests that Cendrars’ search for simultaneity never departs from referentiality in language. Cendrars’ experiments with syntax and structure in “*La Prose du Transsibérien et la Petite Jehanne de France*” and “Dix-neuf poems elastiques” make

these exercises in simultaneity, albeit very different ones” (891). Robertson ultimately claims that “Poems Elastiques” is a better example of simultaneity because of its use of homophones and wordplay: “in their semantic indeterminacy, their stylistic innovation, and their elliptical syntax, the “Poems Elastiques” brought Cendrars closer to subverting sequential linearity in poetry. In destroying the generic divisions between ‘poetic’ discourse and the various dynamic discourses of everyday experience, he had hoped to obtain a ‘profondeur’ [depth] through immediacy and movement” (896). The blurring of the everyday with the poetic creates a kind of simultaneity for Robertson’s reading of Cendrars’ texts.<sup>24</sup> His idea of homophones in Cendrars is significant; however, Robertson concludes that Cendrars essentially fails at simultaneity, and reads *La Prose de Transsibérien* as predominantly linear, and assumes Cendrars lacks Delaunay integral “non-attachment from the referential” (896).

While these characteristics of simultaneity are useful, I think that Robertson’s dismissal of *La Prose* is premature and does not fully grapple with the complexity of the text. The complete neglect of Sonia Delaunay-Terk’s work and her influences also make Robertson suspect to ignoring the important visual factors of the text and its innovative use of color. Robertson never addresses the idea of simultaneity and its strong relationship to color even though he draws links between Robert Delaunay and Cendrars’ work. Trying to find parallels between the theory and Cendrars’ own writing, like many critics of Cendrars and the avant-garde, Robertson never really looks at the relationship of language and color. The function color plays in the simultaneity of *La Prose* is integral to a full reading of the text; however, many critics

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<sup>24</sup> Robertson also seems to link simultaneity to what Perloff calls poetics of indeterminacy though he does not directly cite Perloff. He concludes that it is the indeterminacy, innovation, and stylistic syntax that is like Delaunay’s “movement of color” (896).

often overlook any significant implications of color in *La Prose* and other early avant-garde poems.

I would argue that Robertson's reading is a misreading of Cendrars because the structure of *La Prose* is not linear, and the narrative, as Perloff discusses, continually shifts and slips in its orientation to place and time. In an essay on Cendrars and Frank O'Hara, discussing *La Prose de Transsibérien* as a voyage poem, Perloff astutely notes,

what is less often noted is that Cendrars's discourse is repeatedly breaking out of the voyage frame, that the various camera shots [ . . . ] dislocate[ . . . ] us both in space and time, even as the poet's story-telling explodes the mimetic recounting of the actual journey. It is this curious slippage, this erasing of contours, whether on the level of narrative or imagery or syntax, that makes Cendrars seem so particularly contemporary" (165).

I would like to focus on what "explodes mimetic recounting," and seems so "contemporary." Perloff discusses how the "narrative" moves rapidly from the fantastic reference of Ali Baba to rats on the train (166), but in addition to the idea of a jump (even one that prefigures the cinema), the continual jumps in narrative may also signal the poet's "failure" to create a complete narrative. The idea of failure, "*J'étais fort mauvais poète* [I was a really bad poet]" (6) is repeated no less than four times throughout the poem. If the text is read for these mistakes and slips, the very idea of failure might actually be an invocation against cohesion. Thinking about the idea of the cinematic jump, it is useful to consider Cendrars' sense of dissolution present in

the cinema with which he was also actively involved, and even more so after he gave up writing poetry. In his 1917 essay “The ABCs of cinema, he writes,

A hundred worlds, a thousand movements, a million dramas simultaneously enter the range of the eye with which cinema has endowed man. And though arbitrary, this eye is more marvelous than the multifaceted eye of a fly. The brain is overwhelmed by it. An uproar of images. Tragic unity is displaced. We learn. We drink. Intoxication. Reality no longer makes any sense. It has no significance. Everything is rhythm, word, life. (152)

Cendrars’ manifesto invokes anything but an interest in narrative of any kind. His interest and belief in cinema arises from the lack of “sense” and not having “significance.” While this piece was written during the war, the move away from “sense” and “significance” figures in his prewar texts as well. If we look at the fragmentation that occurs in *La Prose* as not being part of “sense” and “significance,” but as “everything that is rhythm, word, life,” even the seemingly concrete objects in the poem have their place, not as “tragic unity,” but as a kind of dissolution of “sense.” *La Prose* then perhaps has more in common with Delaunays’ non-representational simultaneity than Robertson recognizes.

Cendrar’s writes, “Focus the lens on the hand, the corner of the mouth, the ear, and drama emerges, expands on a background of luminous mystery. Already there is no need for dialog, soon characters will be useless” (152). What he describes is, of course, the idea of the close-up and jump cuts, the image presented to us in rapid fragments. But this is also “rhythm, word, life.” The image and the word become the same along with “rhythm” which in Delaunay’s work is also a part of color. In

relationship to *La Prose*, this fragmenting is also a part of simultaneity as it manifests in the dissolution of concrete objects and nouns. In terms of poetics, fragmented rhythm manifests through simultaneity and color in the poem.

With color as a subversive element, we then understand the finer nuances of Cendrars' use of simultaneity that Marjorie Perloff addresses in *The Futurist Moment*. Perloff highlights the critical difference between simple contrast and the nuanced restructuring Cendrars embodies through what she calls "the spatial and temporal" distortion. Perloff carefully recounts the difference between the Futurists' use and Delaunay and Cendrars' use of simultaneity. "By simultaneity," Perloff writes, "Boccioni and his fellow painters meant 'the synthesis of *what one remembers* and of *what one sees*' " of which Balla's *Dynamism of a Dog in Motion* is an example (7). The idea of the past and present captured in motion is the simultaneity of the Futurists and the "call for the depiction of simultaneous motion, of dynamism and speed" (8). Perloff correctly highlights that Sonia Delaunay-Terk's use of simultaneous color is specific to Cherverul's color theory and idea of " 'dynamic counterpoint of otherwise dissonant colors'" (8). Counterpoint, of course, is not simply contrast, but simultaneously links two elements even as they remain separate. In music, counterpoint is "the relationship between voices that are interdependent harmonically yet independent in rhythm and contour" (Laitz, 96). Contrast alone is based on difference, but counterpoint, or the Delaunays' version of simultaneity is paradoxically interdependent and independent if we analyze what Perloff means by "counterpoint." The relationship between elements produces a particular dynamic. In relation to color theory, it is the contrast of complementary colors used to produce

“harmony” as the Delaunays characterize it, or color rhythm. In relationship to language, what I am proposing is not the binary of semantic sense versus playful nonsense, but that when our position in the framework of language shifts, the variation in the dynamic of language changes the position or groundwork that constructed a binary in the beginning. The difference between the Futurists’ and the Delaunays’ use of simultaneity is not the use of contrast, but the idea of “dissonance” and “counterpoint.” In language, I would suggest, the counterpoint is the dissonance among static concepts, or the juxtaposition of logic as illustrated in Wittgenstein’s surface, substance, illumination, and transparent bodies of color. The Futurists’ use of simultaneity and the movement between past and present does not have the same dynamics of counterpoint. The Delaunays’ use of simultaneity that employs dissonance and counterpoint applies to Cendrars. Perloff concludes, “simultaneity here refers to the spatial and temporal distortion that, as we shall see, characterize *La Prose de Transsibérien*, a poem that collapses present and past, the cities and steppes of the Russian Orient and the City of the Tower the Gibbet, and the Wheel which is Paris” (8-9). The idea of distortion, however, might also be sound and the way I “hear” meaning in a poem, and what happens when sonic puns in the poem “dissolve” my stable understanding of one word. Unlike the Futurists who emphasized the noun and the object,<sup>25</sup> Cendrars’ objects become more abstract rather than concrete. In Cendrars’ simultaneous poem, Perloff locates simultaneity in the “spatial and temporal distortions”; the execution of the framing of the poem, in both narrative and material,

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25 Perloff addresses the idea of the concrete and abstract in Futurism not in relationship to Cendrars, but in relationship to the Futurists and Mina Loy in her essay, “English as a ‘Second Language: Mina Loy’s ‘Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose.’” This discussion of Loy’s work and how it functions is discussed more in depth in Chapter Four.

makes it simultaneous, a simultaneity based not simply on movement as progression, but movement as counterpoint and “dissonance.” The question not asked then is how does this “dissonance” affect other registers of the poem? In particular, where do we locate the counterpoint and dissonance of the object, and how is this disruption a kind of awareness of the Wittgensteinian grammar of the poem?

### **Simultaneity Revisited**

I would like to return to the sense of simultaneity invoked by the Delaunays discussed in Chapter One, and the idea that simultaneity is contrast used to produce a kind of “vibration” or movement. As discussed in Chapter Two in relation to *Tender Buttons*, simultaneity expressed through color is needed to understand the movement within the avant-garde text that breaks the stability of accepted concepts and methods of reading. It is a different language game that highlights/reveals the frame of the ordinary language game that we play. As discussed earlier, Delaunays’ simultaneous contrast developed from Chevreul’s complementary colors. The Delaunays’ idea of color and simultaneity in relationship to language functions as a kind of metaphor to understand the function of “nonsense” and “wrong syntax” in the avant-garde. The color of grammar is a particular use of language that affects a normativized understanding of language itself. The color of grammar is an alteration, not of the object I am looking at *in* language, but the frame *through* which I am looking at an object and the world. As discussed in Chapter Two, Gertrude Stein’s *Tender Buttons* employs the color of grammar through her alteration of form, syntax, and grammar. What is then read in Cendrars *La Prose du Transsibérien* as the odd fragmentary

narration of a journey might actually be an instance that works not simply to fragment narrative, but to create counterpoint to the sense through which we think we understand and are able to read narrative. The repetition, then, of Cendrars' invocation of himself as a "*mauvais poète*/ bad poet" throughout the text actually does specific work in terms of a reader's assumptions of how we think we should understand the text if the traditional poet is supposed to create a "whole." Indeed, Cendrars himself claimed to prefer the "openness" of prose to the "closedness" of poetry.

The counterpoint of "sense" as logic is made apparent not through standard narrative, but through the near homophones, sonic repetitions and puns, color words, color print, Delaunay-Terk's colors, and the contrast of linguistic "sense" against the abstraction of visual color. Color becomes the pivot point where counterpoint is made possible. In 1919, Cendrars' writing on simultaneous contrast claims, "A color is not color itself. It is only color in contrast with one or several other colors. A blue is only blue in contrast with a red, a green, an orange, a gray, and all other colors. // Contrast is not black against white, an opposition or dissimilarity. Contrast is similarity" (155). In this regard, contrast has much in common with counterpoint. The contrast Cendrars looks for is not in binary opposition, but in contrast of similarities like the successive fast cuts he writes about later in cinema. Indeed, complementary colors themselves are not binaries, but a relationship between colors on the color wheel.

### **Reading an Alternative Map of Color**

The color of grammar that emerges in Cendrars is not emphasized through syntax as in Stein, but through the enactment of failure as a form of "bad" poetics and

the use of homophones that blurs truth elements with objects and colors. The framing of *La Prose du Transsibérien* as a kind of map, that includes a reproduction of a Michelin map at the top of the text, is like Stein's Rooms in *Tender Buttons* where we must "act like there is no use in a center." Cendrars' map is disjunctive; the sense of narrative the poet should possess is continually broken off, failing as descriptions of things blur into one another. Like the sense of description Stein discusses in "Poetry and Grammar" that aims at "a way of naming things that would not invent names, but mean names without naming them" (330), Cendrars seems not to "mean names without naming them," but destabilizes meaning through naming things. Naming itself proves to always involve slippage. What is unique about *La Prose* is that it is not just a play of meanings, but the blurring abstract color accomplishes to illustrate the semantic reduction of meaning within language. Through abstraction, the simultaneous experience of language in *La Prose Du Transsibérien* is very much like the simultaneous painting that runs alongside and through the text itself.

Critics of Cendrars have commented on the visual use of color as antithetical to an illustration of the poem. Perloff in *The Futurist Moment* remarks of Sonia Delaunay-Terk that "It is this system of difference that characterizes Delaunay's color field. But her painting is not wholly nonrepresentational either. Without illustrating Cendrars's narrative, it nevertheless complements it" (27). Jay Bochner writes in his seminal book, *Blaise Cendrars: Discovery and Recreation*, "The real form of the poem then is the poem and the painting together, and the depth of their movement arises from the contrasting juxtaposition. We note in this connection the necessity for the painting to be abstract, so that it have no narrative, no story to compete with the

epic of the text” (102). While the idea of juxtaposition of both word and image, narrative and abstraction come to the forefront for both Perloff and Bochner, I disagree that the contrast produced in *La Prose du Transsibérien* is of a binary nature precisely because the color of the visual runs *alongside* of, and also blurs *with* the color references and color type of the text in the original poem/artist’s book. Reading the blurring of color, objects, and concepts that occurs throughout the text creates not a contrast between word and image, but a contrast where word and image actually overlap into each other, in Cendrars’ words, “contrast is also similarity.” Color words contrast with the colors of the printed text, the color of print is juxtaposed with Sonia’s washes of color, text and color juxtapose with simultaneous color, and semantic color words juxtapose to homophonic neighbors. The levels of simultaneous color at play are far and varied beyond just word and image, and illustrate the idea of simultaneity beyond what most scholars of Cendrars express. When we understand how the color of grammar is a semantic and syntactic breaks with understood meaning, the multifaceted levels of simultaneity in the poem surface because the juxtaposition of contradictory elements break the stable meaning of the text that is not bound by the frames and sense of narrative. Like Gertrude Stein, Cendrars breaks the frame through which the reader tries to “view” the poem.<sup>26</sup> But unlike Stein, who breaks the expected frame of our understanding through syntax and contradictory description, Cendrars breaks our narrative expectations of linearity even as he conflates the linearity of the *route* with the circularity of the *roues*/wheel that is also the abstraction of *rouge*/red.

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<sup>26</sup> It is interesting to note that Robert Delaunay’s *Fenêtre* series of paintings extended the painting itself outside of the canvas onto the frame itself so that the delineation and border of painting and frame blurred.

Discussing Sonia Delaunay-Terk's interplay of color with the printed text, Perloff writes, "large planes of pastel colors—rose, light blue, light yellow, violet, pale green—are inserted between the verse paragraphs and lines of the poem so as to destroy the continuity of the text" (28). I agree that the function of simultaneous color, and what I am calling the color of grammar, works against stability, static meaning, and framing. I would add that the color blocks that run through the right-hand column of the text do not just destroy continuity, but transform it. With the blocks of color, the text can no longer be read linearly, and the question becomes, how does one read these interruptions if they are not the destructive ones? They might be something like the cuts in a film that accumulate rather to build something other than a traditional narrative.

Recalling Stein's idea of the sentence and the paragraph from "Poetry and Grammar" and the idea of combining sentence and paragraph to create a "new balance," I would argue that Delaunay-Terk and Cendrars are also using visual color and printed text to create a form of writing with a "new balance." In other words, a text that requires we suspend what we assume we know in and through language. It is only in this suspension that we are able to read and think through this "new balance" of language. The balance in *La Prose* may very well be the rhythm and counterpoint of color.

Recalling the discussion in Chapter Two of the sentence and paragraph and line and sentence that I argue creates a "new balance" in Stein's terms, and that becomes integral to the collapsing of the frame through which we come to understand such terms, Cendrars' *La Prose* as a poem that calls itself prose, may also attempt to

do similar work. In his early shift from poetry to fiction, it seems not simply an abandonment of poetry, but a matter tangled up in a complex sensory experience. Interestingly, in his 1950 interview, Cendrars admits that, “I don’t write any more poems. I make poems which I recite to myself, which I taste, which I play with. I feel no need to communicate them to anyone, even to people I like a lot” (6). The idea of making rather than writing suggests that the poem has its existence elsewhere in the world. And it is sensory, visceral, and something that cannot be pinned down to a line. Further he claims, “Poetry is in the street. It goes arm in arm with laughter. They take each other along for a drink, at the source, in the neighborhood bistros, where the laugh of the people is so flavorsome and the language that flows from their lips so beautiful” (8). Poetry is not something that is simply written, but it is something embodied and that courts movement, or here laughter as they “go along for a drink.”

It then seems that Cendrars experimentation, like Stein’s, was not to “write” poems, but to create a kind of life of things that have real movement and rhythms like our experiences in the world. The idea of blurring and movement can also be extended to the poetic line as in Stein, for the line and the sentence seem similarly to collapse here. Cendrars’ lines are extremely varied, but the justification in the artist’s book would indeed suggest they are poetic lines. The “prose” could be simply the style, but I would like to suggest that the visual color completes the line collapsing it from a poetic line to a prosaic sentence because the poetry must be read with the color as one would read a paragraph (fig. 5).

When we look at *La Prose du Transsibérien*, the text appears in irregular sections that oddly use both left and right justification. It is in the blocks of space

created by these odd stanzas that Sonia Delaunay-Terk's "planes of pastel color" appear. But if the use of color is more than the destruction of continuity, one must read the color with the text and not against it. As a paragraph and not a poetic line, Delaunay's color "completes" the often fragmented poetic lines of the text. Cendrars himself said of the text that he was trying to evoke prose and not poetry. Perloff cites a letter of Cendrars, where he writes: "As for the word Prose: I have used it in the Transsiberian in the Vulgar Latin sense of "prosa," "dictu." Poem seems too pretentious, too closed. Prose is more open, popular" (14, cited in Perloff). Perloff concludes that Cendrars' explanation is the site and cause for "shattering the lyric frame" of the poem. The idea of poetry being closed and prose being open, though, is not discussed in detail.

We might draw a parallel here to Stein's "Poetry and Grammar" and the idea that, "Poetry is . . . essentially a vocabulary as prose is essentially not. // And what is the vocabulary of which poetry absolutely is. It is a vocabulary entirely based on the noun as prose is essentially and determinately and vigorously not based on the noun" (327). For Stein, the noun becomes a kind of closed off entity too grounded in description for fluidity or movement. Stein's notion seems to have something in common with Cendrars' sense of poetry being "closed" while prose is "open" as informal speech that is always metamorphosing and closer to the rhythms of life. As in Stein's work, Cendrars' work seems to engage a sense of the "between" or a use of language which "folds" the opened and the closed together as a practice of writing that functions to expose our thinking in language.

As Perloff notes of *La Prose*, “The poem thus hovers on the threshold between verse and prose, between Siberia and Paris, between “la petite Jeanne d’Arc—and the Trans-Siberian train” (15). Even while Perloff continues to explain how this “betweenness” in Cendrars evokes “rupture,” I believe within that rupture something else also emerges at the surface. The difficulty of rupture or even nonsense seems pitted against a binary of wholeness and sense. The changes and shifts that occur can only be defined in the negative. One must keep in mind, in light of the color of grammar, the importance that the undoing of sense is not taken as a pejorative, but rather as a method that rethinks that which, frames, stabilizes, and makes-sense as a limit to our language and thinking. I do not want to suggest that the “rupture” Perloff notes is simply the modernists’ work against traditional form as it is so often interpreted, and I want to be clear how the avant-garde differentiates itself from high modernism. There is a break and an undoing in the avant-garde, and Cendrars and Delaunay-Terk make possible a reconfiguration of thought and the way one thinks through language. To describe a flower differently is only to reinvent the flower in a different way; the flower I see may change, but the essence of my thinking has not. But to change the way I think about the flower as an object, to question the objects’ relationship to the world potentially alters the way I look and think about everything.

Cendrars’ “openness” of prose suggests a surface. Ordinary language philosophy approaches language similarly focusing not on the depth of meaning, but on what is made apparent on the surface of everyday use. Indeed, J. L. Austin excludes poetry and theater from his analysis of performative and constative utterances in *How to do Things with Words*. But far from Austin’s exclusion of poetry because it is not

serious, Cendrars seems to seek something that is closer to the openness and even messiness of life. The use of prose and the connection to surface is not arbitrary, just as the narrator of *La Prose* who repeats continually that he is a “*mauvais poète / bad poet*” has a double significance.

Color as both a visual plane and as a proper noun alters the sense of depth, transforming the disjunct narrative into a surface that is the fold of the map of how we read. The idea of the fold and surface that Swensen addresses, and that Perloff similarly explicates as the idea of “betweenness,” meet, I believe, where Delaunay-Terk’s color composition and the poem’s color of grammar can be read simultaneously and affects the reader’s expectations of understanding. If color words in the text are read as homophones for object and ideas (*rouge, route, roues; vert, verite, vertte; and jaune, Jehanne, jeunne*), and Delaunay’s colors are read as a completion of the line as prose, it is the blocks of color that finish the sentence. The reader no longer reads purely for the content and narrative of the text, but for the experience of the text, what is left unsaid by color, and the openness of the text.

The simultaneity of color occurs immediately with the orange printed map at the top followed by a sweep of turquoise water-color. While critics have often noted the use of the Michelin Map as a kind of incorporation of advertisements or pop culture and as a symbol of the voyage, these critics never address the color of the map in relation to other colors in the text. Orange and green are complementary colors, but the juxtaposition is also between an image we can read, the map, and the field of Delaunay’s colors. The juxtaposition of color is also repeated in the title where *Prose du Transsibérien et du* is printed in blue, and *La Petite Jehanne de France* is printed

in orange (fig. 5). The character of Jehanne, scholars have commented on as parallel to Jeanne D'Arc who is here transformed into a prostitute. While Perloff observes that Jehanne is the "modern counter part of Jeanne d'Arc" (15), and conflates the binary of virgin/whore or saint/sinner, I am interested in looking at the idea of the name of Jehanne as a proper noun and the way in which history and the past come to be named or defined by definite nouns. If we are looking at how to read color, we must also read it simultaneously with the image of the map, the title *La Petite Jehanne de France*, and the narrator's own personal history that he cannot remember, "J'avais à peine seize ans et je ne me souvenais déjà plus de mon enfance [I was barely sixteen and I couldn't remember my childhood anymore]"(2), which are all printed in orange. Through the use of color, the journey and the idea of history manifest in Jehanne who, in the color title, is given a definite article "la," while *Prose* in the color printed title excludes the use of any article that is even more irregular in French than it is in English.

The narrator's memory of childhood is also linked to Jehanne and the map through the initial recollection being printed in orange as well, even as the idea of memory itself is questioned through the narrator's forgetfulness and inability to remember his childhood. The question of linearity, history, and narration are all called into question. It is not accidental, then, that the "facts" recounted in lines 3 and 4 are justified left. It is at these two lines that the first color block manifests in the text in a turquoise swath. If the color becomes part of the text, completing the prose line, the blue type of the title blends with the turquoise of this first color block. If one reads what occurs in orange and blue as a kind of simultaneity in the opening sequence of

the poem, one can also read simultaneously the map against the first color block, the present tense prose of the Transsibérien against the past tense of the history of Jehanne, and the factual statements of the narrator against the abstraction of blue which continues to repeat throughout the poem. The color and image of the text become part of the texts' poetics, an aesthetics of the page that perhaps pre-figures Cendrars' interests in the possibilities of cinema.

In line 6 we read printed in orange, "Que mon coeur, tour à tour, brûlait come le temple d'Ephése ou comme la Place Rouge de Moscou [That my heart, again and again, burned like the temple of Ephastus or like the Red Square in Moscow]" (6)." If the questioning of nouns and naming is something like what we see in Stein, Cendrars' use of proper names as simile must immediately be questioned. After the use of Moscow and the Temple of Ephestus as a simile for the poet's heart that burns, the following lines unravel the more classic use of poetic tropes: "Quand le solail se couche / Et mes yeux eclaraient des voies anciennes / Et j'étais déjà si mauvais poète / Que je ne savais pas aller jusqu'au bout. [When the sun sets / And my eyes in a flash saw the ancient path / And it was then I was already a bad poet/ that did not quite know how to go about it]" (8-11). The classic use of simile leads to seeing something ancient, though only briefly as suggested by *eclaraient*, and immediately gives way to a sense of failure and the idea that he is a bad poet. At this moment the text also changes justification and the ink switches from orange to red or magenta ink. Just as the failure of memory is intruded on by a block of turquoise color in the previous lines, at this line break, the left-hand justification of text is abutted by blocks of turquoise watercolor. If we read this as simultaneous contrast or contradiction of ideas, the

contrast exists in the color and the text, the color of the print and the painting, the ancient idea of poetry and the path of the current poet that is a failure.

To invoke failure here does more than suggest some fragmented modern state; rather, what happens in the simultaneity of the idea of a history and the failure of a present enunciation is not nostalgia (as is so often read in modernist texts), but a movement of our anticipation of the text, just as the print itself moves from orange to red. The way we read the text is jarring, and in that unsettling, language is unmoored from our expectations. The metaphor or image is not simply surprising or innovative, but the metaphor itself and the frame of our understanding undergo a kind of breakdown. The poet who burns with passion (there is also a pun on Blaise Cendrars' name as discussed earlier) is not eloquent but is a failure. At this point of contrasts, we must rethink the necessity of failure.

Failure becomes the element that undoes the anticipated outcome or reader's expectations of the text. Like Stein's use of syntax that removes the possibility of assumed ordinary semantic meaning, and reveals instead the surface of language, *La Prose* functions similarly, except in the poem it is the poet's failure of "accurate" description that blurs meaning into multiplicity that is parallel to the multiplicity of color in the text. And yet, that is not to say that the multiplicity of color is outside of language or is impossible to read. The question then is, in what "sense" exactly are we reading?

The blurring of meaning dissolves into color occurs throughout *La Prose*. The character of Jehanne herself is but one instance of the particular and the stable concept that slowly dissolves. Marjorie Perloff cites Jehanne, the prostitute from Montmartre,

as the modern counterpart of Jeanne d'Arc, but I think Jehanne is more than this alone. The name Jehanne also sounds similar in the French to the word for youth, *jeunes*. The idea of youth arises at the beginning of the poem, and we know from the opening lines the narrator, even though only sixteen, has forgotten his childhood. In the closing lines, the narrator says he writes this poem in Jehanne's honor: "C'est par un soir de tristesse que j'ai écrit ce poem en son honneur / La petite prostituée / Je suis triste je suis triste / J'irai ou Lapin agile me ressouvenir de ma jeunesse perdu / Et boire des petits verres [It is on this sad evening that I have written this poem in her honor / The little prostitute / I am sad I am sad / I will go to the Lapin agile and remember my lost youth / And drink a little glass] (434-440). Initially, it seems simply Jehanne is gone and the narrator is alone. But the loss of Jehanne and youth occur within four lines of each other. If Jehanne is also the counterpart to Jeanne d'Arc, she is also a figure of history, and something with a long remembered past like the "*voies anccient*" in the opening of the poem. Both ideas are brought into the figure of the ephemeral Jehanne who stands for both youth and the history of France. "Petit verres" also curiously sounds like "vérites" or truths, but also equally sounds like "vert" or green. It is then that these figures also blur into color words because Jehanne also sounds much like the color *jaune*/yellow.<sup>27</sup>

The invocation of color near the end of the poem does not just make the narrative descriptive or flamboyant, but actually indicates how language and meaning dissolve into abstraction that is nevertheless readable. Near the end of the text, the narrator declares that if he were a painter, he would use lots of red and yellow at the

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<sup>27</sup> Similar to Derrida's sense of play and word play where words can also invoke their opposite meaning, Cendrars enacts a dissolution of meaning into abstraction, the ultimate abstraction being color itself. See Chapter One for how the color of grammar is not the same as Derridian play.

end: “Si j’etais peintre je deverserais beaucoup de rouge, beaucoup de jaune sur la fin de ce voyage” (358). While one could read the colors here for what they could symbolize (vibrant, crazy, destructive, or the colors of the apocalypse), I am interested in how the painter’s colors blur homophonically with other nouns in the text while the visual color of the print literally blurs the text as well.

While Delaunay-Terk uses simultaneous colors in her painting, the text itself is also printed in simultaneous colors, red and green, and orange and blue. There have been a few scholars who have noticed multiple color inks, but no one to date has noticed that the colors used also correspond to the rules of simultaneous contrast, and no one has specifically addressed what effect this has beyond being colorful like the painting. Perloff has noted the various jumps in location within the text and abrupt shifts in tense; I propose it is also possible to read the poem out of order in relationship to the colors it is printed in. We are then no longer reading the poem linearly, but we are reading four different poems simultaneously. The opening with the narrator’s youth that he can’t quite remember begins in orange. The next section in red, though it starts in the middle of a sentence, seems to open up more to the world and the narrative of the Transsibérien itself. The appearance of green at line 50 seems to shift to the narrator and his experience of the present moment. At line 101, we get the first interruption of blue printed text and only one word, “Bariolé,” which Ron Padget translates as “plaid,” but in the French it also means “multi-colored” or “motley.” At line 108, we get to words in blue print, “Ce châle [this shawl].” The next manifestation of blue print is at line 164 when Jehanne is first addressed directly. If we read these blue sections as one piece, the poem here shifts becoming more about Jehanne despite

that she speaks and appears elsewhere in the poem as well. Read simultaneously, what comes to the surface of the text because of the color and not linear order is the contrast of the narrator's past and present, the world and the train that is in constant movement, and the particularity of the character of Jehanne. And yet each section is also similar because the narrator's perspective is both in the present and in the past, and the world and train and Jehanne are all figures that move through all four threads. The poem jumps scenes and time and tenses as Perloff points out, but the use of color for the printed text also highlights the distinct elements while simultaneously placing them in contrast to each other. Elements of each, the narrator, the Transsibérien, and Jehanne all appear in each section so the contrast is not a stark one, but one where the contrast also contains similarity. The color of the print text illuminates the surface threads that are woven to create a seeming unified whole. This kind of splicing and interruption of separate elements also occurs at the level of the sentence through the use of objects, abstract ideas or ideals, and color.

Only through reading the multiple uses of the nouns as a contrast or juxtaposition do we gain a sense of how the visual and textual and the abstract and semantic can be read together. Towards the end of the poem we read: "Et voici des affiches, du rouge du vert multicolores comme mon passé bref du jaune / Jaune le fière couleur des romans de France à l'étranger. [And here are posters in red in green multicoloured like my past in short yellow / Yellow the proud color of the novels of France abroad]" (413-414). The odd illocution of a past that is yellow makes "sense" if it connects to the history of France, Jehanne, and the speaker's youth. The color yellow is the color of the "romans de France à l'étranger" or the person abroad or the

outsider. Someone on the outside of things becomes connected with the pure abstraction of color because color brings one to the surface of substance. It is not a moment of confusion, but a moment that draws attention to the blurring of language and conventional understanding. The connection of Jehanne to *jaune*/yellow explains why the novel of France abroad is also yellow. The color here is not symbolic or emotive, but rather the use of color as an abstraction in conjunction with a noun's "definite" semantic meaning brings the surface of language to the foreground. Meaningful ideals of youth, truth, and a path quickly dissolve into color abstraction. The blending and blurring of words illuminates the abstract nature and surface of language itself through the near homophones in the poem. Here in *La Prose* it is the narrator's inability, the fact he is "really a bad poet" that allows this slippage to manifest through contradiction and contrast. Since he is a "bad poet," the reader also recognizes, not the variance of semantic possibilities, but the surface of language and the breakdown of semantics.

The breakdown of language that reveals its constructedness is the color of grammar. Breaking then occurs not just with semantics, but in our linear way of understanding a text. I believe this is why ideal elements (truth, youth, and the path) blur within the poem's progression.<sup>28</sup> In Cendrars' poetry, or rather prose, language is more than metonymy and metaphor; it is also a frame through which we see, like the man the narrator meets on the train with blue glasses in the hall (93). When the surface of language is brought to the foreground through the abstract use of color, the poem resonates not with the "truth" of the subject, but the construction of that truth or ideal.

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<sup>28</sup> As Nietzsche writes in *On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense*, we create truths and then forget that we put them there (878).

This is why the linearity of the path or journey is also conflated with its opposite of circularity and the abstraction of red. *Route / roues / rouge* (road or path /wheel / red) also all blur in a way similar to *Jehanne / jeune / jaune*. At line 89, the noise of the train and the world, “Le bruit des portes des voix des essieux grinçant sur les rails congelés. [The noise of doors voices axles screeching along frozen rails],” becomes the golden thread of the narrator’s future, “Le ferlin d’or de mon avenir” (90). If the idea of a path or road/*route* gets blurred with circle or wheels/*roues*, the cacophony in these lines is also the “thread of the future.” The idea of linearity is combined with the cacophony made by the train wheels altering the sense of a straight or clear line. Additionally, the abstraction of red/*rouge* can be blurred with the French word for Russian/*russe*, connecting the red of Moscow and also Cendrars’ time spent in Russia as an apprentice with Delaunay-Terk’s heritage, until one more moment of possible specificity is crossed with a different idea altogether.

Early on in the poem, before Jehanne is put to sleep and virtually disappears, the narrator recounts,

Je suis en route

J’ai toujours été en route

Je suis en route avec la petite Jehanne de France

Le train fait un saut perilleux et retombe sur toutes ses roues

Le train retombe sur ses roues

Le train retombe toujours sur toutes ses roues

[I am on the road

I’ve always been on the road

I'm on the road with little Jeanne of France

The train does a somersault and lands on all fours

The train lands on its wheels

The train always lands on all its wheels]. (trans. Padgett, 157-162)

Looking at the French alongside Ron Padgett's translation, one immediately notices several variants. While the train landing on "all fours" in English certainly anthropomorphizes the train and plays on the odd sense of *fait un saut perilleux*/somersault, the original French uses the repetition of *roues*/wheels which matches the tripartite repetition of *route*/road in the preceding three lines. "I am on the road" also does not quite capture the same sense of *route* in the French, which does mean road, but also means route or course or path. How does one stay on course when the train you are on does somersaults? The language in these lines performs a kind of somersault because the *roues*/wheels also sound like *route*/road. Wheels may make a track or follow a road or route, but here they also potentially blur as near homophones in the French. The repetition of exact words in the French offers no sonic variance, except for how the repetition itself changes what we hear and perhaps mimics the repetitive sound of a train's wheels, but this doesn't exist in the English translation. The train returns to its wheels, not its track or road/*route*. The wheels also evoke the wheel in the last line of the poem that is as indicative of Paris at the time as the Eiffel Tower. The wheel is circular while the road is straight, but both are brought together through parallel repetition and similar sound. The wheel comes full circle; the road leads somewhere new. The *route*/road could also stand for a larger more metaphorical concept of "being on the right road" or "finding one's path," or the "golden thread of

the future” (89); whereas, a wheel seems to suggest a more concrete object in the world.

*Route* and *roues* also connect phonetically with the word *rouge/red*, which is repeated throughout the poem as seen both in the print in the opening of the poem and multiple times throughout in the image of “le Place Rouge de Moscou/the Red Square of Moscow” (8) to “le bureaux de la Crois-Rouge [the Red-Cross office]” (409) to the “des affiches, du rouge du vert [posters in red and green]” (413). The repetition of *rouge*, *route*, and *roues* could be part of what Perloff names the “curious slippage,” and “erasing of contours” that makes the poem contemporary (165); however, I am interested in what is accomplished beyond the sense of the contemporaneity that Cendrars evokes. As discussed in Chapter One, linguistic slippage could be an instance of Saussure’s paradigmatic blurring of meaning on the vertical axis rather than on the horizontal; however, Cendrars’ move away from definite, though multiple meanings proves otherwise. If we are not looking for the substitution of one semantic meaning for another, but are looking for the breaking of those meanings, the inclusion of *rouge/red* as a homophone creates slippage that is paramount. While color might have meaning because we attribute emotive value to it, (red as passion, blue as coldness, etcetera), color as a concept, unlike wheel or road, is inherently abstract. And as demonstrated in the text, color moves between visual and linguistic, abstract and semantic.

We have already seen color as abstraction in Wittgenstein and *Remarks on Color* in Chapter One:

When we're asked 'What do the words 'red', 'blue', 'black', 'white', mean?' We can, of course, immediately point to things which have these colours,— but our ability to explain the meaning of these words goes no further! For the rest, we have either no idea at all of their use, or a very rough and to some extent false one. (I:69)

As I have argued, in *Tender Buttons*, the semantic breakdown of meaning in the text rests both on Stein's use of syntax and references to color that are out of context. Cendrars' use of color and semantic alteration does not add up to a new meaning but creates contradiction between concepts (*route / roues*) and between concrete concepts (*route / rouse*) and abstraction (*rouge*). In this sense, the narrator is a "really bad poet" if a good one is someone who creates multiple meanings, but a bad one blurs meaning so that meaning recedes.

Perloff in her essay on O'Hara and Cendrars, writes that Cendrars' use of fragments is the dissolution of the idea of the "voyage poem," citing Cendrars' phrase "J'ai déchiffré tous les textes confuse des roues et j'ai rassemblé les éléments épars d'une violent beauté / Que je possède [I deciphered all the garbled texts of the wheels and united the scattered elements of a violent beauty / Which I possess]" (cited in Perloff, trans. Padgett, 170). Perloff suggests that Cendrars reassembles fragments, creating a kind of collage work. While this is true, further close reading reveals a kind of linguistic reckoning that connects to the image of the wheel that appears near the conclusion of *Le Prose du Transsibérien*. Deciphering the "textes confus des roues" could reference the texts of the voyage, i.e. the narrative of memory and the journey on the train; "wheels" in this context become metonymic for the train. But a few lines

before this line, we see that *roues*/wheels is not a simple word for Cendrars who blurs it with *route* and *rouge*. The confused texts of the voyage, “*textes confus des roues*” (403), confuse the idea of linearity associated with the road, the idea of circularity that is the wheel, and the abstraction that is the color, here the color red. Cendrars states, that he has assembled these fragments that he possesses (*Que je possède*), and that move him on (*Et qui me force*). Yet, this is also where the stanza breaks off with no punctuation. In the facsimile version of the text, these lines also end the oddly right justified section printed in green before switching to left hand justification printed red. The next stanza in orange then proclaims, “Tsilsikan et Khabine / Je ne vais pas plus loin (Tsitsihar and Kharbin / I can go no further) (406-407). The juxtaposition of the narrator that moves on and then almost simultaneously stops becomes a contradiction within the poem.

The line break at 409 signals a transition between the green text and the orange text (fig. 6). Both lines between this line break are in present tense, but the orange text of the past comes to a halt, “Je ne vais pas plus loin [That’s as far as I go],” while the green text of the present is the one in which the narrator is driven onwards. Both green and orange sections create a contrast of time and movement. But orange and green themselves are not complementary colors. The complement of green is red, which if we skip the orange text reads, “O, Paris / Gare central debarcadère de volontés carrefour des inquiétudes [O Paris / Main station where desires arrive at the crossroads of restlessness]” (419-420). The “violent beauty” that drives the narrator, “Et qui me force,” arrives at the train station of Paris where desire arrives not to be satiated but to remain restless, creating yet another pairing of opposites. If we follow the idea of

contrast, then we must read the orange text against/or with the blue text at the end. The orange text stops, “ Je ne vais pas plus loin [That’s as far as I go]” (407); the blue text at line 432 also stops in the expression of regret, “Je voudrais / Je vousdrais n’avoir jamais fait mes voyages [I wish / I wish I’d never started traveling]” (432-435). Both the orange and blue text looks more towards the past while the red and the green looks toward the present. The past comes to a resting place, while the present moves ahead even when it arrives. The complexity of the print ink colors of the text illustrates how these narratives cannot be separated linearly, but are always constantly side by side in contrast to each other.

The blurring of *roues*, *route*, *rouge* is juxtaposed across the stanza breaks and between the expressed movement forward and stopping through the printed colors of the text. The contradiction of Cendrars’ text is not just in the fragmentary opposition of images or change of scene (though that is there too), but also semantic, syntactic, and visual contradiction of text color and justification that enacts simultaneity and the color of grammar. Like Wittgenstein’s difficulty defining the meanings of color, Cendrars’ use of homophones to blur the idea of objects, concepts, and colors, creates a dissolution of separate elements while also engaging with the colors used in the print text and in Sonia Delaunay-Terk’s visual painting.

*La Prose du Transsibérien* achieves a dissolution of meaning not to fragment experience, but to exemplify the complexity of the surface of language that is beyond everyday understanding. The use of color in its most abstract sense alters the frame of language because the inherent abstraction that is color typifies the abstract movement that is already within language. Because of Cendrars’ failure as a poet, we do not have

to read for the narrator's metaphorical meanings, but, instead, for how the language "fails." It is in "failure" that there is also a new revelation for the reader. Color is a new way of seeing precisely because it is fundamental to what we see, but also, and at the same time, is only ever a reflection of the surface that we are looking at.

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On a different occasion, I'm at MoMA's *Inventing Abstraction*, seeing again, and yet as for the first time, not one but several versions of *La Prose du Transsibérien*. Side by side, the three versions are similar, but offer small contrasts, suggesting even the simultaneity between versions of the text itself. MoMA is so much larger than the Cooper-Hewitt. Unthinking, I walk up to a glass case to examine one unfolded version and am startled by sound, a disembodied voice reading in French somewhere in the middle of the text. I realize there are speakers placed throughout the galleries reading Mallarme, Apollinaire, and Cendrars, but you do not see them and only hear them when you are directly under them. Of course, I find, I am once again in the middle of things without a beginning or an end, left only with a sonic echoing I cannot quite comprehend, and the whole narrative that I can never completely gather. It is similar to my initial experience of color, if only differentiated from the contrast of similar disorientation through dissimilar mediums.

**CHAPTER FOUR: SURFACE COLOR AND TRANSFORMATIVE LIGHTING: MINA LOY'S  
1923 *LUNAR BAEDECKER***

Emily Post's famous book, *Etiquette*, first published in 1922, describes in 642 pages what is proper and sanctioned in polite American society. In a section dedicated to the proper paper and inks that a woman may use for correspondence, she writes, "White, cream, all blues, grays, and mauves are in best taste. Pink is on the fringe of admittance; green is still not admitted. Paper should be small of medium size, single or double sheets, plain or with any colored border . . . . Writing ink may be violet as well as any blue, but not green" (498). While I am by no means interested in pursuing Ms. Post's manual any further than these few lines, the restrictions around color suggest something about its regulation and social implications at this particular moment in time. It is doubtful that avant-garde painter, artist, poet, and inventor, Mina Loy would have had or cared to know Ms. Post book based on Loy's rather rebellious behavior in her youth. Biographer Carolyn Burke notes that in Munich in 1900, Loy "In order to appear 'voluntarily unsexed,' she decided to disguise herself as an eccentric. . . . 'I preferred to appear as an amateur lunatic rather than an amateur baggage.' Strolling about Munich with the penny pipe in her mouth, she soon attracted attention" (60).

Burke, in her extensive biography of Loy, writes how Loy at this time was "inventing herself" (60). It then seems that Loy from a very early point in her life was quite aware and thinking about the ways in which one "performs" or "presents" oneself and what elements can be employed to create a particular persona. The ordinary and the incidental facts or object of Loy's life may be telling of other issues

Loy was thinking about or working through at the time. In the Gertrude Stein archive at the Beinecke Library, the contrast I found between Mina Loy's letters to the folders and folders of correspondence of her contemporaries of the time was startling.

Opening the folder of Loy's correspondence, I was struck by the abundance of color. Here was paper in the sanctioned white and blue, but also lavender and pink, and inks in black, blue, turquoise, magenta, and purple. I do not intend to pursue a study of paper and inks, but I do think Loy's use of color, even in something as everyday as ordinary correspondence, signals an interest and propensity towards color at the very least. Her training as a visual artist, which most likely would have included some color theory, and her piquant for challenging social norms via her dress designs, hats, and lampshades further illustrates how her uses of color and thinking about "surfaces," whether they are object or garments, are linked in her work. Famously, Sylvia Beach of the bookstore Shakespeare and Company remarked of Loy, "Her hats were very like her lampshades; or perhaps it was the lamp shades that were like her hats. She wrote poetry whenever she had time" (qtd. in Lein, 618). Loy's approach to color may also be influenced by her initial training in the visual arts where presumably she would have learned color theory and visual methods of working with color. Since she did not start writing poetry until the early nineteen-teens, it is possible that her early art training influenced her poetry as well.

Burke traces the art worlds in which Mina Loy lived throughout her career. Before being sent to Munich to study art, Loy attended the Wood School of art in London, but received a rather poor art education because her restrictive Victorian mother had chosen the school based on its social propriety rather than for its actual

reputation as an art school. The Wood School was one of the worst art schools in London, and female students were only allowed to draw Corinthian columns and other architectural details and were restricted from many life-drawing classes which were considered too risqué for female students. In Munich, Loy attended another fairly conservative art school, but gained some personal freedom free from the direct rule of her parents. She requested her own door key and spent time out meeting people at cafés and partaking in the early Munich avant-garde scene. Returning home briefly, Loy was then finally allowed to study art in Paris in 1900. In Paris she met Stephen Haweis who would become her husband in 1903, predominately as a way to gain independence from her family, escape the stifling censorship of her mother, and hide an unplanned pregnancy. The marriage was not a happy one, and did not last.

At the beginning of the nineteen-teens, Loy made the acquaintance of Mable Dodge in Florence, a woman and patron of the arts, who was already friends with Gertrude Stein. It was also at this time that Loy began writing poetry in earnest, and with the help of Carl Van Vechten, her first published poem, “Café de Neant” appeared in *The International*, a left-wing, liberal little magazine (Burke 177). In this time period Loy also had affairs with F. T. Marinetti and Giovanni Papini. Living in both New York and Mexico in the teens, it was not until the 1920s that she returned to Paris where in 1923 her first collection of poetry (and second to last), *Lunar Baedeker*, appeared through Contact Press, a small press run by the early avant-garde publisher Robert McAlmon who, the previous year, in 1922, published William Carlos Williams’ *Spring and All*. When Loy’s first major book appeared, she was working on multiple projects, initiating her lampshade business with the help of financial backing

from Peggy Guggenheim. Returning to New York in the 1930s, Loy, working in more various mediums, began making found collages and proved to be a close friend and influence to another artist working in found object collages, Joseph Cornell. She worked on these collages in addition to writing poems through the 1940s and '50s. In the late 40s, she worked on numerous designs for everyday objects that ranged from a movable toy alphabet in which the letters made from various curves and lines in plastic could be taken apart and reassembled into different letters; a bracelet wrist blotter she named the "corselet"; a long-handled brush for window cleaning; and, the "chatoyant," a reflective kind of object, whose prototype instructions can be close-read as a kind of object poem.

### **Loy's 1923 *Lunar Baedeker***

The *Lunar Baedeker* of 1923 was Loy's debut collection of poetry though she had published much of her poetry already in esteemed journals of the time including *The Little Review* and the *Dial* among others. With only five hundred copies printed, *Lunar Baedeker* had a limited print run and availability in its day. The slim volume of only sixty-three pages collects poems from two different time periods, the era from when Loy started writing, 1914-1915, and the more recent years when the book appeared, 1921-1922. The book itself is printed in two sections, though there is little front matter and no table of contents. Roger Conover's various collections of Loy's work in both the 1982 version of *The Last Lunar Baedeker* and in the 1985 revised and condensed *The Lost Lunar Baedeker* prove to be the most complete collections of Loy's poetry to date. Conover, however, in his collections has rearranged the poems in

groupings of sequential composition and publication date. While Conover's editions also include a number of unpublished works, neither of these collections includes the original sequencing of the 1923 *Lunar Baedeker*.<sup>29</sup> Both published and unpublished poems are grouped according to chronology.

In Loy's 1923 *Lunar Baedeker*, however, the book starts with poems of 1921-1922 and moves backwards to 1914-1915, turning any idea of chronology on its head. Moreover, Loy edited her 1917 version of "Love Songs to Johannes" from thirty-four sections to only thirteen, retitling it simply "Love Songs." "Love Songs" is the first poem of the second part of *Lunar Baedeker*. Similarly, the poem "English Rose" appearing in the first section of the book, was expanded into "Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose" when published the same year in *The Little Review*. Critics often neglect the shortened version of "Love Songs" in favor of the longer 1917 version with its more "I"-centered narrative. Carolyn Burke discusses Loy's editorial decisions in the original *Lunar Baedeker* and suggests

The book's internal structure evoked the distance she [Loy] had covered. Judging as much by what was omitted as by what was included in her guide to aestheticism, she preferred to forget some of these journeys. Of the sixty-two poems published in the past ten years . . . she included only half . . . . In writing the history of her imagination, she was also revising the past. (322)

Burke believes *Lunar Baedeker* focuses on the idea of artistic vision, and that Loy was working to construct a particular kind of artistic persona at the cost of omission

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<sup>29</sup> An endnote in the back matter of *The Lost Lunar Baedeker* notes the table of contents from the 1923 *Lunar Baedeker*, but no edition currently replicates the original version of Loy's work in book form.

and deletion of particular shaping elements in Loy's past. Burke's commentary has become the consistent interpretation for Loy's selection and removal of poems in the 1923 *Lunar Baedeker*. Sandeep Parmar in *Reading Mina Loy's Autobiographies: Myth of the Modern Woman (Historicizing Modernism)* concludes that "not only was [*Lunar Baedeker*] a map of personal 'journeys' through Loy's artistic 'imagination,' but also it was a self-constructed and self-erected image of herself as a poet that she revised consciously in favour of literariness" (58). Both Burke and Parmar believe Loy's editing of "The Love Songs to Johannes" resulted from the initial scandal caused in 1917 around the poem due to its sexual explicitness. However, what none of the scholarship on Loy and the 1923 version of *Lunar Baedeker* looks at is the sequencing and interrelation of the poems as they appear there. Looking primarily at omissions as a way of denying the more boldly sexual poems, critics claim Loy was constructing a less "sensationalized self" as the focus of the book.

What is neglected in these readings are the ways in which a collection of poetry creates its own kind of trajectory, and what comes to the foreground in the orchestrating and sequencing of a suite of poems. Existing scholarship on Loy seems more interested in omissions; I am interested in what the ordering, editing, and the book itself as object accomplishes as a collection or body of poems. Poetry collections, while sometime representative of the poet's experience, also usually are an embodiment of intertwined and linked ideas and motifs that, much like a composition of music, play and reverberate off of one another. Indeed, reading William Carlos Williams "The Red Wheelbarrow" in the context of the original printed version of *Spring and All* from 1922, one year prior to *Lunar Baedeker* (also published by

Contact Editions), alters our sense of the sparseness of the poem. “The Red Wheelbarrow” appears late in *Spring and All* as chapter XXII, but is often only read out of its published context in anthologies as an example of Imagism. The book throughout builds between short poems and longer prose pieces. The poem itself is followed by a long prose meditation on knowledge, categories, and division. The sequencing of the book also tells us something about what Williams is trying to accomplish. The title, *Spring and All*, suggests “spring” as both a new beginning as a noun, and also as a verb. As well noted, the book itself “jumps” non-linearly with its second chapter numbered as “Chapter 19,” and its third chapter numbered “Chapter XIII” printed upside down.<sup>30</sup> Having already discussed the idea of sequencing in relationship to Gertrude Stein and an alternative ordering of the three sections in *Tender Buttons*, and Cendrars’ fragmented narrative of four narratives, I am interested in Loy’s sequencing choices and her edits in the 1923 *Lunar Baedeker* for how they provide a guide for how to read the poems and rethinking “grammar.”

### **Anti-Mapping and the Alternative Guidebook**

Looking at elements of *Lunar Baedeker* as a whole, the book itself as object reveals another facet of complexity and thought that went into it as a collection. Burke has noted the title, *Lunar Baedeker*, “evoked the old-fashioned, opinionated, and reliable Baedeker, the hand-book familiar to all European travellers. Whatever country it described, Baedeker’s reassuring format—red cloth jacket, marbled edges, cream pages and elegant maps—implied that one was in good hands” (321). Examining an

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30 I’m grateful for this reading of *Spring and All*, which I was first introduced to in Dr. Peter Covino’s graduate poetry seminar in spring 2013.

original 1923 version of *Lunar Baedeker*, one immediately notices some striking differences from an original *Baedeker's Guide*. *Lunar Baedeker* is imprinted in red on a cream paperback cover in contrast to the original versions of *Baedeker's Guide* which were always a red cover imprinted with gold lettering (Fig. 9). While some of this might have been due to printing costs for Loy, it is a curious reversal or inversion of the original. Burke writes that, "Mina's addition to the series charted the landscape of the artistic imagination, where the sights were the common place of a tradition that, like Baedeker, predated the century" (322). Burke reads the opening title poem as a critique of the over-wrought, Decadent traditions of the past, but I would like to pause at the suggestion that Loy's *Baedeker* is the "landscape of the imagination." While Loy is indeed fanciful in her images and descriptions, I would also argue that the intricacy of her syntax and meter is not just a critique of 1900's past decadence, but a way of highlighting the surface of the text, the way that color and light provide the reader with places of high-lighting or illumination *vis-à-vis* a reflective surface.

While Loy's *Lunar Baedeker* is materially nothing like Cendrars' and Delaunay's *La Prose du Transsibérien*, the original Baedeker's guides included "14 maps and 41 plans" including three sectioned fold-out maps. In the 1910 *Baedeker's Guide to Paris and Its Environs*, three accordion folded maps of the city, broken into three color coded sections of grey, orange, and red, appear in the back of the guidebook. These maps fold into the book itself in the same fashion that *La Prose* folds up into a small book-like unit. One could even argue that the broken color-coded sections bear a resemblance to the color-coded sections of *La Prose*, but, of course, for Cendrars and Delaunay their "map" or anti-map, as I was calling it, is not linear. Loy's

*Lunar Baedeker* is not an artist's book by any means, but it is possible to read it as a form of alternative mapping that, through reflection, mirroring, color, and changes in the idea of the surface, thereby alters the reader's relationship to the text. It is through examination of the book as object, while considering how Loy thought about these processes in the context of her inventions, that a kind of multiplicity of surfaces and alternative processes of writing and reading emerge.

*Lunar Baedeker* might be a kind of "guidebook," but Loy's title itself is a kind of inversion: *Lunar Baedeker* rather than *Baedeker's Paris and Environs*. The guide no longer belongs to anyone, *Lunar Baedeker*, but is a particular kind of adjectivally modified object. The implication of a guide by association remains, but the authority of ownership of the guide has been erased. "Lunar," of course, refers to the moon which materializes in the twelfth stanza of the title poem, "and 'Immortality' / mildews . . . / in the museums of the moon" (47-49).<sup>31</sup> Loy's museum is suspect with its "mildew," and evokes not permanence, but the transient with "Immortality" appearing in scare quotes. In what "light" must we come to rethink the notion of immortality? "Lunar lusts" appears at line 23, which is a curious pairing since the moon is also traditionally associated with Diana and chastity in Greek mythology. In these two instances, the reader is given a combination of contradictory terms. Loy then employs "lunar" more complexly than just meaning "moon" alone. "Lunar," the OED tells us, has a colloquial meaning of "a look" that was in use predominately from 1906 to 1950. The moon, as a reflective surface itself, implies something of the idea of a "look" or *how* to look as well. Loy's *Baedeker* might just as well be a way of casting

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31 We might also think here about Loy's preference in 1900 to appear "an amateur lunatic rather than an amateur baggage" (Burke 60) quoted earlier.

a surface glance at things, or looking at a different reflective surface of ideas and images in the world.<sup>32</sup> The moon as object that reflects light also resembles Loy's ideas about surfaces as they manifest in her late invention of the Chatoyant.

### **The Chatoyant**

The prototype of the chatoyant is in the Beinecke Library at Yale University (Fig. 7). "Chatoyancy" is the property of gemstones that exhibit "cat-eye" reflection as in the stone tiger's eye or a star sapphire (OED). Loy had devised a way to create this process artificially. In her prototype instructions, she cites Webster's entry:

"'Chatoyant' Webster's dictionary. Having a changeable luster or colour like that of a changeable silk or a cat's-eye in the dark" (1). Loy's invention consists of layered materials that produce changeable visual effects. The chatoyant, she writes, "consists of a layer of brilliant, colored, varicolored or natural colored metal, metal foil, or foil paper combined with transparent or almost transparent plastics or glass, white or colored" (1). The process of layering the materials is what interests me in Loy's invention. The Chatoyant is essentially a kind of reflective and colored surface. Loy's conception of the surface here is unique because the reflective surface is not simply one layer, but is a combination of multiple layers that still appear as *a* single surface.

Loy's description of the reflection of light becomes potentially revealing of how she conceptualized the function of a surface or surfaces. Loy's instructions for the second principle necessary for her conception of reflection is, "The curvature, undulation or angularity of the under surface of solid plastics coinciding with identical curvature, undulations or angularity of adhering metallic lay. viz." (Fig. 8). It is the

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32 For a long philosophical study on the idea of the glance see Casey's *The World at a Glance*.

curvature or undulations in the surface that change the visible perception of what appears as a singular surface. The “chatoyant” effect that is changeable to the eye that views it is due to the alterations or curves in the surface itself. The third principle follows: “The curvature, undulation or angularity may occur in both upper and under surfaces” (2). Loy’s curious wording of “upper and under surfaces” suggests not a surface and depth, but a multiplicity of surfaces, resisting the simplicity of *a* surface. The quality of the light that is reflected is affected by the changes in the surfaces not by a change in the light itself. Loy’s surface here is anything but a simple flat stable surface, and is perhaps more in tune with the idea of the fold as discussed in Chapter Three. Loy’s use of reflection, color, and light serves a similar function multiplying surface and making it recognizable as construction of what is perceived as depth, rather than one side in a dichotomy of depth versus surface.

### **Poetics, Color, Light, and Reflection**

If the book is a *Lunar Baedeker*, in what sense are we looking, and in what way are we being guided to look? The preface to a 1910 edition of a *Baedeker’s Guide to Paris and Environs* reads, “The chief object of the Handbook for Paris, which is now issued for the seventeenth time, is to render the traveller as nearly as possibly independent of the services of guides, commissionaires, and innkeepers, and to enable him to employ his time and his money to the best advantage” (v). The *Baedeker’s Guide* promises a sense of independence, while Loy’s “guide” tries to illuminate the surface of the world, which is subject to constant shifts, contradictions, and instabilities. The idea of shifting changes and instability Loy purposely “illuminates”

not through direct, but through reflective or indirect light. I would like to approach the *Lunar Baedeker*, not simply as a collection in which Loy was trying to excise the past and create a new persona, but as a collection that through the way the poems interact with one another and reflect one another's images of colors and light, alters notions of femininity and sexuality by critiquing how those notions are constructed.

I have already noted the book is in two sections and moves backward through time instead of forward. Oddly there is no critical commentary on either of these aspects of the text. The *Lunar Baedeker's* relationship to both time and the physical object of *Baedeker's Guides* suggests a kind of inversion of time and the normal function of the guidebook that directs the traveler how to move efficiently and expediently through a particular place, highlighting only the most relevant sites and markers usually within a short span of time. What if time is not linear, but is surfaces of memory and experience that we continually read through? What are time and memory if not an accretion of the sediments of experience and time? Looking at the sections in *Lunar Baedeker*, not as simply separate moments in time, but as layers of two surfaces that through each other reflect various changing and shifting moments of light and color, we recognize how experience shapes our beliefs and our constructs of language. The connection between color and light in both sections of the text highlights how common constructions of belief are also misconceptions. The reflective lunar light alters our perception of how we read an event in time.

The surface of experience *is* color. Loy in her *Lunar Baedeker* may not be rewriting her history, but layering experience in time as an "upper surface" and an "under surface" that we *both* simultaneously see through. If *Lunar Baedeker's* two

sections are not read as chronicling simply separate parts of Loy's life in time, but are read between each other or paired to comment on each other across time, the poems "illuminate" different reflections of similar experiences. The shifting reflections are indicative of experience made to "shimmer" through Loy's use of color, light, and reflective surfaces within the poems themselves. The opening poem of *Lunar Baedeker* is also the title poem "Lunar Baedeker" where

A silver Lucifer  
serves  
cocaine in cornucopia  
  
to some somnambulists  
of adolescent thighs  
draped in satirical draperies (1-7)

Carolyn Burke observes of the title poem, "The poem's mannered tone, vocabulary, and sound patterns underscore its critique of the decadent tradition from which it arises" (322). One of the first predominate Mina Loy scholars, Virginia Kouididis, in her 1980 book *Mina Loy: American Modernist Poet* notes that the poem is "[Loy's] most extravagant effort at self-analytical language," finding it to be "A satire of moon-struck escapists (Decadents, dandies, idealist-reformers) who have fled the responsibilities of clear, sunlit vision, the poem recreates their exotic lunar refuge in a decor of Decadence shaped by gilded words and images" (100). However, both of these readings focus on the figures presented as actual rather than *how* they are presented. Starting with the opening, title poem, I am interested in what Loy's

attention to light and color accomplishes as it is layered within the poem, and across the surface of parallel poems in the text. In the 51 short lines that comprise “Lunar Baedeker,” there are numerous references to color, light and reflective surfaces, ranging from “silver,” “chandelier,” “mercurial,” “phosphorus,” “eye-white sky light,” “white light,” “lunar,” “Stellectric,” “Starway,” “glass,” “onyx-eyed,” and “moon.” While clearly drawing on celestial imagery and illumination, Loy’s images are anything but simple imaginative or decadent references.

The layering of surfaces that includes both images of color and light in Loy’s poetry alters the framework of how she recalls tradition, history, and personal event. The color of grammar in Loy is not to be found in her syntax and illogical uses of color as in Stein, nor is it the disruption of linearity and narrative though visual color as in Cendrars and Delaunay, but is the overlapping of time along and abundance of alliterative sound that abstracts objects from their contexts resembling an ever-changing surface that is closer to actual lived experience. Loy’s abstraction then is similar to Cendrars’ dissolution of “objects” into abstract color.

### **Refiguring Figures**

The invocation of Lucifer suggests a classical reference to Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and “man’s first disobedience,” the idea of a fall from grace. A “silver Lucifer,” however, also invokes light rather than the darkness associated with the fall. The name Lucifer does, indeed, mean light, and so whether the use of “silver” in this first line is ironic, or if it attempts to return Lucifer to a state of light before the idea of sin and a fall is left ambiguous. The contradiction of binaries immediately changes the register

of the poem. Kouidis writes that “Mina Loy, like other moderns, draws selectively on the tradition in her revolt against art and mores. She adopts its contempt for middle-class values and its argument from the autonomy of art” (110), but this idea of Loy writing only as a method of critique, does not address the function of combining opposites in the opening of the poem, and how invoking something of a paradox works beyond Victorian critiques of art.

The mythological quality of Loy’s figures, Lethe, Pharaohs, Zodiac, Orient, odalisques, Cyclops, and concubine, initially suggests something akin to the Pre-Raphaelites’ use of mythological figures. The Pre-Raphaelites, as Burke recounts, artistically were some of the first major influences on Loy’s artwork in the early 1900s, while she was still in London (43). Parmar has also noted the mythic quality of some of the poems of *Lunar Baedeker*, and writes that, “These poems share with ‘Apology of Genius’ the language of creation mythologies, a near Biblical tone that depicts a masterful deity” (146). However, Loy transforms her figures with a “light” of the modern world. *Lunar Baedeker*, while initially seeming fantastical, has a particularly contemporary feel that suggests a modern world because of the way light imagery is used. The traditional mythological figures are complicated by what appears to be an urban, electrified and buzzing city.<sup>33</sup> In line 8, we read, “Peris in livery / prepare Lethe / for postumous parvenues” (8-11). Peris is not one of Loy’s unusual spellings but is actually a reference to a fairy-like creature in Persian myth, supposedly descended from fallen angels, once considered female demons and then later considered benevolent (OED). The parallel to Lucifer is immediately recognizable, but we have also moved in a few lines from Christian to Persian to Greek myth in line 10 with the

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33 See Burke’s discussion of these lines in *Becoming Modern* p. 321-325.

reference to Lethe the river one must cross over on the way to Hades. We jump culturally just as we might jump temporally if we approach the separate time periods as facets of the same surface. “Peris in livery” (8) is also a sonic pun, and we can also hear “Paris in livery” in the same line. Livery, of course, indicates a uniform of some sort of servitude, but also often enough is a particular kind of color of dress denoting allegiance, alliance, or position. “Livery” invokes the idea of color, but it is also a type of “costume,” or something that is “put on.” In Loy’s invocation, what particular person in Paris are we presented with and in what “light” and in what “color”?

If we move from a mythological figure to the figure of the city, the poem itself produces a critique of the construction of “reality” by combining contradictory images. Loy’s “Lunar Baedeker,” characterized by Burke and Kouidis as a map of the imagination, is far more a kind of underworld filled with “somnambulists,” “Lethe” “posthumous parvenues,” “infusoria,” “tombstones,” “doomsday” “Necropolis,” and “mildews.” The poem is replete with death imagery, but it also might be the underside of a different surface, or as described in the *Chatoyant*, the “under surface.” If we read “Peris” as its homophonic counter part to “Paris,” the “pothstumous parvenues” might not just be references to the dead, but could very well refer to the expatriate artist crowds of Paris at the time who will not attain recognition or fame until after death. Loy’s use of “parvenue” is also a feminine version of the more standard “parvenu.” The fact that most of her references to other figures in the poem are also feminized, suggests that the figures in this poem are not just generalized “Decadents” as Burke suggests, but feminine figures that have fallen under particular social coding: Peris, parvenues, Odaliskes, and concubine. Most of these figures carry with them the

association of a morally dangerous feminine figure. In keeping with Loy's beliefs found in the *Feminist Manifesto*, the connotations these figure have in society is in need of critique not the actual figures themselves. Loy advocated to abandon looking to social norms and definitions, and to recast the position one imagined herself in: As she argues in her *Feminist Manifesto*, "Leave off looking to men to find out what you are NOT—seek within yourselves to find out what you ARE // As conditions are at present constituted—you have the choice between PARASITISM, & PROSTITUTION—or NEGATION" (154). "Delirious Avenues" could just as well be the grand boulevards of Paris, and "Pharaoh's tombstones" even a possible reference to the Luxor Obelisk at the center of La Place de la Concord. The "Stellectric signs / 'Wing shows on Starway' / 'Zodiac carrousel'" (24-26) also suggests something of neon theater signs announcing stage shows and revues.

### **Theorizing Light and Surface**

Julie Gonnering Lein in a recent essay titled "Shades of Meaning: Mina Loy's Poetics of Luminous Opacity" looks at how Loy's lampshades correspond to her poetry, while also tracing the historical significance of electric lights used in conjunction with sexuality in her poems. Lein argues for how the image of electricity is not simple metaphor, but writes that "[Loy's] approach to the materiality of both light and language suggests alternate, non-metaphorical ways of reading her work. Allusions to particular types of early electrical lighting inflect her poems with a spectrum of nuanced moods and meanings. They operate like analogies more than metaphors, providing specific potential modes of commonality rather than casting

totalizing comparisons: they emphasize tenuous and changeable bonds over abiding unions” (622). Loy’s use of light and lighting, and, I might add, color, are clearly more than a “totalizing comparison.” I argue that Loy’s use of light goes beyond the connection of “abiding unions.” The notion of the “tenuous and changeable” is paramount. Light and lighting are *how* we see. Koudis has already noted that in Loy’s *Lunar Baedeker*, “vision remains the major theme, the eye the major motif and symbol” (109), but Koudis’ study remains focused on the idea of artistic vision and its recognition in the modern world, and she does not address Loy’s use of lights, lighting or color in relation to any idea of seeing.

Along with the prototype of the Chatoyant is a drawing for one of Loy’s many lampshade designs (unfortunately most of these are lost). Her lampshade includes cut-outs in the design to let light through particular points of the image design on the shade so the light under the shade becomes integral to part of the design of the surface of the shade itself. While possibly unremarkable, the lampshade design also seems to have a particular concept of a surface at work in how it uses both surface and light. Lein chooses to “look at Loy’s poetry to demonstrate its thematic and phenomenal similarities to her lamp work . . . . [Arguing] that the significance of Loy’s dual work in lighting and literature radiated beyond an intriguing set of descriptions” (619). Lein examines the developing technology of electric light to draw a parallel to Loy’s poetics. But where Lein suggests that the lampshades are a way of crafting something to “filter the light,” I am interested in the idea that all there is is a surface rather than the idea of a surface that hides something behind it. It is the cut-outs in the surface that change how the light itself is seen. Since Loy was known for the cut-outs in her

designs, I suggest that the cuts in the surface do not reveal the “essence” of the depth of the lamp, but transform the surface we are looking at from a static object (the shade itself) to a surface that is more dynamic in the way shifts and changes are possible. The light *becomes* part of the surface of the shade. And unlike Lein’s study that focuses on the connection between electricity and sexuality, I believe that Loy’s use of light in relationship to color and surface suggests a method of poetics that “sheds light” on her elaborate use of alliterative sound and how things are “figured” in her poetry.

### **Wittgenstein’s *Remarks*: Shine as a Color**

The importance of color as example of the particular recognition to the constructedness of language has been discussed throughout this dissertation. Ludwig Wittgenstein recognizes through the ways in which we use color in relation to surface, transparency, opaqueness, luminous, and shine that these instabilities reveal the framework of our own language and thinking. Our use of color linguistically is not logically consistent, and Wittgenstein’s examination of our use reveals how we “frame” our world. The combination of opposites in Loy reveals the constructedness of ideas and beliefs because her elaborate use of language creates the seeming surface of a mythology out of the ordinariness and even ugly occurrences and instances in the modern world. Like Maimonides flash of illumination, Loy needs *both* the opaque and the luminous to alter what we read as depth and surface.

In Wittgenstein’s *Remarks on Color*, reflection, luminosity, and shine are written about in relationship to color. Early on Wittgenstein writes, “We speak of the

‘colour of gold’ and do not mean yellow. ‘Gold-coloured’ is the property of a surface that shines or glitters” (I:33). What shines or glitters is certainly not logically a color, and yet “gold-coloured” as a description of color on a surface is more or less distinguished *by* the property that *shines*. Just as color may be a solid surface or transparent light, a “shine” or “glitter” also becomes a “property” of color as illustrated through our use of “gold-coloured.” The “shine,” too, is not fixed much like any definition of color concepts, and the very idea of shine, glitter, or luminosity illustrate this. Much later in section three of *Remarks*, Wittgenstein writes, “Whatever looks luminous does not look grey. Everything grey looks as though it is being illuminated. // That something can ‘appear luminous’ is caused by the distribution of lightness in what is seen, but there is also such a thing as ‘seeing something *as* luminous’; under certain circumstances one can take reflected light to be the light from a luminous body” (III: 224). The key of this proposition is in the idea of luminosity, what appears in a particular way, and the shifting qualities of that appearance. Luminosity may appear to radiate from a depth, but in actuality is a reflection. A body that appears to radiate light but that is actually a reflection is, of course, the moon.

Wittgenstein connects luminosity to the color grey to further illustrate the non-uniformity of color logic in the concept of the color grey. However, light in conjunction with color is also interesting in this proposition since color itself is also light to a certain degree. Just as color may belong to a surface, opaqueness, or transparency, “luminosity” is also illusory in *how* it appears. It may not be a light behind something but simply, “the distribution of lightness in what is seen” on the surface color. “The last sentence of Wittgenstein’s proposition I find compelling in

connection to Mina Loy's work and her ideas of reflection and light: "under certain circumstances one can take reflected light to be the light from a luminous body." The moon appears as luminescent, but is actually just a rock reflecting light. Just as Wittgenstein's reflection can be mistaken for the luminous body itself, I believe that Loy's use of the lunar, reflection, light and color, speaks to the instability of a perceived object or even idea. The *Baedeker* is not just a guide, as discussed above, but a reflecting light that changes our perception because of how it presents us with surface. The opacity and density of language is the color or reflective quality that changes what we are looking at in the language of the poem. It is no longer a metaphor, but a density of language that eschews simple "meaning" to critique the constructs of form and tradition. One must also remember how the original Baedeker's guidebook claims to present the traveller with the culture and history of a city or place. If anything, it seems Loy is displacing history and tradition by making traditional mythological images blur with the modern world while also folding notions of linear temporality to highlight the changes we undergo with experience. Contemporary life and archaic mythology are conflated the same way the two time periods of the book are perhaps folded together.

### **Return of the Fold: Fold as Reflection**

Reflection, like the fold, changes the visibility of the object allowing the reader to recognize the surface of the object, or possibly the surface of the text. Cole Swensen, quoted earlier in Chapter Three, writes of Blaise Cendrars' *La Prose du Transsibérien* that, "It is a text that insists on surface, and its folded structure both emphasizes and

enriches that, for the layers inherent in an accordion fold multiply the surfaces, create seriality of surface that amounts to an elaborate refusal of depth” (94). I have expanded on Swensen’s idea of the fold in relation to the complicated use of color in *La Prose* in Chapter Three; however, this statement by Swensen could also be applied to the “curvature, undulations, and angularity” in the surface that Loy employs in her description of the Chatoyant. Loy’s invention, we could say, is also a particular kind of refusal of depth. The changing reflection of the uneven surface is analogous to the idea of the fold that “multiplies surface” and “refuses depth.” With regard to Loy’s poetry, the two parts of *Lunar Baedeker* create two layers like the Chatoyant. The “unevenness” reflected between the two parts, the present and the past, alters how we read the figures and events in each set of poems.

Although, Loy’s inventions are dated much later (sometime around the late 1940s), her description of the Chatoyant prototype at moments resembles the opening of “Lunar Baedeker”: “The combining of these materials to the Chatoyant effect viz that of a shifting glow of silvery, white or coloured metallics high light shining through a slightly veiled surface is based on the following principles” (1). The idea of the “high light” or “shifting glow” in Loy’s description manifests itself in the “silvery, white, or coloured metallics.” The surface of the “under surface,” as Loy calls it, is a surface of changing light, but the “upper surface” is a “veiled surface” which perhaps has some opacity but is also transparent. In her illustrations of how these are layered (Fig. 2), the opacity is created through uneven curves of the under surface. While this might appear as only a technical description of an object, I read it as part of her poetic thinking and in relationship to her poetry. The idea of surfaces and reflections in the

Chatoyant resembles the lunar as reflection and looking in *Lunar Baedeker*. What would language look like that functioned like a “shifting glow of silvery, white or coloured metallic high lights shining through a slightly veiled surface”? It seems such a language would change how we use description and representation, because the seeming stability we believed true in concepts would no longer be stable.

In relation to Swensen’s idea of the fold that multiplies surface, Loy’s “shifting glow” is created by the “upper and under surface” whose folds or unevenness alter the reflective quality of the light. While the “fold” in Cendrars and Delaunay’s work in *La Prose* actually manifests in the material qualities of the text itself, the equivalent of the “fold” in Loy lies in the idea of reflection and how color and light are mirrored between poems. The density and “color” of Loy’s language, as well as the sound, links words while she simultaneously pairs contradictory meanings and images. The total summation of an idea, we cannot quite pin down in her poems because her figures and images lie between the dichotomy of binary thought.

### **Looking at Language: Reflection and Abstraction**

As mentioned earlier, the lesser known colloquial meaning of “lunar” connects to looking. Numerous critics suggest Loy is interested in satirical critique, but one wonders also if there might be more at work in Loy’s poetry than just satire alone. The emphasis on death and the underworld seems to make the idea of satire a plausible explanation, but I still believe Loy’s use of contradiction, repetitive sound, and blending of the modern with the mythological (perhaps another form of contradiction), complicates her work, and makes possible a critique of how traditions and

mythologies are constructed in language. While Stein employs unusual syntax, and Cendrars experiments with abstraction of color and the object, Loy engages in the density and obscurity of her language. Lein concludes her essay writing that,

Loy achieves her poetics of luminous opacity not only through imagery and diction, but also by recasting syntax, lineation, and material printing. Much of the perceived opacity of her writing is due to her characteristic use of caesuras and line breaks in place of standard punctuation and rhetorical syntax, and to her style of dropping out or substituting expected pronouns and prepositions. (627)

The result can be confusion over which words function as subject and object, and how far the action of a verb extends. Lien writes that like electrical currents, her lines of meaning routinely jump gaps and sometimes risk short-circuiting the sense of the stanza altogether (627). The last sentence here could just as well be applied to the work of Cendrars in *La Prose* discussed in Chapter Three. Lein's final assessment of Loy's style is that it is "thrilling" and "provocative." It is here that I would like to pick up and suggest a more critical thread in conjunction to the function of Loy's language.

Loy's "opacity" as Lien calls it, or density as I would call it, is not just a poetic "trick," but achieves a different register of language because of its layers and how those surfaces relate to an idea of perception as multiplicity. In Loy's description, the Chatoyant is dependent on "Alternated cloudy and transparent areas in solid plastics or a) glass of uniform thickness. b) Intermittent clouded and brilliant areas on the surface of the metallic layer" (2). Thinking of Loy's poetry as "opaque," the reference to "alternated" or "intermittent" use of cloudy and transparent," and "clouded and

brilliant” gives us a point to revise the idea of opacity here. Lein in her comparison of Loy’s lampshades suggests that “Just as [Loy’s] lampshades enfold, direct, and decorate the radiance of electric light, her poetics of luminous opacity appropriates, filters, and shapes the brilliance of the avant-garde according to her unique and expressive need and desire” (618). The idea of opacity and the lampshade, I think, is more than just a shaping device. The problem with this reading is that it reduces Loy’s work to something that only reshapes an idea already extant rather than see Loy as actually doing something more radical and experimental.

As Perloff suggests in her virtuosic essay, “English as a ‘Second Language: Mina Loy’s ‘Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose,’” “Loy’s language is anything but direct, colloquial, or idiomatic—what Eliot called the ‘return to common speech’ (‘Music’ 23), or Ezra Pound, “Direct treatment of the thing” (‘A Retrospect’ 5) (133). With Eliot and Pound both clear representatives of patriarchy in the poetry world, and Loy as author of the “Feminist Manifesto” in 1914, it is no wonder that Loy would develop and alternative poetics. Perloff further explains that “Loy’s stanzas are intentionally ungainly, syllable and stress count, line length, spacing, and stanza length being much more variable than [W.C.] Williams” (136). Perloff connects Loy’s poetics not to a method of free verse, but to a Tudor practice of “skeletonics” that employs a particular use of short meter and monorhyme (136). It is the shortness and monorhyme I am interested in. Loy has sometimes been criticized for the seeming simplicity of her poetics as in Fleur Adcock’s introduction to *The Farber Book of Twentieth Century Women’s Poetry*:

Mina Loy, a pioneer of international Modernism, was praised by Eliot and Pound, but these and her more recent advocates have failed to persuade me that her ‘poetry of ideas and wordplay’ retains much more than curiosity value; her impulse to experiment was admirable in itself, but the results now look almost as quaint and over written as [Vita] Sackville-West’s Miltonic or Virgilian imitations. (quoted in Parmar, 62)

Sandeep Parmar in *Reading Mina Loy’s Autobiographies: Myth of the Modern Woman (Historicizing Modernism)* finds Adcock’s criticism of Loy unfounded, and instead focuses on the actual complexity of Loy in comparison to Sackville-West’s more traditional use of forms. The seeming simplicity, with which not all critics agree, suggests something in Loy’s work that makes it seem perhaps simple, and one must also remember the criticism with which Stein’s work was met. I think it is in these mis-readings that the complexity of the poetics is revealed.

Perloff analyzes the specifics of Mina Loy’s verse and the effect it has in her work. Perloff observes that Loy’s stanzas in “Anglo-Mongrels” are not so much grounded in image as they are in sound texture that she traces to “monorhyme” called “leashes.” Perloff writes, “In Loy’s version, these ‘leashes’ often come within lines, as in ‘arid gravid,’ ‘senile juvenile,’ or ‘Occident ox.’ What holds these stanzas together is not a larger rhythmic contour or consistent image pattern as in *Spring and All*, but a network of elaborate rhyming, chiming, chanting, and punning” (137). Perloff takes what seems more “abstract” in Loy and argues that, “Loy’s very diction and syntax constitute a sharp critique of Marinetti’s famed *parole in libertà*” (137). Perloff

explains how Marinetti emphasizes the idea of the noun and the sharpness of image above all else, and it is against the concrete and imagistic that Loy is working:

Loy turns this aesthetic on its head. Her nouns are abstract, not concrete—intellect, ancestors, prodigies, asylum, and they are modified by adjectives that often overwhelm (and even contradict) . . . . Not in *parole in libertà* but in conceptual words and phrases (whatever part of speech); not lyric sequences of analogies but schematics, parabolic, mock-epic narrative.  
(138)

The nuances of Loy's nouns and adjectives that Perloff notices creates the sense of what I am calling the density of language in Loy's work. The idea of "contradiction" that Perloff points out is also relevant to *Lunar Baedeker* and occurs throughout the poem from the opening line of a "silver Lucifer" to "posthumous parvenues" to "mercurial doomsday," "Odious oasis" "white-light district," and "lunar lust." These pairings not only rely on conceptual contradiction, but also heavily rely on assonance and consonance from the repetition of the sibilant "s" of silver Lucifer to the plosive "p" of posthumous parvenues to the liquid "l" and "oo" sound of "lunar lusts," and demonstrate another instance of the "skeletal leashes" Perloff finds in "Anglo-Mongrels." Sound in the above example creates a parallel where idea or image clashes in a kind of paradox simultaneously. Similar to Stein who relies heavily on contradiction in much of *Tender Buttons* to influence the reader to rethink *how* we frame our world in language, Loy in *Lunar Baedeker* encourages a reevaluation of concepts (Lucifer, parvenues, red-light district, and lunar chastity) through contradiction and inversion that creates a "guidebook" that does not "tell us where to

go” but casts things in a different “light” to reevaluate where we have been. (Stein also eschewed nouns in preference for prepositions and articles as discussed in Chapter Two.) Loy creates critique as a “reflective” quality within the poetics of the poem, not because it is reflection as contemplation of thought or ideas in the mind (as so many critics of *Lunar Baedeker* claim), but reflection through the difficult surfaces of language that Loy highlights (particularly the emphasis on sound, archaic words, and color and light).

### **Rereading “Love Songs”**

The multiplicity of surfaces, perhaps because of “layering” opposites, makes possible critique because it changes the seeming depth of the object. With consideration to the idea of “layering surfaces” and drawing on reflection and color, I would then like to turn to how the poems in the separate sections of *Lunar Baedeker* also provide a kind of “upper and under surface” that must be read through each other, rather than simply sequentially. Keeping in mind “Lunar Baedeker” as the opening poem, how does one then read “Love Songs” as another layer to *Lunar Baedeker* as a whole that changes the collection’s opacity and luminescence?

Numerous scholars have written on the longer 1917 version of “Love Songs to Johannes”, and how Loy’s “Pig cupid his rosy snout / Rooting erotic garbage” (3-4) is a satirical critique of traditional notions of love and Eros tied to the image of Cupid.<sup>34</sup> The latter 1923 version retitled “Love Songs” is mostly dismissed as an

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34 For most relevant discussions see, Maeera Shriber, “‘Love is a Lyric / of Bodies’: Negative Aesthetics of Mina Loy’s *Love Songs to Joannes*,” Peter Quartermain, “‘The Tattle of Tougueplay’: Mina Loy’s *Love Songs*,” Rachel Blau DuPlessis, “‘Seismic Orgasm’: Sexual Intercourse and Narrative Meaning in Mina Loy,” Jeffery Twitchell-Waas, “‘Little Lusts and Lucidities’: Reading Mina Loy’s

inferior revision of the poem shortened to 13 sections instead of 34 sections. However, no Loy scholars have closely looked at the 1923 version in conjunction with the opening poem, “Lunar Baedeker.” Reading “Lunar Baedeker,” however, like an “upper surface” to the “under surface” of “Love Songs,” we can see that “Love Songs” is no longer the personal commentary so many critics suggest it is, but is the colored reflective layer seen through the upper surface of the world depicted in “Lunar Baedeker.” The critique of love and the sexual relationship that is often written about remains within the shorter version of “Love Songs”; however, what critics note as the removal of the more explicit and personal experience in the 1923 version is a way of highlighting the effects of experience versus linear narrative and remembrance of an event.

In the first section following the oft quoted opening 7 lines, we read, “I would an eye in a Bengal light / Eternity in a sky-rocket / constellations in an ocean” (8-10). We immediately notice the pun of “I” with “eye” that is also sonically linked to “sky” as well. Again Loy uses the compact chains of sound that Perloff initially writes about. The “I” with the “eye” is also oddly linked by space in the middle of the line. “I would an eye” syntactically and logically makes little “sense,” and we are forced to read for other connections. Light also plays prominently in these lines through the use of light, sky-rocket, and constellations. But these lines also speak to Loy’s engagement of contradictory pairings. The “eye in a Bengal light” raises the questions of what is seen and what is perceived. A “Bengal light” is a blue flare or firework often used for signaling (OED). However, it could be an exoticization, playing off the “oxidized

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*Love Songs,*” Virginia Kouidis, *Mina Loy: American Modernist Poet*, and Carolyn Burke, *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy*.

Orient” and “onyx-eyed Odalisques” we saw in “Lunar Baedeker,” but it might also invoke something like the “chatoyancy” of the tiger’s eye stone seen in Loy’s invention. “A sky-rocket” would obviously be like a firework and inevitably is something short-lived, but Loy pairs it with “Eternity.” Constellations that should appear in the sky above us, here illogically appear in “an ocean.” That is unless what we are seeing in the ocean is a reflection of the sky and not the sky itself. At the section break we are told, “These are suspect places” (13), and this line stands alone from the other stanzas, leaving a reader to wonder if this statement is the narrator’s own view or that of the culture at large.

Read as the latter, the preceding five lines could serve as commentary on the first seven lines. If the first seven lines are the shame of love revealed for its absurdity, as most critics suggest, the following five lines seem the desire for a shift in perspective or a different way of seeing experience, the desire for a different kind of eye, “an eye in a Bengal light.” Because linking of contradiction and repetitive sound follows the line of the “I” and the “eye,” the use of sound and contradiction are then linked to this change in perspective or perception. Section I of “Love Songs” concludes, “I must live in my lantern / Trimming subliminal flicker / Virginal to the bellows / of experience / Colored glass” (14-18). To live in her lantern seems a kind of containment when read against experience that is a “sky-rocket.” “Trimming subliminal flicker” would be to trim the wick of a candle to lessen the flame. Subliminal of course pertains to the unconscious or subconscious, but it also carries with it sonically the association of the sublime. The sublime perhaps submerged or contained becomes the subliminal. Loy writes in her 1914 “Aphorisms

on Futurism” that one should “LOVE the hideous in order to find the sublime core of it” (149). The notion of the sublime in the hideous also provides further insight to Loy’s use of contradiction because it is reframing or re-seeing what is dismissed that becomes a necessity recognizing the world outside of conceptual norms. “Virginal” could read as an adjective that modifies “flicker” but it could also be an adverb for “trimming,” i.e. trimming the dangerous flame *to be* virginal. A third reading could be that the flame *is* virginal to the bellows of experience, but the space between “virginal” and “to the bellows” opens a space of ambiguity as to what “virginal” modifies in the sentence. The position and spacing around color is particularly significant in these lines because “colored glass” stands separate as its own entity removed visually from other modifying phrases on page: to the bellows of experience / Colored glass” (17-18).

Experience is the bellows that fan the flame that must be trimmed, and it is experience itself that is colored. Glass also suggests transparency. Not only is experience multi-colored but it is perhaps something that comes to be seen through, or it might also be a surface that is colored. Glass suggests a multiplicity of surface and not depth, and the ability to both see through and also to reflect. If we draw a parallel between the layered color and wax surfaces of the Chatoyant to the movement of the poem, the “experience” of “Love Songs” is not just the narration of Loy’s own personal history, but the idea that experience is more an ever changing surface that narrative contains and dulls though memory that names.

In the paradox of contradiction and in the reworking of sound, the indefinable “color” of experience comes to the surface of the poem. Looking back at “Lunar

Baedecker,” we then see that the under-world like qualities of the poem perhaps connect to a complex way of reading the underside of life as a colored surface that is not immediately perceptible or namable. To begin a poetry book with the invocation of death seems gloomy, but if read through the surface of language rather than for literal meaning, this invocation is instead transformative and challenges us and how we read the surface of the text.

The idea of transforming what we think we perceive in light of the ineffable color of experience also helps explain Loy’s edits to the 1923 version from her original 1917 version. Carolyn Burke has suggested that Loy in the 1923 version of “Love Songs” wanted to edit out some of the more sexually explicit moments of the poem that caused controversy at its original time of publication in 1917. Indeed, the “skin-sack / In which a wanton duality / Packed / All the completion of my infructuous impulses” (19-22) has been excised from the later version in 1923. Instead, Loy takes section 11 from the 1917 version and makes it the second section of the 1923 version so it reads,

At your mercy

Our Universe

Is only

A colorless onion

you derobe

sheath by sheath

Remaining

a disheartening odour

about your nervy hands. (19-27)

While I agree with Burke that this editorial change shifts the poem away from its more sexually explicit lines, I think the pairing of “colored glass” against “colorless onion” addresses experience, even sexual experience, and alters the registers of perception in the poem. The experience itself cannot be “described” and is “colorless.” With a pun on “union” and “onion,”<sup>35</sup> the act described perhaps becomes only an ironic object that is reduced to its anagram. If color and light are part of the infrastructure of a facet of language that seeks, not to capture experience in description, but highlights its ineffability and changeability through the idea of brief illumination and shifting color, the colorless onion is a world denied of its perceptual complexity. To derobe contains a kind of sexual implication, but what is seemingly a kind of revealing or unraveling reveals very little. The derobing here is also the removal of surfaces “sheath by sheath” as if to find something beneath. It is this definitive search that leads to what is colorless. This gesture, presumably, by a male or patriarchal figure speaks to the inequality of what is acceptable for “nervy hands” while the narrator, presumably feminine, is restricted to “trimming subliminal flicker virginal.”

Between things, on the B side of the dark that the changing reflection of light becomes visible. Early in her “Aphorisms on Futurism,” Loy writes, “BUT the Future is only dark from outside. *Leap* into it—and it EXPLODES with *light*” (149). The contrast of light and dark is not a depth, but a shift in perspective from where one stands. By the end of the essay, Loy concludes, “To your blushing we shout the obscenities, we scream the blasphemies, that you, being weak, whisper alone in the dark. // THEY are empty except of your shame. // AND so these sounds shall dissolve

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35 Thank you to Dr. Mary Cappello who noticed this pun.

back to their innate senselessness. // THUS shall evolve the language of the future” (152). What is contended as obscene or forbidden is only viewed from a particular perspective. (There is something of an echo here of William Blake’s Proverbs of Hell in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.)

The idea that sounds shall dissolve back into their innate senselessness” evokes an idea of language itself and sound. What is said that is obscene is only so because of how it is *heard*. It is what the reader or listener already brings to language that begets the “obscene.” The reference of sound also is particularly germane when considering Loy’s use of sound and how it destabilizes meaning in her poetry. In her “Aphorisms,” she emphasizes, “THUS shall evolve the language of the Future” (153). It is the evolution of language that will make it “new” to borrow from Ezra Pound. But language can only evolve with a change in what is heard. The use of alliteration in Loy and her blending and bending of contradictory meanings give us a kind of new language that does not rewrite the past, but allows us to leap into the light of the future as she says in her “Aphorisms on Futurism.” So, too, in “Lunar Baedeker,” death imagery cannot be reduced to negativity but aligned with something transformative. Concepts must be reexamined because notions like “Immortality” / mildews . . . / in museums of the moon” (44-46), and the stable use of description and language is a paltry thing that pales in comparison to the colors of experience: “Pocked with personification / the fossil virgin of the skies / waxes and wanes -- -- -- --” (49-51).

Loy’s significance lies in how her *Lunar Baedeker* may be read as a kind of text that jumps between experiences of both past and present. The use of color and light in Loy’s poetry presents the reader with a simultaneity of experience in both past

and present that causes one to read it, as through a piece of colored glass, in a different light. What seems the darkness of a “decadent” world can be transformed when “illuminated” with a different kind of light, not the light of reason and the sun, but the lunar reflection of the moon. Color is not employed for its symbolic or emotive value, but as a link between the temporal worlds of the poems that reflect different moments of experience off of each other. While Loy scholarship primarily tends to focus on her feminism and the critique of sexuality as the significant focus of her work, I emphasize how, through her unusual use of vocabulary, reflection and color, and sonic patterning, Loy exhibits another example of the color of grammar. The idea of the color of grammar is not one particular rule or use of language, but the place and moment in a text where form, structure, and concrete ideas break down.

We think of color as primary color and as inherent in the visible world, but it is these inconsistencies in our grammar and perception that is the color of grammar in the text. The particular and often strange use of color (and for Loy light) in avant-garde poetry makes the inconsistencies recognizable as a surface as opposed to the idea of depth or meaning behind something because they challenge our very notion of color concepts. As illustrated through the example of Wittgenstein in his *Remarks on Color* throughout, the stability of color concepts is an illusion because of our diverse uses of color. There is no one logical color concept. Beyond saying something only about color or color theory, Wittgenstein’s examples more importantly illustrate how our grammar constructs the world we think we see. The critique of color is a way to approach language itself, and what language makes and what language also potentially blinds us from seeing. The avant-garde’s unconventional practice of color reveals the

constructedness of form and concepts through an unraveling that becomes a poetics, a way of calling things into being not through naming, but by revealing the framework of the seeming fixity of the noun and the name.

## APPENDIX



Fig. 1 Blaise Cendrars and Sonia Delaunay, *La Prose de Transsibérien* (1913), Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.



Fig. 2 Blaise Cendrars and Sonia Delaunay, *La Prose de Transsibérien* (1913), detail, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.



Fig. 3 Blaise Cendrars and Sonia Delaunay, *La Prose de Transsibérien* (1913), detail, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.



Fig. 4 Blaise Cendrars and Sonia Delaunay, *La Prose de Transsibérien* (1913), detail, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

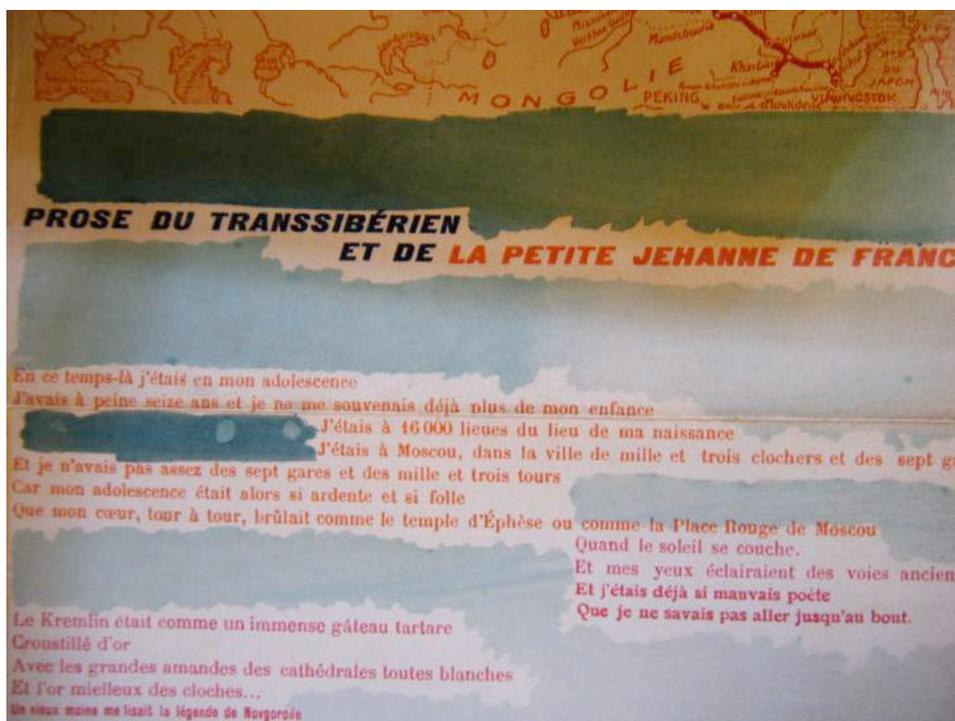


Fig. 5 Blaise Cendrars and Sonia Delaunay, *La Prose de Transsibérien* (1913), detail, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

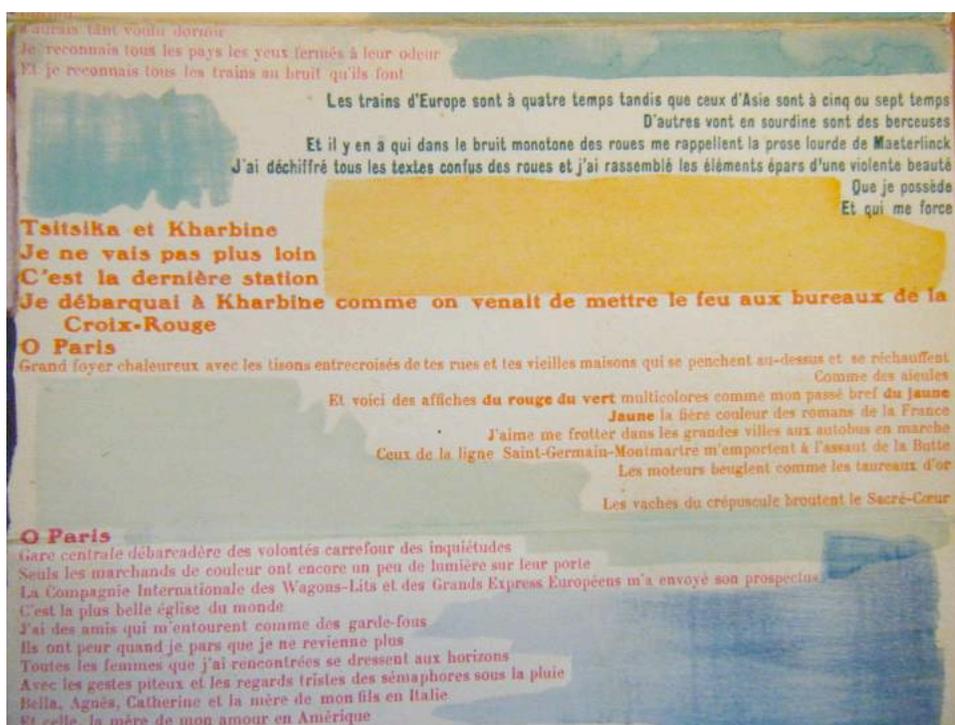


Fig. 6 Blaise Cendrars and Sonia Delaunay, *La Prose de Transsibérien* (1913), detail, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

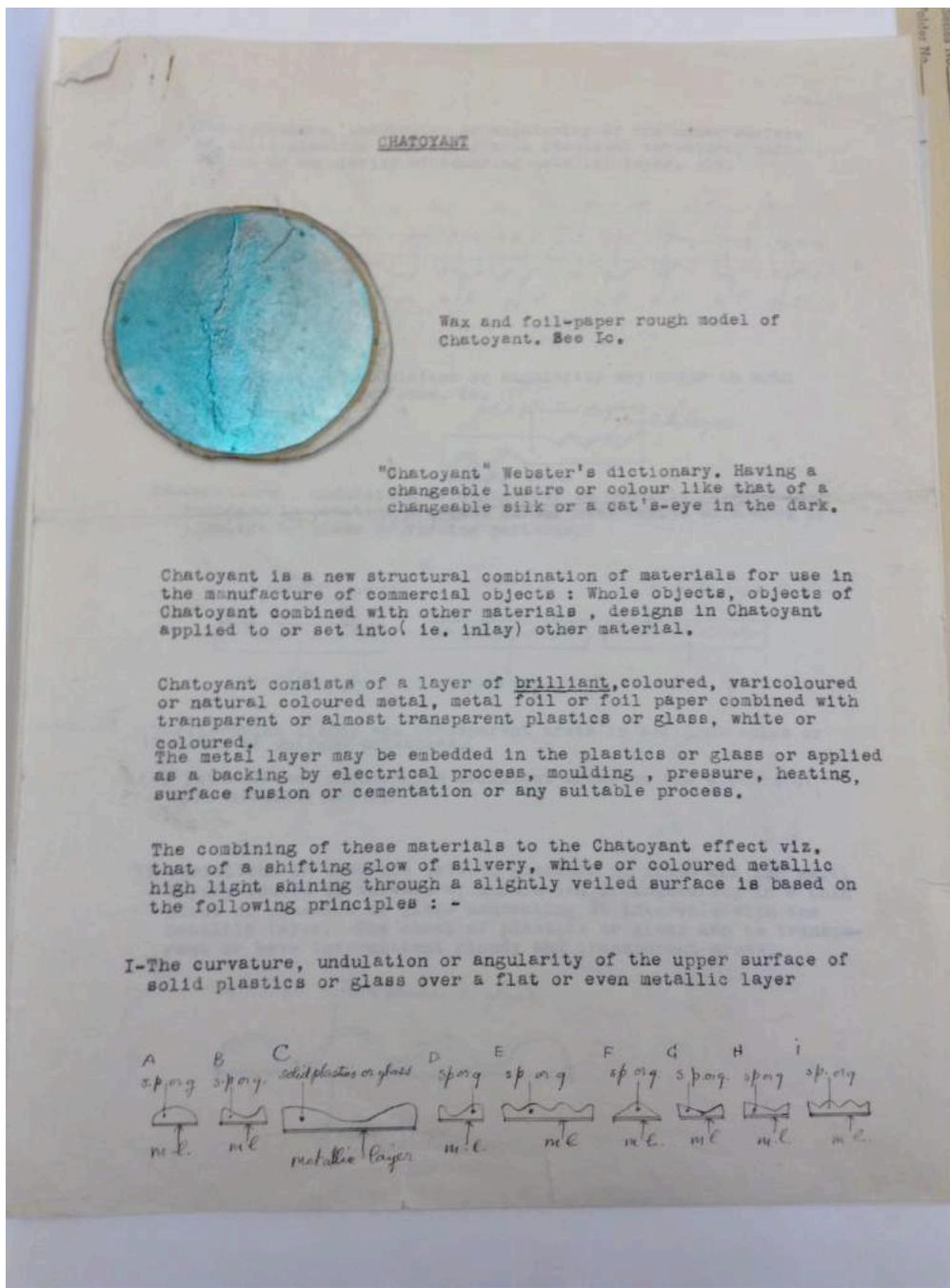


Fig. 7 Mina Loy, "Chatoyant" (1946-48), Folder 186, YCAL MSS 6, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

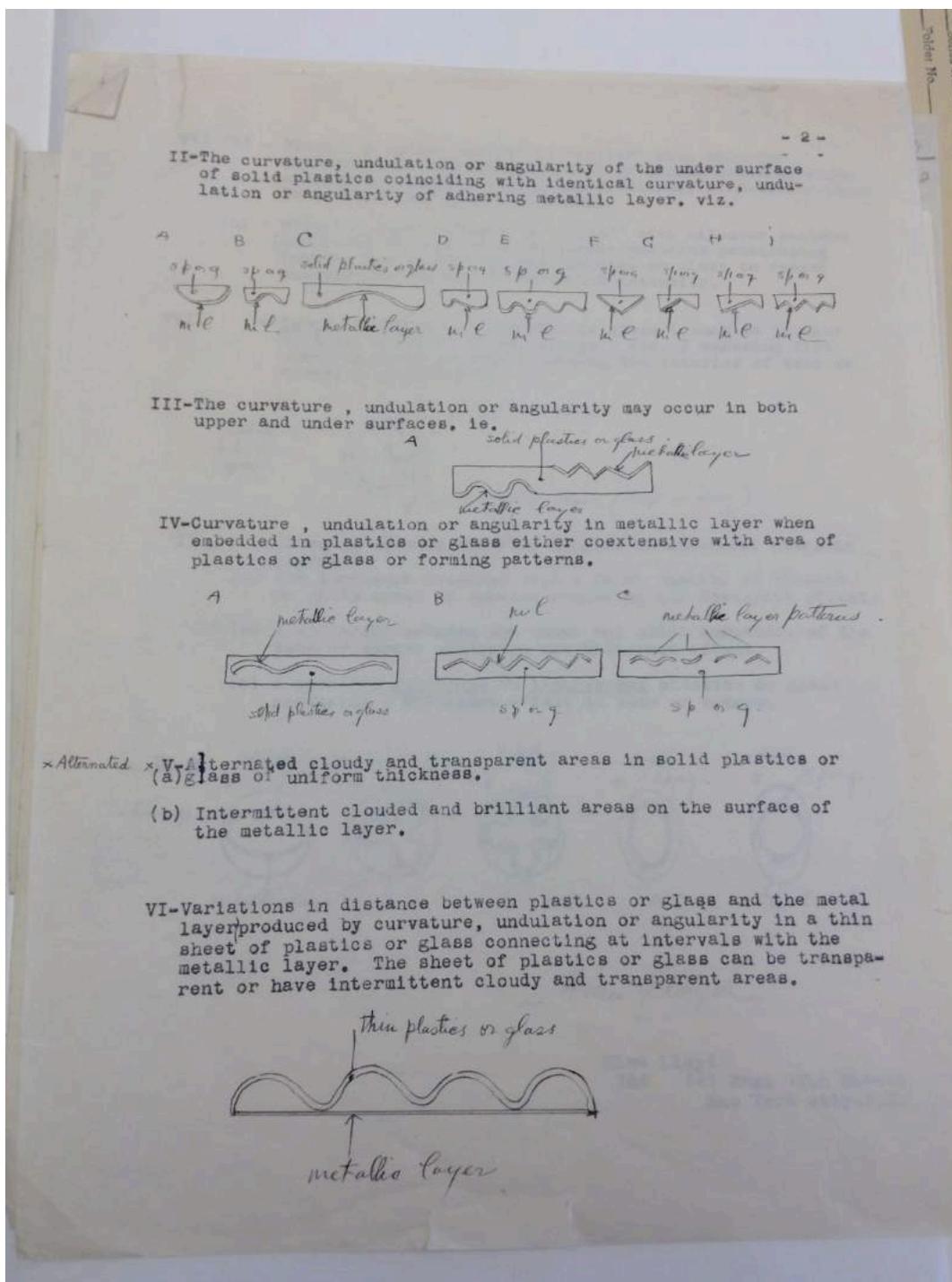


Fig. 8 Mina Loy, "Chatoyant" (1946-48), Folder 186, YCAL MSS 6, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

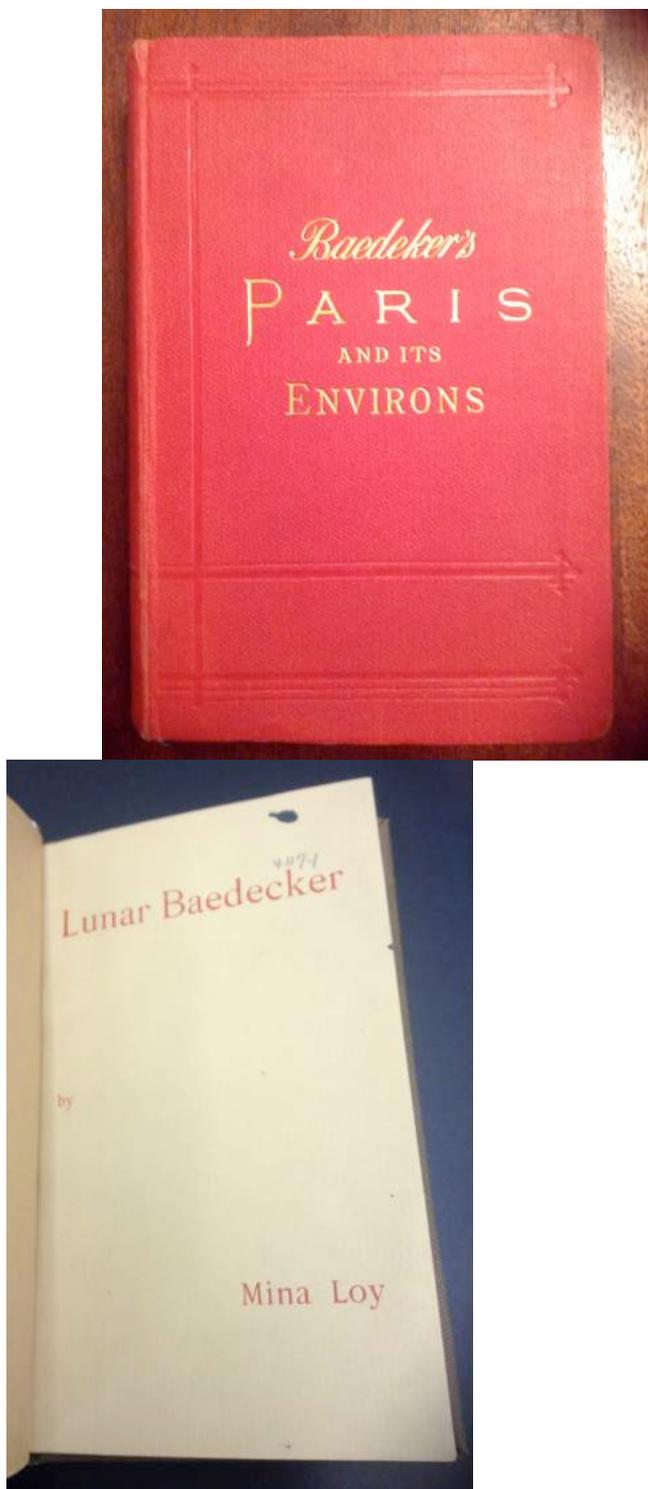


Fig. 9 Karl Baedeker, *Baedeker's Paris and Its Environs*, Leipzig: Karl Baedeker, Pub. (1910). Mina Loy, *Lunar Baedeker*, Paris: Contact Publishing. (1923), John Hay Library, Brown University.

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