

Paul Claudel and Guillaume Apollinaire as Visual Poets: *Idéogrammes occidentaux* and *Calligrammes*

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Paul Claudel and Guillaume Apollinaire both experimented with visual forms in an effort to incorporate a more synthetic and immediate experience into their poetry. The letters of the *Idéogramme* and the shapes of the *Calligramme* do not reproduce reality as much as they translate the fundamental images and world-view of the authors into the visual mode. In both cases the linearity of writing symbolizes movement and time while the larger unit, word or sentence-shape, imposes a more immobile, spatial form upon this movement. For both authors, in spite of differences, this synthetic aspect of visual logic expresses the structure of the real world, which is a dynamic and simultaneous interaction of multiple phenomena, yet is in constant evolution.

The two French poets Paul Claudel and Guillaume Apollinaire both composed their major works during the same period: the first two decades of this century. Yet they have very rarely been compared because of their apparently profound differences in temperament and outlook. Apollinaire is known as an aggressive modernist, Claudel as an equally aggressive conservative. In reality, however, the two authors share some common preoccupations and heritage which are hidden beneath their dissimilarity of temperament. Both, in fact, were very much interested in visual poetry; their works *Idéogrammes occidentaux* and *Calligrammes* (originally entitled *Idéogrammes lyriques*) show them to be heirs not only of the long tradition of visual poetry originating with the Greeks but also of its more recent partisans, notably Stéphane Mallarmé and his *Un Coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard*.¹ This

1. David W. Seaman, "The Development of Visual Poetry in France," *Visible Language*, VI, 1 (Winter 1972), 20. For a discussion and reproduction of *Un Coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard*, see Gerald L. Bruns, "Mallarmé: The Transcendence of Language and the Aesthetics of the Book," *The Journal of Typographic Research* (now *Visible Language*), III, 3 (July 1969), 219-40.

poem was important because it showed that typography could be a visible metaphor for a new poetic syntax, liberated from the temporal succession of language which had, until now, imprisoned poetry in its mechanical, grammatical order. Implicit in this experiment was the notion that the essence of poetry itself is in fact spatial and visual, because its structure is characterized by an internal system of relationships between words created by the poet himself, a system which immobilizes the constant movement of ordinary language and turns the act of reading back upon itself. Thus, for Claudel, “Le vers est une ligne qui s’arrête, non parce qu’elle est arrivée à une frontière matérielle et que l’espace lui manque, mais parce que son chiffre intérieur est accompli et que sa vertu est consommée.”² Visual and spatial representation, capable of expressing this interaction of words simultaneously, is thus a natural means of exploiting the synthetic, non-logical potential inherent in all poetry.

Both Claudel and Apollinaire propose to do this by creating “written signs of an idea,” or “idéogrammes,” although both seem to have interpreted this as “signs of specific objects.” They therefore seek a formula which will enable writing to express an object through its specifically pictural and visual attributes rather than through the process of abstraction which is the normal act of reading. However, they must first overcome the obstacle posed by typography itself, which is necessarily rigid and impersonal and allows for little intervention without losing its intelligibility as a system. Claudel deals with this problem by investing the fixed letters of the alphabet with symbolic significance. His “idéogramme” is a written word whose letters resemble aspects of the object it designates, as in the word “faux” or scythe: “f est le manche et la poignée de la faux, a la place qu’on vient de faucher et l’on voit la lame qui s’éloigne, u est l’herbe, x tout ce qui est section, la lame avide pour couper qui ouvre de toutes parts ses mâchoires.” “Corps,” or body, is described as follows: “c est la

2. Paul Claudel, *La Philosophie du livre*, in *Oeuvres en Prose*, éd. Petit et Galpérine (Paris: Gallimard, La Pléiade, 1965), p. 77. Translation: “A verse is a line which stops, not because it has arrived at a material boundary and runs out of space, but because its interior number has been accomplished and its virtue consummated.”

bouche qui respire et qui avale, o tous les organes ronds, r les liquides qui montent et qui descendent, p le corps proprement dit avec la tête (ou les bras), s tout le tuyautage, ou le souffle.” And Claudel sees in the word “oie,” or goose, “o la mare ou le corps du volatile; i sa langue d’où sort le cri, e à la fois l’oeil, la tête et le bec ouvert.”³ The plastic shape and direction of the lines which make up each letter are imagined to resemble components of the total concept. Apollinaire, on the other hand, intervenes on a level which gives him greater freedom: the patterns among whole words. His “calligramme” is a poem whose parts are organized in the form of objects which play a role in the meaning of the poem. In “Coeur, Couronne et Miroir,” for example, each object is figured by the shape of the sentence which also describes it poetically: “Mon coeur pareil à une flamme renversée” forms a heart shape (Fig. 1; see also Figs. 2 and 3).⁴ Thus both poets seem to be using writing as visual representation, to create a parallel between the linguistic image of an object and the real qualities of this object.

Most specialists in the field would be quick to object to this proposal, of course, since it is a generally accepted doctrine of post-Saussurian linguistics that there can exist no such simple resemblance. The connection between word and thing is an arbitrary one created by convention and system.⁵ The two poets were aware of this problem, however: in reality, the relationship

3. Claudel, *Idéogrammes occidentaux*, in *Oeuvres en Prose*, pp. 83-6. “f is the handle and the grip of the scythe, a the spot that has just been cut and one can see the blade moving away, u is the grass, x everything which is division, the blade avid for cutting which opens out its jaws in all directions. . . . c is the mouth which breathes and swallows, o all the round organs, r the liquids which rise and fall, p the body properly speaking with the head (or the arms), s all the pipelike forms, or the breath. . . . o the pond or the body of the fowl; i its tongue from which comes its cry, e the eye, the head the opened beak all at the same time.”

4. Guillaume Apollinaire, *Calligrammes*, in *Oeuvres poétiques*, éd. Adéma et Décaudin (Paris: Gallimard, La Pléiade, 1956), p. 197. Figure 1: “Heart, Crown and Mirror: My heart like an upside-down flame. . . . In this mirror I am enclosed living and real as one imagines the angels and not in the way of reflections. . . . The kings who die turn by turn are reborn in the hearts of poets.” Figure 2: p. 170; Figure 3: p. 213.

5. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale*, éd. De Mauro (Paris: Payot, 1972), p. ix.

V
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 LA
 CI MAISON
 Où NAISSENT
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 TOI LES
 ET LES DIVINITÉS

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 ARBRISSEAU
 QUI SE PRÉPARE
 A FRUCTIFIER
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 UN CIGARE a

Figure 3. "The Stabbed Dove and the Fountain (La Colombe Poignardée et le Jet d'Eau)." Apollinaire, *Calligrammes*.

Douces figures poi^{gnardées}
 MIA Chères lèvres fleuries
 YETTE MAREYE
 ANNIE et toi LORIE
 où MARIE
 vous êtes-
 jeunes filles
 MAIS
 près d'un
 jet d'eau qui
 pleure et qui prie
 cette colombe s'extasie

Tous les souvenirs de naité Billy Dalize
 O mes amis partis en guerre? Où sont Raynal
 Jaillissent vers le firmament Où sont les noms se mélancolisent
 Et vos regards en l'eau dormante Dont les pas dans une église
 Meurent mélancolique ment Où est Cremnitz qui s'engagea
 Où sont-ils Braque et Max Jacob? Où est-ils morts déjà
 Dernier aux yeux gris comme la bête De souvenirs mon âme est pleine
 Le jet d'eau pleure sur ma peine

CEUX QUI SONT PARTIS A LA GUERRE AU NORD SE BATTENT MAINTENANT
 Le soir tombe O sanglante mer
 Jardins où saigne abondamment le laurier rose fleur guerrière

between the visual form and the linguistic notion is in both cases more complex than it first appears. Apollinaire later changed his title to *Calligrammes*, meaning “beautiful” written objects, thus implying that the esthetic function of his visual forms was more important than the expressive function. His object-poems, on one level, are games which seem to juxtapose the visual and semantic modes of communication rather than seeking to have them coincide. There is a certain redundancy to the process, since each mode is merely reinforcing a meaning which was already clear and complete in the other mode. The parallel, for example, between the poetic idea of the heart and the picture, in the poem already quoted, seems so clear and simple as to be almost superfluous. This redundancy in some ways strengthens the seemingly arbitrary character of the relationship between the linguistic notion and the visible shape in that it creates a sense of irony.

Gentle faces st ^a ^b ^e ^d **D** ear flowered lips
 MIA MAREYE
 YETTE and you
 ANNIE MARIE
 where are
 you oh
 young girls
 BUT
 near a
 fountain that
 weeps and prays
 this dove is enraptured

All memories of long ago Billy Dalize
 Oh my friends who have gone to war Where are you now
 Spring upward toward the skies Like footstools in a cathedral
 And in stagnant pools your names melancholize
 With melancholy names in a cathedral
 Where have you and Max Jacob gone Perhaps already dead
 Derain with eyes as greys dawn My soul is full of memories
 Fountain weep for my sorrow

THOSE WHO LEFT FOR THE WAR IN THE NORTH ARE FIGHTING NOW
 Evening falls **O** bloody sea
 Gardens where rose-laurel warlike flower bleeds in abundance

However, Apollinaire's choice of specific objects does play a role in the total impression and the profound poetic intention of the *Calligramme*, but this role must be understood in terms of structure rather than reference to reality. The isolation of a specific object, both visually and mentally, tends to immobilize it and thus to withdraw it from the ceaseless flux of time which haunted Apollinaire.⁶ In this sense, the representation of objects in the *Calligrammes* is a part of their esthetic dimension, because immobility and synthetic structure can be seen as aspects of specifically poetic form, as opposed to the movement of prose.

For Claudel's *Idéogramme*, on the other hand, the resemblance between writing and meaning is essential: literature and language must reflect the real world, since it was created by God. However, Claudel acknowledges at the same time that this principle is scientifically untenable. He succeeds in overcoming this seeming contradiction by a compromise: the resemblance is a potential rather than a real one—it resides in the human psyche, and perhaps the unconscious—but the laws which govern this human psyche themselves correspond to the divine law which governs the world. The writer or reader, in the act of following the physical movement of the lines across the page, will invest them with a symbolic emotional meaning which Claudel calls a "geste." And this active symbolic value corresponds to the dynamic "geste" by which real things create and maintain themselves in Claudel's world-view. As he explains in his *Art poétique*, "Tout mot est l'expression d'un état psychologique procuré par l'attention à un objet extérieur. C'est un geste qui peut se décomposer en ses éléments ou lettres," and elsewhere, "Ce qui subsiste d'une chose dans ce signe qu'est d'elle un mot, c'est seulement son *sens*, son intention, ce qu'elle veut dire et que nous disons à sa place."⁷ If one studies his *Idéogrammes* closely, one notices that the same

6. Philippe Renaud, *Lecture d'Apollinaire* (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1969), p. 378.

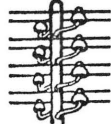
7. Claudel, *Art poétique*, in *Oeuvre poétique*, ed. Petit (Paris: Gallimard, La Pléiade, 1967), pp. 195, 178-9. "Every word is the expression of a psychological state obtained by attention to an external object. It is a gesture which can be broken down into its elements or letters. . . . What is left of a thing in that sign of it which is a word, is only its *meaning*, its intention, what it means to say and (what) we say in its place."

letters change in value from one word to the other. These lines or letters are “éléments mécaniques,” whose visual symbolic value depends on the total meaning conferred on the word by the mind of the author. When the word “faux” mentioned above becomes the adjective “false,” the same letters acquire a different meaning: “Un véritable rébus mathématique. F est l’unité branlante et coupée par le milieu, a l’unité à qui le zéro est amalgamé, u deux unités égales et équivalentes, x l’unité définitivement détruite par l’unité, l’inconnu, le carrefour, l’inextricable.”⁸ Thus, as in the case of Apollinaire, it is the structure of writing rather than the objects it represents which interests Claudel: this structure depends on the simultaneous interaction of the different “gestes,” which are symbols of the structure of reality.

Beneath their variability, however, the lines or “gestes” retain a minimum, fundamental symbolism from one word to the other. This symbolism is mostly based on abstract principles and relationships: in “faux” or false, quoted above, the concept of “l’unité”; in “âme,” or soul, that of “l’ouverture”: “a est à la fois ouverture et désir, réunion de l’homme et de la femme, ce qui exhale et inhale le souffle, m est la personne entre deux parois, e l’être.” In “sur,” (on) it is “l’action parallèle”: “s la compression, u l’action parallèle de haut en bas dont témoigne la boucle inférieure, r la ligne de force verticale avec l’indice en haut comme en chinois”; and in “toit” (roof) “la conservation et la force” which for Claudel are represented by the circle, symbol of the feminine principle, and the vertical line or masculine: “N’avons-nous pas là une représentation complète de la maison à laquelle ne manquent même pas les deux cheminées? O est la femme et I l’homme, caractérisés par leurs différences essentielles: la conservation et la force; le point de l’i est la fumée du foyer ou, si vous aimez mieux, l’esprit enclos et la vie intime de l’ensemble.” Among the most interesting is the S-shape, often symbol of a twisting descent into mysterious depths, as in “Soi” (oneself):

8. “A true mathematical rebus. F is the unit tottering and cut through the middle, a the unit to which zero is amalgamated, u two equal and equivalent units, x the unit definitively destroyed by the unit, the unknown, the crossroads, the inextricable” (p. 85).

A^{DIEU} AMOUR ^{NUAGE} QUI
 FUIS REFAIS LE VOYAGE DE DANTE
 ET N'A PAS CHU ^{PLUIE} FÉCON



OU VA DONC CE TRAIN QUI MEURT
 DANS LES VALS ET LES BEAUX BOIS

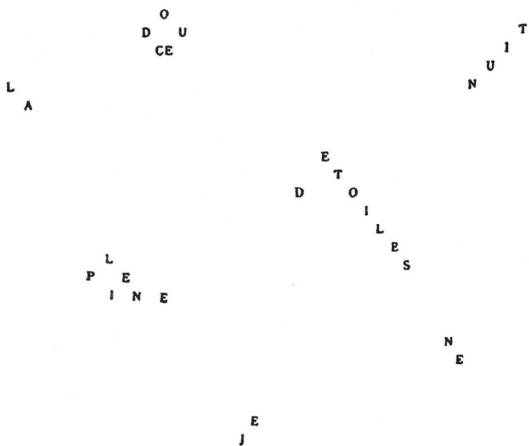


Figure 5. "Voyage (Voyage)." Apollinaire, *Calligrammes*.

of letters which implies spiritual dispersion or disintegration, as in "Voyage," Figure 5.¹⁰ In both cases, the continuity of these primordial archetypes suggests the intervention of the subconscious, as Claudel himself says in *Idéogrammes occidentaux*: "Tous les mots sont constitués d'une collaboration inconsciente de l'oeil et de la voix avec l'objet."¹¹ For this reason one can find striking

10. Figure 4: *Calligrammes*, p. 203; Figure 5: p. 198.

11. Claudel, *Idéogrammes*, p. 90. "All words are constituted by an unconscious collaboration of the eye and the voice with the object."

TELEGRAPHE
OISEAU
QUI TOMBER
LAISSÉ
588 AILES PARTOUT

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E
L
A
P

AU LOIN
FRAIS DU TENDRE ÉTÉ SI P

L U
N A I R E T

C' EST TON SA VI GE
QUE
V O I S P L U S

FAREWELL LOVE CLOUD THAT
FLEES MAKE AGAIN DANTE'S JOURNEY
AND HASN'T FALLEN FERTILE RAIN



BIRD THAT FALL
LET'S
HIS WINGS EVERYWHERE

WHERE DOES THIS TRAIN GO THAT DIES FAR AWAY TENDER SUMMER SO P
INTO THE VALLEYS AND BEAUTIFUL FRESH WOODS OF

THE W S E T NIGHT MON ISH AND

FULL OF STARS IS YOUR FACE THAT

I NO LONGER SE

parallels between the two poets' favorite forms and the major imagery in their poetic works as a whole: for Claudel, the vertical as tree, the circle as Omega and "Maison fermée" (closed house); for Apollinaire, horizontal space as a realm of literary, military, and amorous conquest.¹² The space of the page, for both, has become a visible metaphor for poetic and spiritual space, through a coincidence of primordial structures rather than direct reproduction.

At the same time, however, the two poets are obliged to deal with the fixed aspect of line as it has been codified in Western linear syntax: line as an impersonal, universal aspect of structure rather than an individual symbol. Claudel suggests that the linearity of Western writing is a metaphor for the movement of time as it is defined by Christian theology. Each being evolves towards its death, as the world towards the Day of Judgment: "Dans les pays chrétiens . . . il y a ce qu'on appelle un sens, à la fois dans le sens d'une phrase ou d'une expression et dans le sens d'un fleuve. La civilisation chrétienne vient de quelque part et va ailleurs."¹³ This is the reason for the title of his work, *Idéogrammes occidentaux*. Claudel opposes this movement of Western writing to the Chinese character which is totally synthetic and therefore immobile, and he suggests that Chinese civilization is as immobile as its writing. To a certain extent he integrates the principle of linearity into his *Idéogramme*, which is a series of individual concepts or letters organized into a unity of meaning after they are read successively, just as his universe will fully realize its meaning only on its final day.

Apollinaire also does not seek to destroy linear reading in his *Calligrammes* but to integrate it and to utilize it. However, he does this in a highly ambiguous, ironic way, so that the end result is a heightened awareness of this linearity, of the space which

12. Jean Levaillant, "L'Espace dans *Calligrammes*," *Revue des Lettres Modernes*, Nos. 217-222, (1969), p. 49.

13. Claudel, *Mémoires improvisés* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), p. 298. "In Christian countries . . . there is what one could call a direction, both as in the meaning of a sentence or expression and in the direction of a river. Christian civilization comes from somewhere and goes somewhere else."

alphabetic typography creates for itself. Almost all of his *Calligrammes* are shapes, therefore plastic, anti-linear forms; but these are built up by lines of type, which must be read successively to be understood. The poet delights in playing with the hapless reader by creating a constant tension between these two elements. “Du Coton dans les Oreilles,” for example, forces the reader to read backwards or upwards, and other poems make him follow the sentences around circles, down lines letter by letter, or across diagonals (see Figs. 6-8).¹⁴ Like Claudel, Apollinaire uses this linearity as the symbol of the movement of time. In “La Cravate et la Montre” (The Necktie and the Watch) the words which describe the watch and its time, “la beauté de la vie passe la douleur de mourir,” are broken up into a descending curve like one side of a round watch and like the clockwise movement of the hours around this watch.¹⁵ However, the shape which is formed by

14. Figure 6: “Cotton in the Ears” (p. 287): “So many explosives at a live point. . . . Write a word if you dare. . . . The points of impact in my soul always at war. . . . Your fierce herd spits fire. . . . Omegaphone.”

Figure 7: “Lettre-Océan” (pp. 184-5): “Do you remember the earthquake between 1885 and 1890 we slept more than a month in a tent Hello My Brother Albert in Mexico City. . . . Young girls in Chapultepec . . . Toussaint Luca is now in Poitiers . . . And how I hitched a ride with my girl . . . St. Isidore Street in Havana that no longer exists . . . Chirimoya . . . With cream at . . . Pendeco is more than an imbecile . . . he called the Indian Hijo de la Cingada . . . priotor of 5 or 6 buil . . . I got up at 2 A.M. and I’ve already drunk a sheep . . . the cablegram consisted of two words In Safety . . . Let’s move on gen . . . board all travelers for Chatou . . . The poet’s new shoes . . . of your flower gardens close the doors . . . change of section . . . 300 meters high.”

Figure 8: “Aim” (p. 224): “Horses cherry color boundary of Zeeland . . . Of golden machine-guns croak the legends . . . I love you liberty who watches in the hypogeums . . . Harp with silver strings o rain o my music . . . The invisible enemy silver wound in the sun . . . And the secret future that the rocket elucidates . . . Hear the Word swim subtle fish . . . Cities turn by turn become keys . . . The blue mask as puts on God his sky . . . War peaceful asceticism metaphysical solitude . . . Child with cut hands among the pink oriflammes.”

15. Figure 9: “The Necktie and the Watch” (p. 192): “The beauty of life exceeds the pain of death . . . The painful necktie which you wear and which decorates you, o civilized man, take it off if you wish truly to breath . . . What a good time we’re having . . . the hours . . . my heart . . . the eyes . . . the child . . . Agla . . . the hand . . . Tircis . . . week . . . the infinite straightened up by a crazy philosopher . . . the Muses at the gates of your body . . . the beautiful unknown and the Dantesque verse, shining and cadaverous . . . It’s five till at last . . . And everything will be ended.”

Figure 6. "Cotton in the Ears (Du Coton dans les Oreilles)." Apollinaire, *Calligrammes*.

Tant d'explosifs sur le point **VIF !**

l'os^{es} guerre
tu en
si toujours
mot âme
un mon
Ecris dans feu
d'impacts le
? points crache
Les féroce
troupeau
Ton

OMÉGAPHONE

Figure 7. "Ocean-Letter (Lettre-Océan)." Apollinaire, *Calligrammes*.

Figure 8. "Aim (Visée)." Apollinaire, *Calligrammes*.

A Madame René Berthier

Chevaux couleur cerise limite des Zélandes
Des mitrailleuses d'or coassent les légendes
Je t'aime liberté qui veilles dans les hypogées
Harpe aux cordes d'argent ô pluie ô ma musique

L'invisible ennemi plaie d'argent au soleil
Et l'avenir secret que la fusée élucide
Entends nager le Mot poisson subtil
Les villes tour à tour deviennent des clefs

Le masque bleu comme met Dieu son ciel
Guerre paisible ascèse solitude métaphysique

Enfant aux mains coupées parmi les roses oriflammes

Figure 9. "The Necktie and the Watch (La Cravate et la Montre)."
 Apollinaire, *Calligrammes*.

LA CRAVATE
 DOU
 LOU
 REUSE
 QUE TU
 PORTES
 ET QUI T'
 ORNE O CI
 VILISÉ
 OTE- TU VEUX
 LA' DIEN
 SI RESPI
 RER

COMME L'ON
 S'AMUSE
 BI
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les heures

la

beau

Mon cœur

té

de

la

les yeux

vie

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l'enfant la

dou

leur

Agla

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mou

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et le
 vers
 dantesque
 luisant et
 cadavérique

le bel
 inconnu

les Muses
 aux portes de
 ton corps

l'infini
 redressé
 par un fou
 de philosophe

semaine

la main

Tircis

Il est — Et tout se en ra fin fi ni

the letters conflicts with the movement of reading, and thus undermines the idea of linear time instead of reinforcing it. At the same time, the shape is much more concrete and therefore communicates a literal value; the meaning of the words, on the other hand, is poetic and often figurative. The "cravate" of the above-mentioned poem is formed by the words "La cravate douloureuse que tu portes et qui t'orne ô civilisé, ôte-la si tu veux bien respirer," arranged in the shape of a necktie. The movement of language creates this poetic extension of the object by the process of linear reading: thus the interaction of literal object and figurative meaning is similar to that between the immobility of the visual form and the temporal succession of reading. The immobile object gives form to the ceaseless movement of time, contains it within a comprehensible structure; yet this movement of time is an equally vital part of Apollinaire's universe, since it symbolizes the dynamic quality of poetry and of reality itself. Thus there is a subtle interaction between the two modes, which seem to coexist without ever quite coinciding; the reader is indirectly conscious of one level while reacting directly to the other. In the same way, Apollinaire's general view of poetry and the world suggests a tension between space and time; the world is ceaselessly moving and evolving, yet the only mental and poetic structure capable of seizing its truth is an immobile, synthetic, global vision. "Chaque jour peut-être une volonté toute puissante change l'ordre des choses, contrarie les causes et les effets et anéantit le souvenir et la vérité même de ce qui existait la veille pour créer une succession d'événements établissant une nouvelle réalité. Et ces nouveautés sont le mensonge de l'ancienne vérité. Tel est l'ouvrage poétique: la fausseté d'une réalité anéantie."¹⁶

Thus Apollinaire's visual poetry utilizes the movement of time without attributing to it the character of logical causality and historical progression which had been implicit in nineteenth-

16. Apollinaire, in *La Phalange* (August 1908), quoted by Renaud, *op. cit.*, p. 397. "Each day perhaps an all-powerful will changes the order of things, disrupts causes and effects and destroys the memory and even the truth of what existed the day before in order to create a succession of events establishing a new truth. And these new things are the lie of the former truth. This is the poetic work: the falsity of a destroyed reality."

century ideas of time. And here we touch on perhaps the most fundamental resemblance between Apollinaire and Claudel. Claudel, too, feels that the real world is essentially a dynamic interaction of multiple phenomena. Although he accepts time as the dimension in which things perfect themselves, in a ceaseless effort to realize God's ideal image, this image is itself eternal and therefore timeless. His world is both linear and simultaneous: a totality which at each moment changes and builds upon itself like a text being written.

Comme la main de celui qui écrit va d'un bord à l'autre du papier, donnant naissance dans son mouvement uniforme à un million de mots divers qui se prêtent l'un à l'autre force et couleur, en sorte que la masse entière ressent dans ses aplombs fluides chaque apport que lui fait la plume en marche, il est au ciel un mouvement pur dont le détail terrestre est la transcription innombrable.

Le passé est une incantation de la chose à venir, sa nécessaire différence génératrice, la somme sans cesse croissante des conditions du futur. Il détermine le *sens*, et, sous ce jour, il ne cesse pas d'exister, pas plus que les premiers mots de la phrase quand l'oeil atteint les derniers.¹⁷

The instantaneous and simultaneous perception of spatial relationships expresses an aspect of Claudel's world which is just as important as the movement of sound and time. Each word on the page, each letter of his *Idéogrammes*, each member of the universe depend on their relationship with all the others for their full meaning. It is necessary to perceive the totality all at once in order to situate each part. An *Idéogramme* is a total picture which tries to englobe many different facets of a synthetic experience,

17. Claudel, *Art poétique*, pp. 135-6: "As the hand of the person writing goes from one side of the paper to the other, giving birth in its uniform movement to a million different words which lend each other force and color, so that the entire mass feels in its fluid equilibrium each contribution made to it by the moving pen, there is in heaven a pure movement of which earthly detail is the innumerable transcription."

Art poétique, p. 140: "The past is an incantation of the thing to come, its necessary generative difference, the endlessly growing sum of future conditions. It determines the *direction*, and, in this light, it does not cease to exist, no more than the first words of the sentence when the eye reaches the last ones."

even while each aspect remains distinct. In the word “baum” (German for tree) Claudel imagines a whole landscape in miniature: “a est un lac alimenté à la fois par la pluie et le ruissellement, u est une vallée sur laquelle flotte un gracieux nuage, m est une forêt de sapins.” In “locomotive,” he sees “Un véritable dessin pour les enfants. La longueur du mot d’abord est l’image de celle de l’animal. L est la fumée, o les roues et la chaudière, m les pistons, t le témoin de la vitesse, comme dans *auto* à la manière d’un poteau télégraphique, ou encore la bielle, v est le levier, i le sifflet, e la boucle d’accrochage, et le souligné est le rail!” And in “courir” (to run), “c est le corps penché, u les deux jambes, r les deux genoux qui travaillent, i le but qui est en avant et au-dessus, tout ça roule o!”¹⁸ The task of the poet in general, as Claudel sees it, is to expand and to exploit this synthetic potential of writing till it expresses the entire universe. For the very basis of poetry is image, or the juxtaposition of two different things, like the basis of synthetic visual logic itself.

Par *l’image*, le poète est comme un homme qui est monté en un lieu plus élevé et qui voit autour de lui un horizon plus vaste où s’établissent entre les choses des rapports nouveaux, rapports qui ne sont pas déterminés par la logique ou la loi de causalité, mais par une association harmonique ou complémentaire en vue d’un *sens*.

Jadis au Japon, comme je montais de Nikko à Chuzenji, je vis, quoique grandement distants, juxtaposés par l’alignement de mon oeil, la verdure d’un érable combler l’accord proposé par un pin. Les présentes pages [développent ce] nouvel Art poétique de l’Univers, une nouvelle Logique . . . celle-ci a [pour organe] la métaphore, le mot nouveau, l’opération qui résulte de la seule existence conjointe et simultanée de deux choses différentes.

18. Claudel, *Idéogrammes*, pp. 83-7: “Tree: a is a lake fed both by rain and streams, u is a valley over which floats a graceful cloud, m is a pine forest. Locomotive: A real picture for children. The length of the word, first, is the image of that of the animal. L is the smoke, o the wheels and the boiler, m the pistons, t the witness of the speed, as in *auto* like a telegraph pole, or maybe the connecting-rod, v is the lever, i the whistle, e the hitching hook, and the underlining is the rail! To run: c is the inclined body, u the two legs, r the two knees working, i the goal which is ahead and above, all of that’s rolling o!”

Il est impossible pour un poète d'avoir vécu quelque temps en Chine et au Japon sans considérer avec émulation tout cet attirail là-bas qui accompagne l'expression de la pensée . . . Quelques traits délibérés . . . et voici, de quelques mots, débarrassés du harnais de la syntaxe et rejoints à travers le blanc par leur seule simultanéité, une phrase faite de rapports!

Le *mot* chez nous (qui signifie: *acquis par le mouvement*) est un ensemble obtenu par une succession. Il vibre encore, il émane encore dans cet arrêt du blanc qui le limite l'allure de la main qui l'a tracé.¹⁹

Throughout his life, as the passages above show, Claudel was haunted by the idea of a poetic structure liberated from mechanical and logical progression, and suspended in the mind as written words are suspended in blank space.

The *Idéogramme* and the *Calligramme* are, as we have seen, very different in structure and intention: one is a fully developed, self-contained poem, the other a reverie on the visual potential of the system of writing as a whole. And, as we have also seen, Claudel believes in the ultimate power of this system to suggest an eternal reality, albeit indirectly. Apollinaire, on the other hand,

19. Claudel, *Introduction à un poème sur Dante* (Introduction to a Poem about Dante), in *Prose*, p. 422: "By the *image*, the poet is like a man who has climbed up to a more elevated spot and who sees around him a more vast horizon where new relationships are established between things, relationships which are not determined by logic or the law of causality, but by a harmonic or complementary association in view of a *meaning*."

Art poétique, p. 143: "In former days in Japan, as I climbed from Nikko to Chuzenji, I saw, although quite distant, juxtaposed by the alignment of my eye, the green of a maple complete the accord proposed by a pine. The present pages [develop this] new Poetic Art of the Universe, a new Logic . . . it has [for organ] the metaphor, the new word, the operation which results from the simple united and simultaneous existence of two different things."

Claudel, *Préface à Cent phrases pour éventails*, in *Oeuvre poétique*, p. 699: "It is impossible for a poet to have lived some time in China and Japan without considering with emulation all those implements which accompany there the expression of thought . . . Some deliberate strokes . . . and here we have, out of several words, liberated from the harness of syntax and joined across space only by their simultaneity, a sentence composed of relationships!"

Ibid., p. 700: "Our *word* (which signifies: *acquired by movement*) is a unity obtained by a succession. It still vibrates, it still emanates, through the white space that arrests it, the rhythm of the hand that traced it."

芳

院

La
rose

n'est
que
la forme un instant tout
haut de ce que le cœur
tout bas appelle ses
délices

乳

消

Nous
r

ouvrons
les yeux
et la rose a d
isparu nous
avons tout r
espiré

扇

息

Éventail

De la parole
du
poète
il ne reste plus que le
S
ouffle

朱

橋

La
rose

J'ai franchi
sur un pont de corail
quelque chose qui ne
permet pas le retou
r

Figure 10. Claudel, *One Hundred Phrases for Fans (Cent phrases pour éventails)*, pp. 708-9.

花

Une
rose

d'un rouge si fort
qu'elle tache
à m e
comme du vin

酒

巾

Une
pivoine

aussi blanche
que le sang
est
rouge

白

雪

La
neige

sur
toute la terre
pour la neige
étend
un tapis de
neige

龍

湖

Au
travers
de
la
cascade

une
longue fée horizontale
verte et rose
joue de la
flût
e

草

is interested in exploring the potential of different forms in order to express an essentially human truth, and in innovation per se as a necessary image of the constantly changing world. It is possible to question, as many critics have done, the real success of the *Calligrammes* as visual poetry and the usefulness of the *Idéogrammes occidentaux* in the actual reading and understanding of poetry: in both cases, the visual and linguistic modes remain perhaps too loosely fused. In this context it is interesting to compare them with a third work, Claudel's *Cent phrases pour éventails* (*One Hundred Phrases for Fans*), in which the words of each poem are laid out in different patterns on the page: here the designs are purely abstract, yet perhaps for that very reason seem more intimately a part of the total experience of the poems (see Fig. 10).²⁰ The structure of the thought is more closely related to the visual structure which expresses it.

This problem of structure is thus the most important component in the question of Claudel's and Apollinaire's visual poetry. Not only their ultimate success or failure but also their intentions can best be understood by their efforts to penetrate the essential, internal workings of visual and poetic expression. Both perceive poetry as a way of organizing language and thought, a unique structure, and the visual mode as a direct way of formulating this structure. Thus, beyond their differences and the question of their relative success or failure, the *Calligramme* and the *Idéogramme* retain a certain enigmatic quality because their ultimate workings defy exact translation into ordinary language. The choice of the visual mode imparts to the poetic message an aura of suggestiveness and concreteness so that we experience a different type of logic which, in its own way, completes and expands the conventional act of reading.

20. Figure 10: *Cent phrases pour éventails* (*One Hundred Phrases for Fans*), pp. 708-9: "The rose . . . is only the form resounding for an instant of what the heart in a low voice names its desire/We r . . . open our eyes and the rose has disappeared we have breathed it all in/ Fan . . . out of the poet's words nothing is left but the breath/ The rose . . . I have crossed on a coral bridge something that does not permit return/ A rose . . . of a red so deep that it stains the soul like wine/ A peony . . . as white as blood is red/ Snow . . . over the whole earth for the snow spread out a carpet of snow/ Across the waterfall . . . a long horizontal green and pink fairy plays the flute."