Guillaume Apollinaire

Experiments in poetry

Linda C.H. Lai
Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918)

Poet who took part in avant-garde movements in French literature in the beginning of 20th century.

1st work (15 years of poetry):
ALCOOLS (1913)

http://www.wiu.edu/apollinaire/ (in French)
http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/737 (in English)
http://www.slideshare.net/Pawlowski/le-pont-mirabeau-recorded-by-apollinaire-in-1913-presentation (to listen to Apollinaire’s reading in 1913)
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“Poetry as usually read today, silently and from a monotonously printed text, fails to exploit its two principal sensuous aspects”

*shape

*sound
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*figure & ground: the perception of dark figures arranged on a light surface (or vice versa)

-- type size, paragraphing, run-down pattern, generic forms etc.

→ organization thought via visual arrangement (spatialization of text)
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Efforts to make a poem a distinct visual object...

Some methods:

Principle of the ideogram

[a written sign that represents an idea or thing rather than the sound of a word]

Calligrammes (visual + verbal composition)
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What are “Calligrammes”? 
Plastic arrangement of words on writing surfaces

“visual lyricism”
Visual poetry / spatial poetry
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What are “Calligrammes”?
Visual poetry / spatial poetry

Derived from TWO techniques –

*Fragmentation*

*Recombination* (of fragments)
(in his conversation poems)
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What are “Calligrammes”?  
Fragmentation / Recombination

Simultaneous nature of consciousness
→ (abandoning)
Discursive expression
Linear layout of poem
What are “Calligrammes”?
Fragmentation / Recombination

Typographical revolution –
“It is necessary that our intelligence become accustomed to understanding synthetico-ideographically instead of analytico-discursively.” (G. Arbouin)
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3 different fashions in the plastic arrangement of words (Calligrammes):

(1) to represent the objects being described

(2) to represent a total conception of the order of the world or of the universe

(3) to express a movement of thought within the poem (writing for the eye)
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To represent the objects being described

e.g. *Paysage* (Landscape), *La Cravate et la Montre* (The Tie and the Watch), *Il Pleut* (It’s Raining)
The Tie and the Watch

It's Raining
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To represent a total conception of the order of the world or of the universe

e.g. *Lettre-Océan* (Ocean Letter)
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To express a movement of thought within the poem (writing for the eye):

e.g. Visée (Aim)
Poetry as an aural experience:

Sound of the words in combination

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Apollinaire: *Poetry as an aural experience*

Sound of the words in combination: 2 methods

(1) To write while humming a tune to whose rhythm he could fit words
[to upkeep meter-consciousness]

(2) “Poèmes conversations”
[combining at random the odd sentences and phrases that occurred to him or that he overheard]
Poetry as an aural experience

Sound of the words in combination

Pure sound:

Exploration of vowel qualities, alliteration, rhymes etc.

e.g. “Voyage à Paris” (Voyage to Paris)
Guillaume Apollinaire’s Calligrammes

Espen J. Arseth cites Apollinaire’s non-linear texts in “calligrammes” as examples of ergodic literature which also characterizes the cybertextual process.

A more generic term: Concrete poetry

Other names: \textit{pattern poetry, shape poetry}

Typographical arrangement of words is as important as the conventional elements (meaning of words, rhythm, rhyme...)

The words themselves form a picture. [imagery]
Concrete poetry

Term coined by Augusto de Campos

Useful reference:
The Sackner Archive of Visual and Concrete Poetry:
http://www.rediscov.com/sacknerarchives/
Indexes to webpages and print resources:

On “pattern poetry”:
Concrete poetry

Interactive puzzle poetry:

Jennifer Kathleen Phillips –

http://www.geocities.com/visualpoetry_au/vpoem.html