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The Simultaneous Dress of Sonia Delaunay, Fashion, and the Tangibility of the Tango

Introduction

The simultaneous dress (*robe simultanée*) of 1913 is the first example of a series of colourful and extravagant clothing designed by the Ukrainian visual artist and fashion designer Sonia Delaunay (Sarah Sophie Stern Terk). It was worn by the artist in the hangouts of Paris' cultural scene, including the Bal Bullier, which Delaunay patronised with her circle of friends and avant-garde artists during the years in which the tango was in vogue.

Delaunay's dress has garnered growing historical-critical interest over the last twenty years, characterised by an increase in the volume of research and a broadening of its interdisciplinary character beyond the borders of *Simultanéisme*. This term, adopted by Sonia Delaunay and her husband Robert from 1912 onwards, refers to their own non-figurative research, which was based on the simultaneous contrast of colours within painting and design.

By focusing on the relationship between art, fashion, and the tango, this article studies the dynamic between the tangibility and intangibility of the dress and proposes a different interpretation related to the collage. Delaunay's dress incorporates a heterogenous variety of materials, which includes both fur and fabrics of different weights and colours. The art historian Tag Gronberg (2003: 114) makes reference to this, together with materials such as "collaged fabrics", whereas the literary critic and fashion scholar Paola Colaiacomo (2018: 157) has labelled the dress "a collage of different pieces of fabric and a collage of thoughts". More generally, as this study seeks

to show, the dress materialises the collage within the lexicon of fashion, while its texture incorporates fragments of movements, tango poses, and everything one could find drooped over the patronesses and patrons of the ballrooms of the age. To put it another way, this study transposes the concept of the collage from the surface of the dress to the space of the ballroom, and reflects on the new idea of intimacy and physical proximity encouraged by the fashion of the tango: a dance considered one of the most sensual and transgressive in Europe during the early 1910s.

Despite her passion for the tango, Delaunay chose to sit on the sidelines at the Bullier and observe the others as they danced (Apollinaire 1926). Wearing this dress was therefore her way of participating in the dance. The avant-garde historian Chris Townsend (2006: 369) has explained Delaunay's decision by suggesting that it was the dress that danced for her, dissolving her body in space and "making apparent a new modern and syncopated subject". This interpretation is interesting for its hypothesis identifying Delaunay with the ballroom. However, it is limited in its construction of the image of the artist as a modern woman and the modernist fragmentation of the subject. For Gronberg (2003), the wearing of the simultaneous dress transcends the subjectivity of the artist since it serves to reinforce the avant-garde identity of the Delaunay spouses. As the collage is a multiplier of viewpoints, and a vessel of a dialogical mass of voices (Krauss 2013), it can contribute towards developing an interpretation of the dress as an expression of chorality that eclipses the authorship of its designer. In this sense, it offers an extraordinary vantage point in establishing a connection between the voice of who designs the dress and the (often undervalued) voice of who wears it, establishing a discourse between the body and the gender that effectively wears it, and those potentials it calls into dialogue. When viewed from this perspective, Delaunay's case can go some way towards overcoming the intrinsic difficulties faced by fashion historians when studying an item of clothing that has lost its relationship with the body, or bodies, that wore it. As an embodied practice, fashion is more than just an image and an object; it is also performative, with implications of non-dualistic thought and

the transformation of subjectivity (Sedgwick 2002).

This article studies the simultaneous dress of 1913 by analysing written sources (the testimony of artists and authors of the time) and visual sources (primarily contemporary photography which portrays Delaunay clothing herself in her creations) in tandem. It also draws on direct observations of the dress made during its exhibition in London's Tate Modern in 2015: the occasion of the first retrospective English study dedicated to the artist (Marcadé et al. 2014). During that show, the dress was displayed in dialogue with the large painting dedicated to Paris' Bal Bullier, a work created by the artist the same year as the dress.

The Collage in Fashion

The collage has come to occupy an important place in fashion history and theory, becoming a useful conceptual instrument for understanding the logic of fashion, well beyond its historic relationship with the avant-garde. Reference is made to the collage in relation to the postmodern mixing of high and low categories, to forms of the aestheticization of daily life, and to the ephemeral dimension of fashion in its contacts with consumer culture (Davis 2008: 57; Cottington 2004; Banash 2013). While this is not the place to reconstruct the complex history of the relationships between fashion and collage, it is however useful to outline one of the possible inquiries to have emerged during the postmodern debate.

In the context of reflections into subcultures, the collage has become a metaphor for punk-style incongruity, and is at the foundations of the theory of the "subcultural *bricoleur*" developed by the media theorist Dick Hebdige (2002: 106) in the 1970s. Making explicit reference to the subversion of surrealist perception – and to Max Ernst in particular – Hebdige defines the subcultural *bricoleur* as "the 'author' of a surrealist collage" (ibidem) who juxtaposes apparently incompatible realities and provokes an explosive junction between them. The collage has thus become a concept connected with the transgression that disturbs the principle of syntactical coherence in the urban context of street styles.

The theoretical work developed in the context of subcultures has converged, through cultural studies, into fashion studies. Since the 1980s, fashion studies have included the fringe among their possible areas of research and reconsidered fashion itself as an active force and an agent of individual and social transformation (Barnard 2014). In this context, the collage has come to be identified as an instrument for the conceptualisation of fashion and its functioning, as much within theoretical as within creative disciplines.

In the theoretical field, the practice of clipping has been explored in relation to fashion magazines, archives, and time. The fashion historian and curator Alistair O'Neill (2005), for example, has analysed how the creative duo Viktor&Rolf rearranged the press review of their recent collection, transforming clippings from fashion magazines into an elegy to the past. As much for Viktor&Rolf as for the historical precedent set by Elsa Schiaparelli, the clippings invite us to reflect on what has just gone out of fashion, on the aesthetics of the transitory, and on fashion's fragility of memory. Indeed, upon reflecting on the collage, which is usually associated with the avant-garde, an element of nostalgia emerges for the nineteenth-century pastimes of *découpage* and the scrapbook (ibidem; Waldman 1992). The archive of clippings and the magazine itself, which goes out of fashion from month to month, mould "the becoming of fashion" and the experience of modernity (Benjamin 1999). The fashion historian and theorist Caroline Evans (2003) has drawn inspiration from the nineteenth-century figure of the ragpicker, proposed by the philosopher Walter Benjamin, to analyse the work of fashion designers at the end of the twentieth-century, highlighting how their references to the past constituted a set of fragmented memories rather than a coherent narrative. Evans identified anti-linear temporality as itself a peculiarity in the history of fashion and the rummaging among the waste as its fundamental methodological instrument (ibidem; Evans, Vaccari 2020).

The derivation of the Cubist collage in the early 1910s has been brought to light by the curator and art historian Jeffrey Weiss (1994), who situates its origins among the culture of variety and popular entertainment from the beginning of the century. Weiss underlines

Fig. 1
Craft and Colour, Exhibition design inspired by Sonia Delaunay, *Utopian Bodies–Fashion Looks Forward*, 2015. Photo Mattias Lindback, Liljevalchs, Stockholm.

the importance of the *revues*: satirical scenes in which actors would comment on the news of the day, often wearing costumes made from (or made to imitate) printed media. Just as with the image of the ragpicker gathering up what has been abandoned, the three-dimensional, wearable, and performative origin of the collage offers methodological guidance for interpreting Delaunay's work in fashion.

Sofia Hedman and Serge Martynov, the curators and designers of *Utopian Bodies: Fashion Looks Forward* (Liljevalchs, Stockholm, 25 September 2015-7, February 2016) based two rooms of their exhibition on Delaunay [Fig. 1], with the aim of reflecting on the importance of the handmade in fashion, and the undervaluation of colour in Western traditions (Lázár 2006). Colaiacomo too has drawn methodological inspiration from Delaunay (2000: 11), particularly from the "planar" dimension and lack of stitching evident on her "Cubist-inspired patchwork blanket". This allows Colaiacomo to reflect on fashion's singular appropriative process in which the author, in turn, takes possession of the organisation of the texts in the anthology *Cartamodello,* which, she writes, are "cut and put on the model […] like the game of depths all expressed on a surface which renders the effect of the Cubist canvas simultaneously simple and disturbing" (ibidem).

In the creative field, the case of the journalist and fashion icon Anna Piaggi (1998) has received particular attention, specifically the *doppie pagine* (double page spreads) she devised together with the creative director Luca Stoppini for *Vogue Italia* between 1988 and 2012. The pages were intended, Piaggi writes, as a collage of ideas, words, and images capable of assuming a layout that was autonomous and dissonant when compared to the typographic cage of the magazine page (Clark 2006). Ultimately, the collage plays a key role in fashion design. It is often employed during the research phase of a new collection in the construction of the moodboard, on which photographs, colour samples, magazine cuttings, sketches, and fabric fragments converge. These heterogeneous materials fuse together to give form to the ideas and sensations – literally the states of mind – at the foundation of the new collection. In a handbook of fashion design, the moodboard is defined as a "physical representation of an otherwise abstract survey of ideas and inspiration" (Kennedy, Banis Stoehrer, Calderin 2013: 132). But rather than referring to a representative order, the term "mood" appeals to the moods of a community and the glue that holds it together (Sheehan 2018). Incidentally, the term "mood" also adheres to the poetics of simultaneity during the years in question, as in the case of Umberto Boccioni's *Stati d'animo* from 1911 (Schiaffini 2002).

The Body of the Dress

The dress is still extant, intact, and fairly well preserved, except for some discoloration and heeling (Albritton 2005). It is composed of heterogeneous materials: silk taffeta, crêpe, satin, velvet, woolen cloth, and fur, the latter used abundantly at the time for collars, borders, and sleeves. Its various fragments consist of varying colours and dimensions, including rounded shapes, triangles, and rectangles. They were stitched together in a patchwork, a technique Delaunay first experimented with when she made a blanket for the cradle of her son Charles, who was born in 1911. The texture confers an eccentric appearance on the dress in light of the fashion of the times, while the silhouette is in line with the trends of international fashion

during the early 1910s. Its bust is not tight-fitting and can be used without a corset, the sides are soft, and the dress narrows at the bottom, where it reaches and covers the ankle, leaving the shoes exposed. The dress highlights the artist's feeling for fashion, which would culminate with her opening a boutique on Paris' Boulevard Malesherbes in 1924 (Troy 2003).

A consensus has yet to be reached among the historic-artistic literature regarding the interest given to, and the role played by, Delaunay among the milieu of Parisian fashion. Some commentators emphasise the extent of Delaunay's endeavour, using this as proof of the professional scale of her business, which employed more than thirty personnel before the boutique closed in 1931 (Brentjens 1988 cit. in Troy 2003). Others retain that Delaunay had no interest in creating her own fashion in the field of clothing – a view to which her biographers, among others, strongly subscribe (Baron, Damase 1995). Delaunay's social circle would seem to support the first hypothesis: in 1913 she had documented meetings with Nicole Grout (Marie Nicole Poiret), the sister of the renowned couturier Paul Poiret, who was on the verge of embarking upon her own career in French high fashion (Buckberrough 2014).

For some scholars, 1913 was the moment everything changed. This was the year in which the simultaneous dress was created, and although it may seem reductive to circumscribe the complexity of such a phenomenon to a single date, it was, to cite the title of Jean-Michel Rabaté's book (2007), the "cradle of modernism". More cautiously, we might say that the dress belongs to a period even Delaunay considered extraordinary (1978: 45) when she recalls in her autobiography: "12, 13, 14, such intense years; explosive for Robert and I!". They were the years the artist worked on creating a new image for herself, after a radical change in her life. As noted by art historian Sherry Buckberrough (2014), at the root of this change was her second marriage, to Robert Delaunay, in 1910, and their new avant-garde house-atelier-parlour in Paris' rue des Grands-Augustins. All of this nourished her interest in experimenting with textiles and clothes, and in her new and intense social life. Delaunay's desire to experiment with embroidery – in works such as *Broderie*

de feuillages (1909) – and with patchwork coincided with her desire to find a bond between art and life. In the wake of Arts and Crafts and the revival of the popular art of Eastern Europe, this all came to be re-interpreted in the context of the avant-garde (ibidem). Further confirmation of her desire to merge art and life comes from the fact that the first simultaneous clothes between 1913 and 1914 were worn by the artist, her husband, and their circle of acquaintances, and as much in a domestic setting as in the public eye.

The Worn Dress

Delaunay's role as interpreter of her own creations is attested by two photographs published in the 1914 April-June edition of the artistic journal *Montjoie!*, founded and managed by Ricciotto Canudo, an Italian writer and film critic, who was a friend of the Delaunay couple and an acquaintance of their avant-garde circle [Fig. 2]. The photographs are of a documentary nature in their full-length front and back view of the artist's image. This representation stretches far back in history, spanning a chronological arc stretching from the anatomical sketches of the Renaissance through to the photographic archives of fashion houses at the beginning of the twentieth century. Maison Worth's impressive photographic archive offers one such example. It constitutes the systematic documentation of collections produced between 1890 and 1965 (De la Haye, Mendes 2014). In Worth's archive, the clothes are pictured mounted on a mannequin positioned in front of a tailor's mirror, enabling both front and back to be photographed with a single shot. Delaunay's choice to photograph her dress front and back can be interpreted as further proof of her knowledge of fashion. Yet it also bears testament to Delaunay's desire to identify herself with her own creations, choosing to wear them directly rather than entrust them to a mannequin. The shots originated from the photographic studio of Reynald. However, in most likelihood, it was Delaunay who made the decisions related to the shooting itself and the poses she would strike. If it is the case that Delaunay did not handle the photography equipment herself, she did however "systematically check each framing",

Fig. 2
Sonia Delaunay wearing the *Robe simultanée*. Photo Reynald, *Montjoie!,* 4-6, 1914. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris. Gallica.

as suggested by the art historian Cécile Godefroy (2002), who has studied the artist's album of press cuttings and fashion images conserved in France's Bibliothèque Nationale.
Expounding on the subject of the pose, it is interesting to note how in *Montjoie!* Delaunay maintains roughly the same posture in both frames, creating an almost symmetrical effect, as though it were the camera moving around her and not vice versa. In both shots, Delaunay rests an arm softly on her side, which is pushed up, creating a light asymmetry of the hip and accenting the suppleness of her body. The asymmetry is further underlined by the dress' shape, which features a conspicuous drape on its side, most clearly visible in the rear photograph. Her legs feature the same pose both front and back: her feet are positioned one in front of the other, like a mannequin's pose or a dance step, making the dress seem even straighter and her body's line more tapered. This double photograph is fascinating not only because it provides insight into how the dress fit the body for which it was designed, but because it also shows Delaunay's double role: as both creator and wearer. Posi-

tioning oneself in front of a camera lens may seem a banal practice in the age of social media. However, it certainly carried a different significance at the beginning of the twentieth century, when the profession of the mannequin (and of the photo model) was just starting to emerge (Evans 2013). Ultimately, even the pose carries its own historic value, and the allusion to something that resembles a dance step may be less casual than it seems at first glance, especially if one takes into account Delaunay's interest in the tango and, above all, how this fashionable dance granted models a preliminary repertoire of movements to draw upon during the emergence of fashion shows (ibidem).

Tango, Fashion, and the Avant-Garde

Like other artists of the age, including Gino Severini, Sonia Delaunay harboured a passion for the tango, a phenomenon of both exotic and erotic fascination which reached the pinnacle of its popularity in Europe between 1912 and 1914 (Davis 2013). The tango originated in Argentina and Uruguay in the middle of the nineteenth century, and was born out of the convergence of diverse musical cultures, which had been developed since the sixteenth century with the contribution of slaves of African origins and European immigrants (Ferrer 1996; Zalko 2001) [Fig. 3].

The tango was also a main event of the evenings at the Bal Bullier. Founded in the nineteenth-century, this historic Parisian ballroom underwent a revival in these years among the milieu of the artistic avant-garde. It was situated in Montparnasse, the central hub of the artistic and cultural scene, and frequented by Delaunay and her circle of friends on Thursday, and sometimes Sunday, evenings (Albritton 2005). The poet and writer Blaise Cendrars (2005) provides a description of how the tango, the avant-garde, and simultaneous clothes converged on those nights. His description offers a sophisticated deconstruction of dress codes, and highlights the unconventional appearance of the poet and boxer Arthur Cravan, known mainly as the nephew of Oscar Wilde:

> Cravan, Delaunay, and I were a trio; we used to go to the Bal Bullier,

Fig. 3
El tango criollo, *Caras y Caretas,* 226, 31 January 1903, Archivo General de la Nación, Buenos Aires.

> where we danced the tango in silk socks that did not match, Robert sporting a half-red and half-green dinner jacket, Arthur in black shirts with the dickey slit open to reveal his bleeding tattoos and the obscene inscriptions on his skin, his coat-tails flying free and daubed with fresh paint (before going to the ballroom, Arthur invariably managed to sit on Delaunay's palette, which made Robert scream because of the cost of the lapislazzuli and which ruined our evenings on more than one occasion (transl. Conover 1996: 101).

One testimony of the simultaneous clothes worn by Sonia Delaunay comes from the poet Guillaume Apollinaire, who described its appearance in an article published in the *Mercure de France* in January, 1914.

> [...] purple suit, long purple and green belt and, under the jacket, a bodice divided into areas of bright, soft or faded colours, where old rose mingles with deep orange, stylish blue and scarlet red […] all on contrasting materials, such as plain cloth, taffeta, tulle, flannelette, moiré and ribbed silk (transl. Gott 2020).

The colour scheme illustrated by Apollinaire for Delaunay's dress

is faithfully reproduced in her painting entitled *Bal Bullier* (1913), where greens, purples, blues, and various shades of orange come together. The orange-red of which Apollinaire speaks – in French "*la couleur tango*" (Apollinaire 1926: 128) – was a bright colour particularly in vogue throughout these years, like the music and dance from which its name derived. Indeed, it was one of the most popular tones for the clothes and hats worn to fashionable restaurants and dance halls. According to an article entitled *Tango Tints*, published in the *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* (11th November 1913: 11), the colour tango could be used in light touches for accessories or showpieces, or, more conspicuously, as a single colour cast from head to toe.

In reality, one danced the tango wearing all kinds of clothes, but the fashion of those years primarily associated the dance with a palette of vibrant colours, no differently from other fashionable cultural phenomena of the times, such as the Russian ballet. As reported in *Vogue* (1st December 1913: 35-7; cit. in Evans 2013: 53), the English fashion designer Lucile offered a case in point when, in 1913, she organised a tea dance in Paris to promote her collection, making her mannequins dance with tango wigs in blue, green, purple, and red, and either coordinating or contrasting with the clothes. The article also specifies that the red in question was not a simple Titian red, but an "unnatural" tango colour, perfect when combined with a green dress. Pink, green or fiery red wigs also accompany some dress designs of Jeanne Paquin's collections of 1913 and 1914, as attested by the fashion houses' archive preserved in the Victoria & Albert Museum.

Regarding the perception of colour and the use of simultaneous contrasts, the reflection between fashion, dance, and the avant-garde has often been too limited to the Russian ballets, at the expense of the important contribution made by the tango, as Lucile's case would seem to show (Bellow 2012). Though we lack historical-critical inquiries into this aspect, we do receive further confirmation of the tango's importance from Delaunay's own hand, when writing in her autobiography: "I captured the movements of the dance (tango and flamenco), which mean movement of colour" (cit. in Slevin 2013: 30).

Delaunay and the Tangibility of Tango

The tango involved a new and sensual bodily experience for those involved in its performance. Legs intertwined; abdomens and pelvises made contact; heads entered into such close proximity that couples could – as Filippo Tommaso Marinetti sarcastically wrote (1914: 1) – gazing "into each other's mouths" and "ecstatically examining each other's teeth, like a pair of allucinating dentists" (transl. Berghaus, Jansen, Somigli 2021). The form of intimacy which manifested itself in the public sphere of the ballroom was both new and radical, opening up to the modern concept of self-expression. In contrast to the syncopated dances of the twenties, the tango of the 1910s was slow, sensual, and thus often associated with physical touch. Though the tango's etymological origin may be uncertain, according to the author of the manual *The Tango and how to Dance it*, "the name 'Tango' [...] means 'I touch', being the first person singular of the Spanish verb 'Tangir', which means 'to touch', and was doubtless chosen as a title for the dance owing to the somewhat close proximity of the partners" (Crozier 1913: 14).

We also find explicit references to the tactile dimension of this dance in the contemporary press. In an article from 1914, for example, the humour magazine *Fantasio* affirms "*le tango n'est pas intangible*" (the tango is not intangible), instigating the express condemnation of the Italian and French authorities and the Catholic Church for this dance which was seen as morally dangerous. *Vogue*'s edition of 15th February 1914 asserts that in Germany the slogan "*Noli tangere*" had been launched in protest against an imperial edict abolishing the tango from among the dances of the court [Fig. 4].

Touch is also a core aspect of Delaunay's simultaneous dress. The art historian Ann Albritton (2005: 3) has described it as "sensual and inviting", and as something which provokes in the viewer "a desire to examine it closely, to touch, and to feel the different textures". While historic clothes become "untouchable" for the sake of their preservation (Palmer 2008), they do however remain important instruments for haptic exploration, at least in the case of the "inviting" simultaneous dress. Etymologically, haptic means "to come into con-

Fig. 4
Les confidences d'un professeur de tango. Image Koister, *Fantasio*, 169, 1913, Alma Mater studiorum Università di Bologna - Rimini Campus Branch Central Library.

tact with" and, Giuliana Bruno observes (2002: 6), it simultaneously involves the sense of touch and the kinesthetic sense. The concept of haptics is linked to empathic reciprocity and acts as an "agent in the formation of space", in that it enables touch from distance (Marks 2000).
Should Apollinaire's testimony be given credence (1926: 129), Delaunay did not wear her simultaneous clothes to dance the tango. On the contrary, she sat on the sidelines, close to the Bal Bullier's orchestra, where she contemplated, "with no disrespect, the monotonous clothes of its male and female dancers". Delaunay's decision to sideline herself seems strikingly at odds with the sensuality of the tango. However, it is fully comprehensible from a haptic perspective.
Delaunay's first simultaneous dress was not in fact a representation of the tango, even if explicit visual references to it, such as the colour palette, manifest themselves on its surface. Its primary purpose was to bring about the connection – or collision – of everything one could find in a dance hall of the early 1910s: the lights, the mix of fabrics, elements of the male and female wardrobe, as the genders they represent. At first reading, the patchwork structure functions as an atlas of the mass moving in unison on the dancefloor. We find confirmation of this in the *Bal Bullier* painting (1913) which, in turn,

corroborates the haptic interpretation: the long stripe of colour unfolds in kinematic fashion, forcing the viewer to walk as if they were in a dance hall.
There is, however, a second, divergent interpretation of Delaunay's dress which this study sets out to propose for first, initial verification. According to this interpretation, the dress incorporates not only the mass within its texture; it also captures the intimate encounter between the dancing couple, calling into question the concept of dualism and opening up to the performative. By drawing on the cognitive instruments that derive from the history of fashion, one can observe how the dress incorporates feminine and masculine fabrics, the first of which are colourful and glossy, the second dark and opaque.
Even the form of the fragments and their arrangement on the dress suggest an interpretation that transcends the binary concept of the couple. The tango calls for a differentiation of posture on the basis of sex. Yet by virtue of its proximity, it simultaneously induces empathy between the bodies of its participants. These are not fused together and made fluid, as in a process of morphing. On the contrary, they remain fragmented and numerous, as in a collage. The most feminine part of the dress is its front, which is silky, and coloured. The rear of the dress is almost entirely black, the sole exception being a small piece of pale fabric at the centre of the back, at the height of the figure of the *abrazo*, and where the often-white-gloved hand makes contact with the partner. With the tango, one's back became especially mobile and acquired, especially in the case of women, an important role in fashion. Corsets retreated to the waist and were limited to smoothing over the hips, leaving the back exposed – if not visually (although this was sometimes the case) then to the partner's touch. An example can be found in the publicity of Bonwit Teller & Co's promoting a new model of corset called *Tango*. As the text explains, the item "has practically nothing above the waist" (*Vogue*, 1 September 1913: 5).
In the fashion of the beginning of the twentieth century, dark colours were associated with menswear. The way in which these colours rendered clothing monotonous (Balla 1914) exposed them

Fig. 5
Sem, *Tangoville sur Mer,* 1913.

to criticism from the Italian futurists and fashion magazines in equal measure. The latter lamented how the chromatic revolution brought about by the tango had only affected women's fashion [Fig. 5]. On Delaunay's dress, it is mainly the posterior that addresses the masculine and feminine binary schema. The back is formed of two parts: one a soft, draped fabric; the other a dark, rigid panel, the form of which evokes a pair of pleated men's trousers. The split between these two different parts draws a line in which, theoretically, the dancers' legs come into contact, interrupting the fluid step of the *paseo*. This split makes us think of the female sex and, without explicitly illustrating it, of the slit which had become fashionable during these years in skirts worn to walk and dance. The way in which the tango induced bodily contact influenced the form, perception, and spatial awareness of clothing, influencing the fashion culture of those years. Even to this day, the slit skirt remains a staple in the iconography of the tango (Vaccari 2019).
The simultaneous dress of 1913 raises – without seeking to resolve – the discontinuity of gender, an interpretation that finds confirmation in a photograph from circa 1914 preserved in the basement of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. The photograph was taken in the living room of the Delaunays' studio on the rue des Grands-Augustins and depicts Sonia Delaunay and the painter Alice Bally

wearing a simultaneous jacket and gilet respectively. In her analysis of the photograph, Buckberrough (2014: 46) contextualises the clothing as an "act of cross-dressing" and of androgynous experimentation. She hypothesises that Alice is wearing an item from Robert Delaunay's wardrobe while Sonia is wearing a "man's working jacket, direct from the ready-to-wear rack, personalized by her patchwork". Most authors have attributed a fully-feminine form to the simultaneous dress of 1913 (Damase 1991). Yet in light of the analyses outlined in this study, it seems more appropriate and promising to assign an interpretation less based on the reassuring concept of gender identity. Here the link between the dress and the collage finds justification and explanation against the gender theory outlined by the American philosopher Judith Butler (1990), specifically when she states that "the very notion of 'the person' is called into question by the cultural emergence of those 'incoherent' and 'discontinuous' gendered beings". Delaunay appears to confirm this interpretation within the pages of her autobiography (1978: 93) when she writes: "my pleasure [...] was not only in creating a dress or a scarf, but seeing a new creature emerge". Ultimately, Sonia Delaunay's simultaneous dress of 1913 constituted a space that was at once densely crowded and surprisingly open in its interaction with the fashion and forms of public entertainment – the re-examination of which underpins every kind of collage.

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