PLAYING AT FRENCHNESS:
SPORTS AND SYMBOLS IN ROBERT DELAUNAY’S *THE CARDIFF TEAM*, 1912-1913

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ABSTRACT

Rachel Ozerkevich: Playing at Frenchness: Sports and Symbols in Robert Delaunay’s The Cardiff Team, 1912-1913
(Under the direction of Daniel J. Sherman)

Robert Delaunay’s The Cardiff Team testifies to the contradictory and overlapping manifestations of Frenchness at the outset of the First World War. Ideas about the city, the modern nation-state, and international communities run through this group of works, but since “identity” is never a singular entity, these broad categories inevitably overlap with and contradict each other. In particular, these paintings are in dialogue with some of the ways in which Frenchness, as a concept always in question, was navigated in this period. This thesis considers implications of the individual symbols in these works, and the conflicting understandings of identity that emerge when the symbols are imaged together as they are in the three versions of The Cardiff Team. The larger role that sports played in French culture and politics in the period surrounding these works’ creation offers another useful lens through which to discuss The Cardiff Team.
For Dad,
Whose love of airplanes and sports has resurfaced in an unexpected way.
AKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Paintings, especially those produced during politically contentious periods, have agency; artworks, that is, are themselves capable of participating in political discourse. In his thorough analysis of Edgar Degas’ *Place de la Concorde* (2011), André Dombrowski writes of how, in the years following the Franco-Prussian War, “art could not escape politics, nor politics the realm of image production.” Dombrowski addresses bodies, their relation to specific urban signs, and their implications in post-1870 Paris, but his insight applies just as well to Paris forty years later. Produced between 1912 and 1913, the set of paintings Robert Delaunay made of *The Cardiff Team* is an equally active participant in its sociopolitical milieu. These works present bodies in unusual perspectives moving through fragmented urban ephemera in the Paris cityscape. Consisting of three canvases with the same title, these paintings were produced at a time when many French men and women struggled to reconcile their sense of self and social belonging with the specific urban center, the nation, and the world beyond. *The Cardiff Team* exhibits formal innovation consistent with contemporary avant-garde practice, but Delaunay’s imagery complicates our understanding of these paintings as independent and social objects.  

*The Cardiff Team* testifies to the contradictory and overlapping manifestations of Frenchness at the outset of the First World War. Nationalists, according to Richard Handler,

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2. Though *The Cardiff Team* is typically referred to as a series, each canvas can also be understood as a version of the same subject. As such, I will refer to this body of work as three individual paintings, and not as a series.
believe strongly that their cultural identity is unique. Handler points out an important contradiction inherent in the process of imagining cultural identity: nationalists believe that the boundaries by which they construct and define their identity are naturally given, while also seeing the nation as a project of progress. Handler’s argument that all groups lack essential identities, and thus cannot be defined as things, is a crucial concept with which to address The Cardiff Team. These paintings are in dialogue with some of the ways in which Frenchness, as a concept always in question, was navigated in this period; they should thus be considered in relation to the matrix of social relations that Delaunay used to define himself in relation to his sociopolitical milieu. Because all three versions of The Cardiff Team depict men playing rugby, the larger role that sports played in French culture and politics in the decades surrounding the series’ creation offers another useful lens through which to discuss these works.

*The Cardiff Team* engages in pre-war avant-garde artistic discourse and is in dialogue with other key Cubist attempts to make sense of pan-European tensions between 1912 and August of 1914. Formal consideration cannot be divorced here from historical contextualization. The sources, history, and implications of the individual symbols of these works, and the conflicting understandings of identity that emerge when the symbols are imaged together as they

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4 Ibid., 34.

5 Delaunay’s canvases depict a rugby match. In the early years of the twentieth century, rugby was considered a form of football, albeit with more players on each team and a unique set of rules. Rugby union, as it later became known, with fifteen men per team, would not emerge as a distinct sport until several decades later. Though rugby and football are now different games with differing sets of rules, both games and their players emerged in the early twentieth century as symbols of physical prowess. Christopher Thomson writes of soccer as indicative of creativity and finesse in French imagination, while the rugby “type” of soccer was seen as powerful and violent. For fans, both sports represented French courage. See Christopher S. Thompson, *The Tour de France: A Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 96, and Philip Dine, *French Rugby Football: A Cultural History* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2001).
are in the three versions of *The Cardiff Team*, all demand attention. The city, the modern nation-state, and international communities are three dominant constructs present in this group of works. Since “identity” is never a singular entity, these three broad categories inevitably overlap with and contradict each other.

Delaunay’s writings point to his antithetical and shifting political and personal allegiances. They consistently emphasize his engagement, in some form, with his own sense of self and belonging to a larger collectivity. Much of his correspondence suggests fervent xenophobia, increasingly so as the First World War progressed. Delaunay’s relation to French nationalism is as complex as the term itself: we can trace the concept of nationalism in France back to the revolutionary period, when the idea of “the nation” was deployed by the new political order to garner mass support. Nationalism rallied likeminded groups while alienating others; during the July Monarchy, the term began to denote a broader set of basic values and sense of shared identity by diverse sections of people living within French political borders.\(^6\) At times, Delaunay subscribes to a xenophobic understanding of national identity that reacts to the arrival of immigrants onto French soil, suggesting that his own sense of Frenchness is at odds with anything understood as “foreign.”\(^7\) However, several notes the artist penned suggest a desire to achieve international success, both elsewhere in Europe and in North America. Delaunay’s participation in the 1912 Blaue Reiter Exhibition in Munich and the 1913 Armory Show in New York City further indicate his interest in life beyond French borders.

Zeev Sternhell writes that the decades following the Franco-Prussian War in France were characterized by revolt against bourgeois parliamentary political culture in favor of popular and

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\(^7\)Ibid., 127.
authoritarian nationalism. In this period in particular, French nationalism is difficult to consider as a singular entity, though it can be understood broadly as Eugen Weber does: a selfless desire to secure power for the nation.\footnote{Eugen Weber, \textit{The Nationalist Revival in France, 1905-1914} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 2.} French jingoism during the First World War drew upon discourses of the military offensive and the desire to accumulate power developed prior to 1914; Delaunay’s struggle with Frenchness during 1912 and 1913 is but one reflection of this cultural and political climate, and indicates the fraught trajectory by which the artist and his works entered the War. The period preceding the First World War witnessed widespread struggles on the part of the government, the populace, and artists to make sense of personal and collective identities. Though Delaunay is certainly not exemplary of the French public at this time, or even of Cubist artists, his case points to the importance of complicating oversimplified narratives of nationalism, identity, and wartime cultural intolerance.

Art historical scholarship has neglected Delaunay’s engagement with pre-war nationalism in its various meanings and the different ideas implicated in and conveyed by his athletic figures. Recent scholarship on Delaunay, such as Roland Wetzel’s essays in a 2008 Kunstmuseum Basel catalogue, addresses the most prevalent symbols in the artist’s work. In discussing the airplane, its personal significance to the artist, and the mixing of abstract color forms with representational imagery, Wetzel considers politics sparingly, primarily to suggest that the artist maintained a lifelong fascination with Paris.\footnote{Roland Wetzel, \textit{Robert Delaunay: Hommage a Blériot} (Basel: Kunstmuseum Basel, 2008), 8-13.} Other scholars such as Michel Hoog and Sherry Buckberrough have written about Delaunay’s engagement with internationalism; the Eiffel Tower, for Buckberrough, is a “long established symbol of human constructive capabilities” and 1914’s
*Hommage à Blériot* is about the “assimilation of universal energy.” Mark Rosenthal’s 1997 essays on the artist focus, on the other hand, on the specifically French implications of Delaunay’s symbolism. Rosenthal argues that the imaged Tower speaks to *French* technological prowess and a “dreamy” kind of patriotism, though he stops short of considering the ways that constructed identities overlap and inform each other in these works, focusing instead on the formal innovations and Parisian references in Delaunay’s paintings.11

Gordon Hughes, in his recent monograph on Delaunay, argues that the artist largely sheds his representational content in order to examine optical structure.12 This argument does not fully apply to *The Cardiff Team* paintings. Despite the artist’s lifelong interest in uncovering the cognitive processes behind vision, the representational imagery he chooses in these works *is* significant. One of the most troubling aspects of this group of paintings is the disjuncture between their shared title and the potential nationality of the players. Titling these pictures *The Cardiff Team* suggests that the players represent that specific Welsh rugby team. Hughes, however, presents compelling evidence that Delaunay’s figures are taken from French photographs of French rugby teams. Resolving this opposition between title and subject requires careful consideration of what kinds of source material the artist had access to in person and in the media, and the possible political implications of erasing and/or displacing the actual Cardiff players in favor of French stand-ins. This contradiction is not the result of an oversight: the artist deliberately puts the Cardiff and French teams in a match, with title versus subject matter

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potentially reflecting more deeply ingrained nationalist anxieties. Yet rather than seeking direct correlations between Delaunay’s representational imagery and political movements, it is more useful to consider how extreme political factions and theories may have informed the artist’s work, much as Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighten have done in addressing the constellation of discourses and movements surrounding European pre-war modernists.

The first chapter begins with the paintings themselves, and how precedents in Delaunay’s oeuvre inform *The Cardiff Team*. Here I examine the symbols and their possible implications, both building upon and challenging what Wetzel, Buckberrough, and Rosenthal have posited about the Tower, the Ferris wheel, and the biplane. The second chapter addresses the human representational imagery in the paintings and explores how early sporting history engages with nationalism, militarism, and internationalism. Finally, the last chapter considers other identities in the paintings as well as in Delaunay’s prior canvases. Delaunay’s international exhibition history further complicates his own highly nationalist utterances and pictorial messages. The city provides a setting in which the artist explores and transgresses his self-proclaimed national, cultural, and artistic allegiances. Paris, specifically, emerges as a crucial entity with which to identify, adding to the dialogue between France, Delaunay, and the rest of the world.

To claim that Delaunay’s personal views were muddled is an understatement. His representational language in *The Cardiff Team* is unique for blending identifiable landmarks and sports teams with shattered planes of color. The pictures do not clearly illustrate the artist’s political or theoretical views in 1912, nor the conflicted turns they would take leading up to and during the First World War. We can, however, discern a relationship between form and conflicted political positions. Delaunay reaches a midway point in *The Cardiff Team* between optical abstraction and politically charged representational imagery, and French nationalism and
his dissatisfaction with the limitations of being “just” French. Just as no “solution” exists to the pictorial strategies in these paintings, there is similarly no easy way to summarize the artist’s political convictions. What emerges from close readings of the artist’s work, writings, and exhibition history validates the claim that art is able to participate in political discourse. In Delaunay’s case, this discourse is complex and contradictory, much like the disjuncture between title and subject, allowing for fruitful inquiry into the ways we might situate *The Cardiff Team* pictures in their socio-political milieu.
Chapter 1: Symbols

The three large canvases that, in addition to various studies and sketches, make up The Cardiff Team confront the viewer with their jumble of bodies and technological fragments. All three versions contain block lettering in the form of advertising posters and, in the case of the first and third images, Delaunay’s name. The imagery in all three paintings, angular and flat, pushes up against the picture plane, negating our attempts to read spatial depth into these scenes. Color and movement flow throughout each canvas. We are confronted by a mix of planar fragmentation and what Hughes terms an “overly representational idiom” in relation to the artist’s other major works. All three works are overwhelming, both individually and especially when considered together. Hughes writes that these are “images of aerial vision,” full of “high-impact visual stimuli and mass-cultural images.” This description is apt, for our eyes bounce from figure to architecture, from clouds to poster—from the street to the sky and back again. This chapter will first address each of the three versions separately before examining their common motifs.

The first version, currently at the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich, leaves an initial impression of being sketch-like, and perhaps unfinished (see figure 1). Delaunay has applied large fields of watered-down pigment in rectangular planes to the canvas. As such, much of the white canvas pushes through between color blocks. In certain places, the artist has helped this

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13Hughes, 66.
14Ibid., 67.
process along by outlining curves in stark white. However, our eye is first drawn to a golden rectangle slightly to the left, on which the name ASTRA, a French manufacturer of airplanes, balloons, and airships founded in 1908, is clearly printed in crimson. ASTRA’s advertisement leads our gaze up to a white biplane floating in a cerulean sky. This shell of a plane trails triangular clouds behind it, which seem to radiate from a bright red Ferris wheel, cropped almost exactly in half. The wheel appears to be standing in mid-ground, for behind it is a tall conical tower in slate grey, nearly blending into the white and blue atmosphere. All around these structures, men crouch and leap for a rugby ball. One figure ascends, catching the ball far above his competitors. The ball here is not nearly as striking as the bright white halo surrounding it. Pictorial fragmentation makes it difficult to discern the exact number of players: the exposed canvas partially swallows a figure on the far left, while those in the mid-ground share planes of color with their neighbors and the lawn around them. Enmeshed in color and architecture, these figures are connected in a continuous upward motion.

The air and ground are rendered in chaotic, fragmented planes. These call to mind the disks that Delaunay painted throughout his career, which reflected a kind of dynamism radiating from whatever mechanical or human forms featured in the work. Though in this version of The Cardiff Team, angular planes replace round disks, the forms are still so pattern-like as to confound our ability to see them as natural elements. Delaunay’s life-long exploration of what he termed “simultaneity” is evident here. The concept refers to painted form or color’s ability to stimulate optical perception, which forces the viewer to become aware of the transcendence of

15Wetzel, 41.

expansion and movement.\textsuperscript{17} It is certainly easy to detect movement in this canvas. The contrasting shades colliding with each other, in both the figures and their environment, emphasize the speed at which they are moving. Despite the crispness of these planes, they bleed into and overlap one another, especially in the sky and grass, indicating the transience of the depicted movement. The prewar period was marked in part by an overall interpenetration of science and art, with both acting as tools with which to examine modernity in all its iterations.\textsuperscript{18} In his analysis of machine imagery in this period, Robert Herbert suggests that in Delaunay’s work, “both form and subject would reveal the pervasive universal flux in which modern machinery is situated.”\textsuperscript{19} Machines, humans, and the energy they produce are thus merged.

The team plays in a space pushed right up against the Eiffel Tower and the Ferris wheel. Like the background structures, the team members’ bodies are fragmented into different, overlapping angles, so that the viewer can see their movement. The only element separating the bodies from this architecture is a green horizontal banner, containing the same tones as the field, on which the letters DELAUN are printed. The corporate name ASTRA and the truncated signature are in dialogue in this work, though they differ from each other. The airplane logo seems pasted onto the canvas, separate from the action around it, while the artist’s name is integrated into the scene, calling to mind sidelines in a sports arena. The green on which the name is emblazoned melts into the field, and a player’s head even rises into the lettering, further obscuring it.

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{17} Ibid.
\bibitem{19} Ibid.
\end{thebibliography}
The second canvas, currently at the Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, does not deviate from the first version’s general frenzied composition (see figure 2). Here, the ASTRA poster, the plane, wheel, and Tower are in the same places, though the plane here appears to be emerging from the wheel. Notably, Delaunay’s name is absent. The scrubbed, raw canvas of the first version is replaced with highly saturated paint. The sky’s blueness radiates from the center of the image, becoming darker in bands towards the outer corners of the painting. The biplane retains its shell-like structure, but the Ferris wheel is less crisp and more sketch-like. The curve of the Tower no longer corresponds to the curve of the wheel, which here erases nearly half of the Tower, replacing it with pale blue sky and clouds.

The players here lose even more of their individuality. Where they lacked faces in the first version, here they lack limbs and heads. The ascending figure dissolves into the sky above him, and his extended arm fuses into the Ferris wheel rigging, while the rugby ball floats as a crisp pink sphere. The color red dominates here: the planes that form each element of the composition bleed into each other much more dramatically, with greater speed and urgency, than in the first version. In place of Delaunay’s name, on the sidelines, the words MAGIC and PARIS appear on a crimson field. The word CONSTRUCTION is printed faintly below the red logo, and the tail end of another, unknown, word on a white banner pushes up against the gold rectangle.

The third version, in the collection of the Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, lacks the red tint of the second and the scrubbed-on paint of the first (see figure 3). Here, the paint is lightly applied, but in a seemingly more deliberate manner, with a finer brush. More detail is evident as a result, in both the lettering and in the players’ faces. The placement of all human and inanimate figures remains consistent with the other two works. The Tower and sky have taken on
a purple tinge. The sky and clouds around the simplified airplane are trapezoidal, and the Tower
has not been truncated by the wheel. The wheel, in turn, is more clearly delineated, with
individual compartments and beams rendered in sharp red lines. The ASTRA poster is even more
developed, still in gold with red lettering, though the text below it is nearly illegible. We can
make out “Société” and “Aeropla…,” but the other two lines are blurred with thin purple
pigment. Here, the sideline banner is green and reads DELAUNAY NEW YORK-PARIS-. The
players are also more clearly defined. The artist renders each torso and each limb as highly
muscular, with exaggerated bulges and curves interspersed with planes of white and blue stripes,
and solid orange and purple uniforms. The field is cut with yellow planes that both define and
truncate the men’s body parts.

**Tower**

Though the bodies are rendered and colored differently in each version, the Eiffel Tower
remains consistent in its placement and general form. Devoid of detail, it appears as a conical
behemoth extending from the middle to the top of the canvas in each work. Delaunay began
painting the Eiffel Tower in 1909, when it was just twenty years old, and maintained a lifelong
fascination with it. Built in 1889 for that year’s Exposition Universelle, the Tower had by 1910
become a cult-like object for French citizens and visitors alike, and was one of the most
photographed sites in the world. It is difficult to comprehend as a twenty-first century viewer
how utterly strange the Tower would have appeared in 1889—a 1000-foot-tall structure (the
tallest in the world at that point) made of steel, in a seemingly endless cage-like design. In 1910,
Jean Metzinger identified Delaunay’s pictorialized conceptions of the Tower as a denial of

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Renaissance perspectival conventions, and as a “confounding of our rational expectations.”\textsuperscript{21} By that year, according to Hoog, the Tower had come widely to be seen as a symbol of modern technology and the endless potential of European engineering.\textsuperscript{22} Hoog likens the Eiffel Tower to the Tower of Babel; both towers are marked by pride in origins and defiance of prior limitations of construction materials. Hoog’s analogy seems less farfetched when we remember that after the 1889 World’s Fair, the Tower served as an international communications post. It thereby facilitated correspondence at an unprecedented rate, rooting trans-European and transatlantic communication in the capital of France.

Few artists painted the Tower in this era, though Georges Seurat rendered it before Delaunay. In 1889, Seurat produced a small (nine by six inch) painting of the Tower (see figure 4). According to Michelle Foa, this work occupies an unusual place in the artist’s oeuvre, as it is neither a landscape nor a picture with human figures, and is somewhere between a sketch and finished picture.\textsuperscript{23} Seurat’s Tower is presented in a frontal view, with its base rendered in hazy yet discernible pointillist detail. As our eye ascends the Tower, the structure fades into the sky, and thereby appears infinitely tall (it was, in fact, not yet finished when Seurat painted it). Foa reads the Tower as a representation of new modes of vision enabled by technological modernity. The Tower enabled panoramic views of the city, while itself acting as a new and striking visual feature in the Parisian skyline.\textsuperscript{24} Foa writes that Seurat’s Tower is rooted in Paris, symbolizing and physically adding to the city’s “fascination with light.” That it emanated electric light, and

\textsuperscript{21}Jean Metzinger as quoted by Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighten in \textit{Cubism and Culture} (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2001), 96.

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., 57.


\textsuperscript{24}Ibid., 199.
was often compared to an urban lighthouse, further emphasizes the Parisian-ness of the structure as well as its connection to the world beyond.\textsuperscript{25}

For Raymond Duchamp-Villon, writing in January 1914, construction in iron belongs to an age of transition.\textsuperscript{26} He refers to the Eiffel Tower as the “pinnacle” of an era of extreme evolution. With the Tower, “the iron cycle is now complete, but the chain of human effort has, through it, been enriched by another link.”\textsuperscript{27} The key word here is \textit{human}: Buckberrough also understands the Tower to be a symbol of human constructive capabilities.\textsuperscript{28} Delaunay used the Tower’s form as a unifying element. The Tower served as a point of visual unity, both theoretically (as a means of connecting pre-industrial France to an era of technological modernity) and compositionally.\textsuperscript{29} In all three versions of \textit{The Cardiff Team}, the Tower serves as an anchor, directing our gaze up and around the rest of the image. Its curvature connects technology, visible in the sky and background, with the human body, embodied by the athletic figures.

Whereas in Delaunay’s prior studies, in which the Tower appears monumental, detailed, and, to borrow Gustav Vriesen’s term, “glorious,” the Tower in the first version in particular is reduced and relegated to the furthest background.\textsuperscript{30} It appears as a mirage, sharing its blue tones

\textsuperscript{25}Ibid., 199-203.


\textsuperscript{27}Ibid., 618.

\textsuperscript{28}Buckberrough writes that the Tower, like the airplane, is an invention of human ingenuity, gathering people around it. The Tower functioned in part to record weather, which, for Buckberrough connects it to the “forces of universal nature,” making them accessible to the masses below. See Buckberrough, 48, 232.

\textsuperscript{29}Ibid., 49.

\textsuperscript{30}Vriesen, 32.
with the sky around it. The Tower stands watch over the scene, and resonates much more with the idea of global communication than with French-specific pride. We can contrast this notion of a “global” tower with a more blatantly “French” tower: in Delaunay’s 1911-1912 La tour rouge, the colors of the French tricolor flag dominate the canvas (see figure 5). In this work, a monumental crimson tower pushes through white clouds into a deep blue sky. The only other tones in the work are shades of grey. Whereas La tour rouge portrays violent movement and solid mechanical detail, rendered in fewer tones than we typically see in the artist’s work, in The Cardiff Team, the Tower is unassuming and omniscient in the way it anchors the action and figures surrounding it, calling to mind the kind of dependability one might expect from an unglamorous communications tower.

The Tower’s muted nature reflects its utilitarian international role. Yet Duchamp-Villon also writes of the Tower as the culminating example of a tradition of French innovation going back to Gothic architecture. Duchamp-Villon directly connects the Tower’s engineers to medieval church builders, writing that both are representative of a race whose “new iron pyramid was the product of national genius.”31 This imagined link between France and a Gothic past was propagated in these years by, among others, Robert Pelletier’s right-wing Ligue celtique française, founded in 1911. The Ligue understood the French common people as an incarnation of “Celtic” national genius, thereby opposed to foreign “Latinism.” This group took Gothic culture to be a natural continuation of Celticism, and conflated an imagined Celtic past with a more recent, though equally homogenized, Gothic culture.32 Pelletier praised Gothic churches

31 Duchamp-Villon as quoted by Antliff and Leighten in Cubism Reader, 627.
32 Those who subscribed to this ideology championed Henri Bergson, as his philosophy of intuition was deemed compatible with what Antliff terms the “idealist and pantheistic spirit found in Gothic art and bardic poetry.” Albert Gleizes and his contemporaries understood France’s racial roots to stem from a
built by medieval guilds as evidence of a national tradition rooted in the Celtic (and thereby Gothic) sensibilité of the common French people.\textsuperscript{33} To Pelletier, the Eiffel Tower was a contemporary manifestation of the Gothic roots of France. Gothic cathedrals such as Notre Dame de Paris were born of the same kinds of “constructive desire” and “boundless ambition” evident in the Tower’s construction.\textsuperscript{34} Pelletier imagined a national history of technological innovation, with the iron Eiffel Tower as a physical reference to the unprecedented engineering of a specific Gothic past. Similarly, Duchamp-Villon’s article considers the architects and engineers who had designed and constructed the Eiffel Tower to be direct descendants of the builders of the Chartres Cathedral.\textsuperscript{35}

Delaunay had a long-standing interest in Gothic architecture. As early as 1909, he began a series of seven paintings of the interior of the thirteenth century St. Sévérin church (see, for example, figure 6). This late Gothic church, located in Paris’ Latin Quarter, was near the artist’s studio, and was likely chosen due to its accessibility.\textsuperscript{36} In these works, Delaunay emphasizes the structure’s high arches and vaulting, paying particular attention to the ambulatory. The artist has created a sense of depth in this series, with stripe upon stripe of narrow blue vaulting, leading back to pointed windows. The depicted space closes in on the viewer, seemingly enveloping us in cool stone. The narrow upward curve that each vault follows in these cathedral studies closely

\textsuperscript{33}Antliff and Leighton, \textit{Cubism Reader}, 625.

\textsuperscript{34}Ibid.


\textsuperscript{36}Buckerrbough, 40.
mimics the tall ellipse forming the Eiffel Tower in each version of The Cardiff Team. Indeed, Delaunay approached the Tower in much the same way that he approached the cathedral: he sought to conquer each subject by investigating its construction, minutely rendering the ways that color is carried by line, through a kind of perspective heavily influenced by Cézanne’s geometric pictorial language.\(^{37}\) Delaunay was interested in Henri Bergson’s theory of \textit{durée}, of which simultaneity is a kind of pictorialization. \textit{Durée} speaks to unity of experience, or continuity, experienced sensually. Roger Allard understood Cubism’s pictorial strategies as a means of grasping the collective \textit{durée} of the French people.\(^{38}\) According to Allard, it was difficult if not impossible to rationally discern a singular past; artists following Bergson allied French classicism with a kind of irrationalism, or unquantifiable continuity. Instead of subscribing to a notion of a singular French heritage, they sought to explore the immeasurable continuity between \textit{all} of the past and present in their works.\(^{39}\)

The \textit{St. Sévérin} and \textit{Cardiff Team} paintings speak to this understanding of a French classical past predicated on “radical heterogeneity” that can only be accessed through pictorial innovation. The \textit{St. Sévérin} series suggests that the Eiffel Tower’s origins might be located in Gothic precedents.\(^{40}\) The way Delaunay renders the Tower, with such similar lines, further emphasizes this heritage, as he connects the Tower back to the Gothic. Delaunay wrote in a 1912

\(^{37}\)Delaunay as paraphrased by Vriesen, 26.

\(^{38}\)\textit{Cubism and Culture}, 113.

\(^{39}\)Ibid.

\(^{40}\)Antliff and Leighten have written about Albert Gleizes and the Cubist-oriented Société Normande de Peinture Moderne, founded in 1909, and their efforts to celebrate “Gothic” subject matter in their paintings, using Cubist distortions as a means of connecting idealized Gallo-Celticism to contemporary France. Jean Metzinger, a member of this faction, included Delaunay in his list of artists who understood the “classical” French tradition to originate in Gallo-Celticism. See Antliff and Leighten, \textit{Cubism and Culture}, 113-114.
letter to Franz Marc that “clarity is the quality of the French race, but it is a quality that helps only French inventors…[and] I have to be satisfied with that heritage.” By “clarity,” Delaunay could be referring to mental clarity, pictorial clarity, or technological foresight. His use of the term might speak to a desire to capture the continuity between present and future technology, monuments to past French achievements, and the optical illusions they produce. It also emphasizes the artist’s struggle to reconcile subjective vision with a collective French Gothic heritage.

**Ferris Wheel**

Designed and built by an American civil engineer, George Washington Gale Ferris, for the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago, the first Ferris wheel would have been an American counterpart to the Eiffel Tower, itself constructed for an equivalent French exposition. The Grande Roue de Paris—the wheel painted by Delaunay in *The Cardiff Team* pictures—was nearly twenty meters taller than the original Chicago version, and built in Paris just seven years later, when it was installed on the Avenue de Suffren near the Eiffel Tower for the 1900 Universal Exposition. Delaunay’s rendering of the wheel as significantly smaller than the Tower in the majority of his studies of it does seem to suggest that the Tower—an entirely French innovation—dwarfs the American structure.

Whereas the Tower in *The Cardiff Team* works is devoid of recognizable mechanical detail, the Ferris wheel in each canvas is immediately identifiable as such. In all three versions, the wheel is cut in half, with its upward curve mimicking, and in the first and third versions, fitting into, the curve of the Tower. While the second version’s wheel is blurred, seemingly

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41 Delaunay as translated and quoted by Rosenthal, 129.

emanating from the central player’s arm, it, as in the other versions, has its seats and steel rigging visible. The Ferris wheel is another recurring symbol in Delaunay’s oeuvre. In 1912, he painted a work called *The Three Windows, The Tower and the Wheel*, wherein the wheel is rendered as a whole sphere instead of a half (see figure 7). Buckberrough writes that, because the wheel is depicted as much smaller than the Eiffel Tower in the aforementioned work, Delaunay clearly did not see it as equal in importance to the Tower. Instead, the wheel is a “secondary” modern, mechanical object through which the artist could explore simultaneity.⁴³ But in each of *The Cardiff Team* paintings, the wheel soars to equal or greater heights than the Tower. The wheel appears to lean on the Tower in each version, and the two monuments are both structurally incomplete. The wheel shares with the Tower its status as a notable iron monument on the Parisian skyline. The wheel seemed, as early as 1908 in Jules Romain’s *La Vie Unanime*, an apt symbol of modernity.⁴⁴ In recalling Delaunay’s fascination with Cézanne’s pictorial innovations, we can also connect Cézanne’s use of carefully balanced lines and geometric forms with how the wheel must have appeared to someone like Delaunay.⁴⁵ The wheel also calls to mind Delaunay’s exploration of color and contrasts, constantly spinning, refracting light and color in the middle of the city.

But the wheel in *The Cardiff Team* canvases is not a whole, and it does not convey a sense of refracted light and simultaneous color contrasts. Instead, Delaunay presents us with large fragments of the iron monolith. As such, it is hard to accept Buckberrough’s argument that the wheel was for Delaunay another tool through which to celebrate simultaneity and movement. The wheel in each version is static, for a half-wheel cannot spin. In one of Delaunay’s collected

⁴³Buckberrough, 151.

⁴⁴Ibid., 156.

⁴⁵Ibid., 157.
postcards, depicting the Eiffel Tower and Parisian skyline at the Exposition Universelle de Paris of 1889, there is clearly a Ferris wheel in the right background, and in another two postcards from 1910, the wheel appears to be in the same place in relation to the Tower. In many of Delaunay’s watercolor, ink, and oil sketches of the Eiffel Tower, the wheel is rendered, usually as a half or quarter fragment, in this same position and to a similar scale. It seems to be only in 1912 that the artist brings the Tower and wheel close together, in The Three Windows, The Tower and the Wheel, and, of course, in The Cardiff Team.

Hughes writes that the wheel failed to reach the same iconic status as the Tower, and instead presented viewers with bird’s-eye views of the city while itself standing for the urban jumble below.\(^{46}\) The official guide to the 1900 Exposition Universelle describes the Grande Roue as offering enchanting views of the city, surrounding urban parks, and the Exposition, from one hundred meters in the air. From this perspective, the wheel allowed one to make sense of, or at least survey, the modernizing city. Though the guide further introduces the wheel as “indispensable” to Paris, the wheel’s ability to offer sweeping views has no specifically French undertones.\(^{47}\) The wheel simply allows for an elevated vantage point from which to both celebrate and take advantage of modern engineering. The guide does, however, omit any mention of the Grande Roue’s English construction or American precedent. Though Ferris’s invention has been reimagined for Parisian audiences and rebuilt on Parisian soil, much larger than the Chicago iteration, the wheel’s presence in The Cardiff Team paintings suggests that what was initially American technology has been invited into the French cityscape to participate in the creation of a kind of transatlantic industrial collage.

\(^{46}\)Hughes, 92-93.

**Biplane**

Together, the Tower and wheel direct our eyes to the biplane. The plane’s placement in all three versions is nearly identical—floating atop the canvases, away from the center. The airplane here is a 1908 Modell Voisin, a model frequently imaged on pre-First World War postcards.\(^4^8\) Delaunay’s depiction of the airplane is in part a reflection of the increasingly pervasive presence of the machines in the environment around him, as well as another homage to his postcard collection. French enthusiasm and pride for aviation technology was at an all time high in 1913.\(^4^9\) Delaunay himself was deeply enamored of the airplane, and took frequent trips to the airport at Buc to observe takeoffs and landings.\(^5^0\) Roland Wetzel writes that in *The Cardiff Team*, the actual technical aspects of the plane are deemphasized in favor of postcard imagery.\(^5^1\) Indeed, in all three versions, the planes are so pared down that they hardly look capable of exceeding the heights achieved by modernity.\(^5^2\) It is difficult to read speed, defense, and international communication in these planes, which seem to have been folded and tossed from the Tower, much like a paper airplane.

The airplane is another symbol that features repeatedly in the artist’s work. In his 1914 *Hommage à Blériot*, Delaunay’s celebration of French aviation engineer Louis Blériot’s inaugural flight across the English Channel, he renders the Tower and airplane together (see [48 Wetzel, 40.](#)

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\(^4^8\)Wetzel, 40.

\(^4^9\)Robert Wohl writes that the French press took a great deal of pride in the fact that Louis Blériot’s inaugural flight across the English Channel had been accomplished by a Frenchman in an airplane of French design. *Le Matin* reported the event as an example of “French genius” carrying off “yet one more victory.” See Robert Wohl, *A Passion for Wings, 1908-1918* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 57.

\(^5^0\)Buckberrough, 228.

\(^5^1\)Wetzel, 40.

\(^5^2\)Ibid., 31.
figure 8). This monumental painting directly connects the plane to the Eiffel Tower, another of France’s recent engineering feats. Where Delaunay’s cathedrals hint at modern French technology’s indebtedness to its Gothic origins, the airplanes in Delaunay’s works speak to the current and future manifestations of French industry. In *Hommage* and multiple other airplane studies, Delaunay renders the mechanical apparatus of the plane: the propellers, air ducts, and blades. He exaggerates their curvature, allowing them to reverberate into the surrounding environment, which gives these works a sense of movement. Delaunay was fascinated by the challenge of rendering dynamism pictorially.\(^5\) Buckberrough observes that in Delaunay’s works, the airplanes seem more important than the pilots who fly them.\(^4\) This is certainly evident in *The Cardiff Team*, as in all the versions the planes lack any human intervention. In the first version of *The Cardiff Team*, the plane is rendered in such a similar manner to the clouds that it appears to dissolve into the sky. In all three versions, the planes do not swirl, but rather float like the trapezoidal clouds behind them. The Modell Voisins in these works do not seem to celebrate the universal conquering of nature nor do they seem to “show off” French innovation.

In *Hommage*, Delaunay mixes “unmediated” vision in the form of the airplanes, Tower, and wheel, likely discernible from the streets in 1913, with heavily mediated visual imagery in postcard and painted form. It is significant that the Tower and airplane are imaged together. While Blériot’s plane made its inaugural flight from Calais to Dover, by situating the ascending machines in relation to the Tower in a *Parisian* landscape, Delaunay claims this moment in the development of aviation for France. Robert Wohl writes that, prior to 1914, the French considered themselves “the winged nation.” France’s claim was highly contested by the United

\(^5\) Herbert, 1289.  
\(^4\) Buckberrough, 228.
States: the Wright Brothers’ developments in aviation technology were regularly at odds in these early years with French innovation. The true inventor of the airplane is a matter of dispute, and this arrangement reflects of a kind of international competition. We can detect a degree of French pride in the Hommage canvas in its celebration and projection of France’s perceived technological hegemony, with an implied continuity between Celtic, Gothic French heritage and contemporary technological prowess.

Delaunay’s symbolism in the three versions of The Cardiff Team carries significant national weight, linking modern innovation to storied racial origins. Yet by bringing the cathedral-like Tower and the biplane, with its contested national roots, into close physical proximity with the American Ferris wheel, the artist also renders a kind of transatlantic cooperation. Further, the optical science these symbols reference continue to emphasize universalism. The more general themes of modern engineering they convey bring us back to a kind of pan-Europeanism, or internationalism, thereby further emphasizing the ongoing tension between French pride and universalism. The Cardiff Team works, as well as other Delaunay canvases depicting cathedrals, the Eiffel Tower, and airplanes, exist at this intersection of French national pride and optimism about international exchange. Modernity—industrialism, urbanization—was certainly not tied exclusively to France, and Delaunay was aware of this. Celebrating technology in this general sense diverts focus from the individual and the specific nation, and instead celebrates the durée of industrialism in the urban sphere. Light and color, as they bounce off of steel and bodies, connect these technical icons, regardless of their national origin. Paris, however, remains the geographical anchor on which all these entities rest.

55Wohl, 3-5.
Chapter 2: Sports

In the early twentieth century, sports constituted one of the ways in which France measured itself against the rest of the world. France and Britain attempted to outdo each other in technological arenas in the years leading up to the First World War, and sports brought young men from these same nations into highly physical and often violent contact. Long considered a British pastime, team sports remained an upper-class pursuit on the Continent, with amateur leagues emerging slowly in the 1870s and 1880s. Only when, around 1900, individual policy makers began to recognize sports’ potential to discipline youth, train future soldiers, and channel masculine physical energy, were football and rugby considered appropriate for young French men. Even with educators acknowledging organized athleticism’s benefits, football and rugby retained their distinctly non-French taint. Delaunay’s depiction of rugby in France represents popular cultural exchange and the attendant tensions between turn-of-the-century France and its immediate neighbors. Where the repeated symbols explored in chapter one oscillate between internationalism and French pride, the foregrounded playing figures in each of the three versions of The Cardiff Team are a more aggressive foray into internationalism, while simultaneously reinforcing the idea of French physical strength. These pictorial allusions and their multifaceted meanings act much like opposing teams, ultimately ending up in a kind of tie between xenophobia and cultural openness.

The idea of a nation seeking to strengthen itself after a military defeat is not new, though physical and ideological fortification through sports was unprecedented at this time. According
to Eric Hobsbawm, sports adopt all the institutional characteristics of an invented tradition. The rituals associated with playing, viewing, rivalries, and professionalization in the fin-de siècle reflect a collision of social anxieties after the Franco-Prussian War in 1870 and the possibilities of national unity offered by mass participation in sports. Football provided a means for national identification and community building in this period, both necessary after a crushing military defeat and in preparation for another international war. If we consider Delaunay’s paintings in the cultural and political contexts in which he worked, we can detect these intersections between French exceptionalism, Celtic heritage, national cohesion, and sports matches on his canvases.

Comparisons with other renditions of sports in this period make clear that though Delaunay’s particular method of negotiating pictorial fragmentation and French sports prowess is unique, he was not alone in exploring broader themes of competition and teamsmanship by rendering bodies at play. In 1908, just two years before his death, Henri Rousseau, one of Delaunay’s closest friends and mentors, painted *Joueurs de football* (see figure 9). Unlike Delaunay’s paintings, Rousseau’s canvas is devoid of pictorial fragmentation, though its dramatic marionette-like figures are disconcerting. Rousseau has painted four men: two closer to the foreground in blue and white striped uniforms, and two in the background in red and white stripes. These men are clearly of the social elite: their uniforms are impeccably clean, and this neatness extends to their surroundings. They skip on an impossibly smooth ground, framed by rows of parallel trees and pattern-like foliage. The image is, at first glance, one of play. Its unsettling nature emerges from the too-perfect environment and the overt aggression of one of


57 Ibid.

the players. The man most prominent in the foreground has tossed a rugby ball into the air, and his opponent reaches out in what appears to be a jab, seemingly striking the first man in the side. Hardly a celebration of physical exercise and “healthy” competition, the work shows the game descending into unsportsman-like disarray. These men are not members of teams. Rather, they are individualistic, and the only interaction between figures is one of minor violence. Delaunay’s figures merge together; Rousseau’s is a scene of strangely stoic disintegration.

Where Rousseau’s image presents a scene of overt competition subverting upper-class leisure, André Lhote’s depiction of football presents teamwork and exceptionalism. His Rugby Match of 1917 (see figure 10) exhibits uniformed male players with flattened torsos overlapping with and blending into each other. We see a kind of angular distortion in their musculature similar to Delaunay’s third version of The Cardiff Team. The neatness of Rousseau’s figures mimics the austerity of their outdoor environment, while the patterning of the players’ clothing in Lhote’s work mirrors the shapes in this surrounding environment. Unlike in Rousseau’s work, but similar to Delaunay’s canvases, Lhote’s bodies are distinctly part of the landscape in which they play. While The Cardiff Team and Lhote’s work celebrate contact sport through a similar language of pictorial abstraction, Delaunay’s particular incorporation of advertisement-like lettering bordering his players is unique.59 Lhote’s background lettering—“EVENT,” short for “événement”—might refer to the match he depicts. Delaunay’s lettering, with its place names and signature of sorts, is more specific, and comments on contemporary urban advertising and broadened communication, both enabled by the airplane and Tower. His painting encapsulates excitement and visual stimuli of the urban center in the form of new building technology, the collision of bodies, printed material, and the blurring of all of them together. Rousseau’s scene

59 Hughes argues that Delaunay’s depictions of sport stand apart from these aforementioned examples, and from other French depictions of the same topic. See Hughes, 69.
appears to take place in a garden, removed from the city. Lhote’s playing field is so dominated by atmospheric clouds as to obfuscate any clear sense of an urban environment. In The Cardiff Team, Paris anchors the game, itself acting as an active participant in the rugby match.

The purple-clad figure in the first Cardiff Team picture is one of the image’s most dominant features. He is clearly delineated from both the blue-and-white uniformed bodies around him and the ground and sky. The ball he catches appears to emerge from his arms, suggesting that his body has merged with the sport: he is one with the inanimate ball. The brightest point of the canvas is the white halo radiating from the ball; this figure achieves a kind of glory for having made contact with it. The rugby ball is much more elusive in the second version. Here, the ascending figure is as red as much of the background and several of his teammates. He has not made contact with the ball. His upper body dissolves into the sky, while the ball remains distinct and fully independent. The third version’s ball is the most recognizable as a rugby ball across all three paintings. There is a discernible difference between the leaping man’s black jersey and the brown ball. Here, the ball is solid. It is as much a prize as in the first version. We can discern the ball’s weight and the physical strain on the central figure. In the third version, the electric connection between man and object is deemphasized in favor of the action itself.

In all three versions, Delaunay depicts a lineout, a moment in the game when play has just been resumed: the player in the far left corner has thrown the ball to his teammate, the central ascending figure. The picture thereby captures an explosive moment when physical action has just begun. Each player in each canvas exhibits a stressed, anticipatory energy.

Though these bodies are static, the electric energy they radiate imparts a sense of motion to the works. These bodies in play are foregrounded against the aforementioned signs; The
*Cardiff Team* canvases thereby combine symbolism with physical action. Hughes suggests that, despite the work’s title, these players are not Welsh, but are actually French. Citing a photograph from the January 18, 1913 issue of the sports journal *Vie au grand air*, Hughes detects notable similarities between Delaunay’s figures and the French teams Stade Toulousain and Sporting club universitaire de France (see figure 11). The photograph appears to be the artist’s source material for his imaged players. Indeed, Delaunay’s central figure closely mimics the leaping man in the photograph. The paper clipping in question also shows evidence of the artist’s sketches for the background Eiffel Tower and Ferris wheel.

Even in black and white, the French teams from the magazine are clearly defined by their differently patterned uniforms. Team photos of Stade Toulousain from 1909 and 1912 indicate that their uniforms were red and black, as is still the case today. Though Delaunay renders the Stade Toulousain-inspired players in variations of red, purple, and black, he has further complicated the composition in each version by rendering three differently colored jerseys. At least three of the men in the first version wear blue and white stripes, while a *repoussoir* figure in the far right wears head-to-toe orange, and the ascending figure is in purple. The blue and white uniforms remain as such in the second version, while an opposing team is discernible in crimson. The team colors are less clear in the third version. Here, the blue and white stripes are again consistent, but the ascending man’s purple uniform is now black and purple, mirrored in part by an all-black teammate. Again Delaunay includes a red-orange *repoussoir* figure, whose team affiliation is unclear. It is possible that this figure represents a referee, as he stands apart from the

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60 Though the photograph that Hughes cites appears in a 1913 issue of the journal, archival images of the team in 1909 and 1912 demonstrate that their uniforms were the same as, or at least very similar to, their uniforms in 1913. The image from *Vie au grand air* shows the teams playing a match. The caption recounts that the Toulousains were victorious, and were the reigning champions from 1912. They beat SCUF 16 to 8. See Hughes, 72.
other men in both coloring and position. In the way the artist has abstracted figures from photographs and manipulated their original uniform colors, Delaunay seems to suggest that these are not distinct teams or team members, and are instead bodies forming part of a unified group.\footnote{Hughes, 72.}

In other words, rather than individual men, these bodies are fragmented in much the same way as all the other elements in each of the paintings. They are, in Hughes’s words, “bodies tangled up with life.”\footnote{Ibid., 73.} The players have been sourced from popular media, just like the biplane. Human bodies in fragmented action are imaged as urban ephemera, abstracted from life to photograph and thence to painterly intervention. Delaunay thus treats the body no differently from any other thing available for visual perception.

Though these bodies may be unspecific, even dehumanized, there still remains the question of how to explain the disjuncture between the paintings’ title and the French source material for the players. The photograph that Hughes cites is from 1913, after the paintings and their preliminary studies were begun in 1912, though it is possible that the artist began work on the pictures before having turned to this photograph for reference. Paris SCUF’s striped team uniforms from the early twentieth century are consistent with both the inspiration image and Delaunay’s rendered bodies, while the actual Cardiff Team’s uniforms at the turn of the twentieth century featured blue and black stripes.\footnote{eam photos of the team Paris SCUF from the organization’s website show that uniforms from 1905 and 1906 are consistent with Delaunay’s figures. The Cardiff Team’s official website outlines the evolution of the team’s uniform, and recounts that prior to the twentieth century, the team adopted a blue and black uniform. See “Histoire,” Site du SCUF Rugby-Paris, http://scufrugby.over-blog.com/archive/1906-02/ and “Cardiff Rugby Football Club-A History,” The Official Website of Cardiff RFC Blues and Blacks, http://www.cardiffrfc.com/Page/Content/1068.} This discrepancy between the Cardiff Team’s uniforms and those of the imaged players further indicates that Delaunay very likely used the Vie
photograph as inspiration. The actual Cardiff rugby team did travel to Paris regularly in 1911 and 1912 to play French teams, and was regarded as an impressive team by the French sports press. An article from the February 20, 1912 issue of *Le Journal* states that the Cardiff Team is so strong that French team Stade Français does not stand a chance of beating them.\(^6^4\) That the Cardiff team did visit Paris on a regular basis indicates that Delaunay would have had the opportunity to see the team play before beginning work on *The Cardiff Team*. As such, it is possible that Delaunay used the *Vie au grand air* image as a stand-in for action he witnessed in person—action that would have passed by too quickly for him to capture. The artist attempted to capture movement and urban ephemera in his works; his use of a 1913 image is less puzzling when considered in this light.

Beyond logistical reasons for Delaunay’s use of French teams as reference for the players identified in his title as Welsh, we can look again to the contemporary discourse surrounding the roots of French heritage for a more political explanation for the disjuncture between subject and title. If France was widely imagined to be Gothic, and thus, according to contemporary assumptions, Celtic, then it is likely that Delaunay is forging a pictorial connection between Celtic France and Celtic Wales and through it a kinship between Wales and France. Delaunay was clearly interested in this intersection. He chose the title for the paintings himself, as evidenced by his own writings in which he refers to these works as “*L’Équipe Cardiff*.”\(^6^5\) The combination of Welsh title and French source material acts as a bridge between these modern political entities. Much as the artist uses urban technology in the form of the French Eiffel Tower, the American Ferris wheel, and the biplane, whose origins belong to both nations, to

\(^6^4\) *Le Journal* (February 2 1912), 5.

bring opposite sides of the Atlantic into dialogue, he challenges our ability to discern any definite national origin for these bodies, instead offering us a Welsh-French hybrid. The players are both Welsh and French, playing on French soil, under technology that is both French and international.

Delaunay’s titular reference to Cardiff, the capital of Wales, and his imaged references to France also invoke sports’ initial classed British heritage. Though Wales and England should not be conflated, that Wales formed a part of Britain (both then and now) indicates that some cultural practices were shared between the two. In blending the competing nations together in one image, Delaunay forces us to consider the image an homage to the tensions and collaborations, as they relate to the development of sports, between Britain and France. Throughout Britain, horse racing, betting, rowing, and yachting by the mid nineteenth century had established connotations of vanity and idleness, traits seemingly reserved for the upper class. The first iterations of French sport were similar. The French educational system in the mid-nineteenth century did not yet prioritize athletics: the British model served as early inspiration for its general emphasis on morality and physicality. Team sports in the early twentieth century were, to some extent, transnational: standardized rules, international fan communities, and matches against foreign teams broadened sports such as soccer beyond England. Despite the transnational origins of team sports, these games were used as a means of reinforcing offensive and defensive postures within national boundaries through the conditioning of young male bodies.

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Though early team sports were inherently offensive in nature, few people outside the upper classes had free time for purely leisure activities; Eugen Weber writes of sports as the ultimate antiutilitarian pursuit.⁶⁹ Land-based sports in France, however, took on a militaristic aspect at the turn of the century. Skiing and hiking clubs, for example, facilitated exploration of the French landscape, thereby training future military recruits by conditioning young men to survey and trample large swatches of territory.⁷⁰ Though logistically, those participating in these early activities were not (yet) from the working class, the potential military benefits of athleticism necessarily reached across strict class divides, slowly permeating broader echelons of society. The beginnings of what Paul Dietschy terms the “universalist spirit” of French sports are evident here: French Enlightenment values of universal equality permeate discourses of physical training and “healthy” competition.⁷¹ In the *Cardiff Team* canvases, we can read a tension between equality and exceptionalism in the male bodies. While these bodies blend together in their fragmented planes of color, the pyramidal form created by ascending figures asserts the necessary fact that some of these bodies will triumph over the others.

It is easier to read competition than cooperation in *The Cardiff Team* paintings; the idea of competition reinforces the militaristic nature of sports in this period. Christopher Thompson writes of the role that bicycle racing played immediately after the First World War in symbolically reclaiming territory lost in 1870: conditioned French bodies physically traversing

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⁷⁰Ibid.

French land reaffirmed the existence of “an eternal France.” Sports reflects this kind of nationalist assertion in that it allows bodies to lay claim to politically charged space. Having large numbers of French men physically traverse terrain is a way of declaring the landscape’s Frenchness. Delaunay’s players are situated in a landscape that is identifiably French; its aforementioned symbols mark the space as Parisian. The players themselves, in their uniforms inspired by actual French teams, are part of this French landscape in which they play, despite being identified in the paintings’ title as Welsh. Their action further lays claim to their playing field. Like Blériot’s biplane, imaged as flying over Paris, these French bodies are a nationalist assertion of the space in which they move. Though they only traverse a confined urban terrain, and one not under dispute after the Franco Prussian War, their uniformed presence and physical action emphasize the Frenchness of their urban playing field.

The idea of strengthening the nation through sports became increasingly popular with both left- and right-wing nationalist groups who saw significant potential in training young men for future combat through paramilitary sporting activities. In a discussion of sports and pre-First World War nationalism, Weber cites an article in turn-of-the-century journal *Almanach des Sports* in which team sports were starting to be recognized as a “veritable little war, with its necessary discipline and its way of getting participants accustomed to danger and blows.” This same argument could be made for rugby, which is an especially violent game. In the latter half of

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the nineteenth century, sports was thus imagined to reinforce class distinctions, physically prepare future soldiers, and ward off feared racial degeneracy.

Tension between camaraderie and competition is also evident in French internal political discourse of the time.⁷⁵ Sports was a key part of harmonious social order for both ends of the political spectrum, and both sides saw the potential too for individual citizens to be edified by mental and physical exercise. Politicians from both the far right and the left were evidently able to equate sports, still so new in France at the time, with tangible social goals for a nation between defeat in 1870 and the First World War. France’s defeat in the Franco-Prussian War prompted widespread fears about the degeneracy of the French race as a whole. Athleticism fostered by team sport was increasingly recognized as a practical means of reinvigorating French youth.⁷⁶ Medical texts propagated the idea that sports would strengthen French minds, morale, and bodies. This connection between the ideological and the physical cannot be overemphasized: it was widely believed that France as a unified whole had been weakened by defeat. Some theorists even went so far as to connect turn-of-the-century French weakness to trauma experienced by previous generations in past French conflict.⁷⁷ Mental and psychic decline needed to be curbed through physical conditioning in order to rebuild the nation. If the body could be strengthened,

⁷⁵Sudhir Hazareesingh writes of two basic undercurrents in French nationalism in the early nineteenth century: a modern, optimistic faction concerned with maintaining the status quo, and a suspicious strand veering towards reaction and authoritarianism. Early team sports could serve as a physical embodiment of the elitist, preservationist school of thought or the offensive camp. Hazareesingh describes a “pessimistic” nationalism that was concerned with preventing the decline of French spirit. See Hazareesingh, 128.

⁷⁶Nye, 52.

⁷⁷Philippe Tissé, an advocate of physical education and sports, believed that the psychic state of the contemporary generation in France was the result of the psychological traumas experienced by their mothers during the French Revolutionary wars and the First Empire. The journalist Émile Weber, writing in a 1905 issue of *Sports Athlétiques*, similarly believed that French “ancestors” had passed on “several centuries of laxity” and “muscular laziness,” which had contributed to the current generation’s weakness. See Thompson, 28.
so too could the will of the nation. Nationalists concerned with *revanche* quickly picked up on this discourse, and saw sports’ potential to rebuild France as an international power.

The elitism that early French sports shared with British athleticism quickly morphed at the turn of the century into something analogous to Hazareesingh’s definition of suspicious, reactionary nationalism: sport was used for defensive and offensive preparedness. While it is difficult at first glance to read militarism in Delaunay’s bodies, it is important to consider the broader political discourses and justifications that likely led to the conditioning of the bodies, which were then photographed, distributed, and further abstracted in these paintings. The tension between Delaunay’s title and the national origin of his source material reflects contemporary cultural and political desires to assert France as exceptional. The Cardiff Team was considered one of the best rugby teams in Wales in the late nineteenth century, if not the best. The team’s success faltered significantly in the 1910s, only to pick up again in the 1930s. Stade Toulousain, however, won the French national championships in 1912. That Delaunay chose not to depict British bodies suggests that French teams are better suited to representing sport and physical achievement in this period, as the French teams from which he drew inspiration were experiencing greater success.

For both players and spectators, sports demonstrates, according to Hobsbawm, the links that bind inhabitants of a state, regardless of local or regional differences. The different team

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78 Paul Adam’s 1907 *Le Morale des Sports* as paraphrased by Nye, 61.

79 Nye, 61.

80 Dietschy, 523.

81 Dine, 48.

82 Hobsbawm, 301.
colors on Delaunay’s players clearly point to different teams. Because we are not able to fully
differentiate the bodies from one another, we are unable to identify which player belongs to
which team.\(^{83}\) Delaunay blurs the literal lines between sides—either regions in France and/or in
Celtic Britain, in favor of a unified group of players. Fragmentation is used to suggest local
unity. A match in 1912 would likely have appeared, from a fan’s perspective, like a mass of
strong bodies moving quickly and violently towards each other; Philip Dine describes this as a
“network of immemorial inter-communal enmities” perpetuated on the rugby field.\(^{84}\) Despite
regional differences, the game was an opportunity for men and spectators to interact with each
other. This communitarian atmosphere gave way to violence after the First World War, but in
this prewar period, rugby matches were entertaining diversions that allowed one to cheer for
groups of men representing one’s home region.\(^{85}\) Delaunay’s games do not appear warlike.
Instead, these bodies are engaged in a kind of competition that unifies them through action. The
jumbled planes that blur their bodies together emphasize this camaraderie.

Delaunay’s imaged bodies, despite the optical excitement in which they take part, are still
militaristic. Though the title of the paintings identifies these players as Welsh, and they play a
game with British origins, they are, at the very least, visually associated with Frenchness.
Dietschy writes that military service in France, as well as in many other continental European
countries, played a fundamental role in the nationalist orientation of sports.\(^{86}\) These fragmented
players have been sourced from photographed bodies that were conditioned under aggressively

\(^{83}\) Hughes, 72.

\(^{84}\) Dine, 65.

\(^{85}\) Géo André, a journalist for *Le Miroir des Sports* described a 1925 championship game as a “match of
brutes…with the players excited by the cries of spectators, and their brains overheated by the sun, the
game was played in the most vicious spirit…” See Dine, 83-84.

\(^{86}\) Dietschy, 518.
militaristic auspices. Yet Delaunay’s formal language prevents us from reading strictly offensive militarism in these bodies. The specific moment in the match depicted in each *Cardiff Team* picture emphasizes electric tension, while the blending together of different team members and a referee figure challenges our ability to discern separate factions. These players lack the individuality of Rousseau’s figures, and fuse together as a frenzied though unified front. Though their unification might suggest militaristic strength, it also indicates a kind of cooperation. Like the symbols addressed in chapter one, athletic bodies invite us to read reaction, defense, and jingoistic assertion into these works, while also continuously reasserting themes of collaboration and outside influence. Allusions to the city, in the form of the players’ uniforms, civic architecture, and lettering, deepen the paintings’ dialogue with Paris, France, and beyond.
Chapter 3: City

In *The Cardiff Team* and his other pre-First World War works, Delaunay’s celebratory French symbolism and use of sports as a militaristic metaphor posit the nation as both exemplary and in dialogue with neighboring countries. The artist’s own professional success and exhibition practices further emphasize the tensions played out on his canvases between nationalism and internationalism, xenophobia and pan-European cooperation. Delaunay lived and worked primarily in Paris, and the city itself emerges as another source for identity embedded in his works. In *The Cardiff Team*, Paris is both French and international. It is present in symbolic form, and, in the second and third versions, in block letters on the field’s sidelines. Paris bridges the gaps between nationalism and internationalism, while adding yet more layers of contradiction and overlap between the two. The city provides a setting in which the artist’s own political leanings at once engage with and break from contemporary dominant political discourse. Paris for Delaunay is a site of personal allegiance, and a point from which to depart, both physically and intellectually.

Cubist pictorial language is well suited to conveying confusion and ambiguity. In all three versions of *The Cardiff Team*, Delaunay combines multiple views into a single image, representing movement through time and space in a static and two-dimensional form.\(^8^7\) We can tentatively label him a Cubist, if only for this reason. As an artist who attempted to capture fragmentation and *durée* in his canvases, and who lived and painted in the center of French political and cultural activity during these years, Delaunay must be considered in the context of

\(^{87}\)Antliff and Leighten, *Cubism and Culture*, 96.
his complex avant-garde artistic and political milieu. That the artist was struggling to make sense of his personal beliefs in this pre-war period, while tackling urban ephemera and formal innovation, does not make him unique. Rather, it indicates his immersion in the very milieu with which his works engage.

Delaunay was part of what David Cottington terms a “contradictory and unstable constellation of interests and practices, some aspects of which were complicit with [dominant cultural and political] forces and others opposed to them, but all of which were shaped by them.” Nationalist discourse—in the form of talk, news, and theory—necessarily surrounded Delaunay and his work. Nationalism in this period is disordered and complex, but at its most basic can perhaps be characterized as a series of reactions to fear of war and of social revolution, as well as a broad concern with maintaining established order. In the years and months leading up to the First World War, a new kind of fervent nationalism permeated French society. According to Weber, “liberal” nationalism of the late nineteenth century, concerned mainly with revanche, national unity, and expulsion of foreigners, was being replaced with a new iteration of the term. This “liberal” nationalism propagated the idea that universalism and optimism stemming from Enlightenment ideas had, and would presumably continue, to cause French


90Weber makes an important distinction between patriotism—a love of a particular place, without desire to force upon or even share the place with others—and nationalism—a desire to secure power for the nation, above oneself. In this view, patriotism may shade into nationalism, but patriotism is inherently defensive, while nationalism involves the accumulation of power, often through offensive means. See Weber, The Nationalist Revival in France, 1905-1914 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 2.
military spirit to die out and would lead to an influx of foreign labor on French soil.91 According to Weber, this notion had evolved into something more unwieldy and ballistic by 1905.92 This “new” nationalism was marked by an overall blending of nationalism and patriotism, and manifested itself in significant improvements to the nation’s military preparedness. As opposed to “ultranationalists”—concerned with convincing a widely patriotic public to follow their lead—President Raymond Poincaré propagated a “mainstream” right-wing ideology that sought to mobilize the nation as a strong front. In a 1914 speech, he demanded that the nation eradicate factional differences in favor of a union sacrée.93

While it is impossible to discuss the French public in the years prior to the First World War as unified, Marc Ferro writes of the intellectual climate as marked by two main strands of thought: one based on progress and optimism, and the other focused on military preparedness.94 Ultranationalists were wary of the kind of modernity that Delaunay celebrates in The Cardiff Team.95 Broadly speaking, this far-right faction denounced technological progress and urbanization, and was concerned with revanche, constitutional revision, and national unity.96 The second version of The Cardiff Team, created prior to Poincaré’s call for cultural and political


93Ibid.


96Ibid., 2-3.
unification, obscures the idea of global standardization by highlighting what is physically unique about Paris while shunning outdated fears of technological progress and internationalism.

The second version reflects a kind of cultural and technological openness; Delaunay’s formal practice as evidenced in *The Cardiff Team* as a whole more broadly indicates a desire to move away from what he saw as the restrictive, “orthodox” methods of Cubism employed in Paris by Picasso and Braque. Instead of exploring harmony and proportion in his canvases like the Gallery Cubists, Delaunay wanted to engage with what he understood to be more “universal,” “dynamic” themes surrounding him in “real life.” Presumably the artist was not referring only to subject matter: he wrote in 1934 that abstract work acts as a living representation of its era. Though *The Cardiff Team* works are not fully abstract like other paintings in the artist’s oeuvre, abstract art, according to Delaunay, is both human and social. The orbs that Delaunay painted throughout his life express his search for a more basic structure inherent in optical perception. These goals seem to negate offensive, suspicious nationalism: the desire to uncover and express universal experience seems inherently optimistic. Indeed, on a more basic level, before the first *Blaue Reiter* exhibition in Munich in December 1911, artists were broadly beholden to the idea that paintings needed to describe something in either a real or imagined world. Abstraction—that is, non-representational imagery—is both optimistic and innovative in the

97 Vriesen, 52.


99 Vriesen, 61.

100 Hazareesingh, 128.

way it allows artists to break free from this prior restriction. Delaunay sought to develop a method of abstraction that could defy intellectual and national boundaries. Investigating “pure painting,” often devoid of referential content, necessarily breaks through these boundaries. Delaunay’s search for a new pictorial language, one that is influenced by but not wholly in line with abstraction, helps shape what is formally distinct about *The Cardiff Team* paintings.

In combining views of biplanes with the Eiffel Tower, Delaunay effectively reimagines the idea of the French landscape. Where the Impressionists had looked to the pastoral, the environs of Paris, and southern French villages, in *Hommage à Blériot*, his Eiffel Tower series, and *The Cardiff Team*, among others, Delaunay asserts the urban setting as most immediately emblematic of France. The Parisian city fabric is simplified down to a few of its most recognizable, and perhaps most significant, features: the Tower, the Ferris wheel, and the optical illusions of speed, steel, and light refracted off industrial machinery. The Tower points upward, suggesting mobility, and, by extension, progress. Rosenthal reads the structure across many of Delaunay’s works as emblematic of French innovation and optimism. He sees the Tower as a demonstration of the flexibility and progressiveness of French culture, and sees patriotism (in Weber’s sense of the term: as a deeply personal love of a particular place) in Delaunay’s urban iconography. The Eiffel Tower, airplane, and refracted light and color form a distinctly modern urban landscape, one marked by technological achievement, but also by advertising.

The writing on the sidelines in each canvas is perhaps the strangest element in the paintings. Hughes interprets Delaunay’s use of writing in these pictures as a reference to

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102 Dickerman, 16.
103 Rosenthal, 11.
contemporary advertising billboards. Below the ASTRA poster and in front of the sideline banners, the players represent the “impact, shock, and intoxication” of the visual experience of the modern urban crowd in this early twentieth century period.\(^{105}\) The hyper-abundance of advertising and consumer goods in the city suffuses these works. They seem disconcertingly current for this reason: sports venues still inundate viewers with excessive product placement.

The players in each *Cardiff Team* picture play in a space that is difficult to make sense of. The green planes of paint suggest a field, but the players seem to merge with the urban stimuli surrounding them. Hughes terms this phenomenon “street vision”: a means of giving life to all that is visual in the urban center—posters, architecture, fashions, and furniture.\(^{106}\) Simply put, Delaunay does not merely react to the onslaught of *things* in the urban sphere in this period, but to the ways in which things are available for visual perception, and, by extension, for simultaneous contrasts. We are looking not at these objects (the airplane, the Tower, the wheel), but rather at their fragmented pictorial representations. Delaunay captures the commercial and fragmented nature of his mass-produced and widely available urban imagery, and celebrates the fact that all pictorial representation is a kind of abstraction. In *Hommage* and in *The Cardiff Team*, he blends aerial vision (views of the city from above), street vision (views of the city and sky from the street level), and the distortions produced by the eye when taking in movement, all in two-dimensional form.\(^{107}\) Delaunay makes all these modes of seeing equivalent. Urban ephemera, moving bodies, historic monuments, and contemporary technology all receive the

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\(^{105}\) Hughes, 78.

\(^{106}\) Ibid., 71.

\(^{107}\) Ibid., 91.
same formal treatment: all are subject to fragmentation. All vision and all things seen become heavily mediated through pictorial representation.

Beyond advertising and the optical stimulation it produces, the writing leads us back to the notion of the city, and to Paris more specifically. With its “W-NEW YORK-PARIS-” printed below the artist’s name, the third version might indicate Delaunay’s desire to engage with the world beyond Paris (see figure 3). If we understand the Eiffel Tower as a technological bridge between international urban centers, this literal connection between Paris and New York suggests cultural openness, or at the very least, the artist’s desire to exhibit in the United States. We can therefore discern a degree of professional mobility in this canvas. Paris in this case is “point A,” and New York is “point B,” while the half Ferris wheel resembles a bridge that might extend across the Atlantic, connecting the two points.

Paris is clearly central to Delaunay’s work. The city was inarguably the cultural and political center of France, but was also the world’s major artistic hub. The Armory Show of 1913 in New York City represents an alternative (though, perhaps a provincial one) to Paris’ cultural primacy before the First World War. The Armory exhibition not only informed the American public of mostly-unknown avant-garde European activity, which proved to be puzzling and offensive for many American viewers, it also facilitated a previously unprecedented degree of intellectual exchange between European and American modern artists. An angry Delaunay

\[^{108}\text{Ibid., 56.}\]
\[^{109}\text{Wetzel, 41.}\]
\[^{110}\text{Weber, Nationalist Revival in France, 6.}\]
\[^{111}\text{Andrew Martinez, “A Mixed Reception for Modernism: The 1913 Armory Show at the Art Institute of Chicago,” Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies, 19 ,1 (1993), 40, and Walt Kuhn, The Story of the Armory Show (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1938), 6-12.}\]
threatened to withdraw all his submissions after his La Ville de Paris was rejected from the Armory Show (on the grounds that due to its size, it would overwhelm the other works on display), yet the artist’s lettering in his third version of The Cardiff Team bridged a physical and theoretical cultural gap between New York and Paris.112

The second version of The Cardiff Team lacks the lettering spelling out “NEW YORK” (see figure 2). Instead, the word “MAGIC” is emblazoned above a smaller “PARIS.” It is easy to read celebration in this text, of both the city and the optical excitement it produces. This optimism masks the social and political strife that led to the city’s development as a forerunner in engineering technology. Antliff writes that space and time in this period were socially constructed as quantifiable commodities. As social structures, space and time were “wholly absorbed into the homogenizing powers of money and commodity exchange.”113 With this in mind, the kind of highly subjective experience of time evident in Delaunay’s work, as well as the celebratory identification with Paris, appear incompatible with the capitalist logic of advertising and consumerism evident elsewhere in the work. Instead, Paris—its light, color, and movement—is “magic,” as suggested by both the printed word and the celebratory attitude the artist demonstrates toward all these technological innovations. “Magic,” however, can also refer to illusion. As such, we might read a degree of irony in Delaunay’s use of the word, especially in light of the inherent difference between subjective time in the electric city and the capitalist labor underlying the city’s development.

Leah Dickerman terms these phenomena a “new modern culture of connectivity,” thanks to developments in train and air travel, which allowed artists to move between cities, countries,

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112 Hughes, 16.

and continents. Delaunay’s exhibition practices should be viewed in this light, as he brought his real and imagined views of Paris to audiences outside France. He showed five paintings of Paris at the 1911-1912 Blaue Reiter Exhibition in Germany. The pictorial language of these works is reminiscent of Cézanne’s planar views of the French countryside. Delaunay’s depictions of the Parisian urban landscape were very well received in Germany, impressing Expressionist painters such as Ludwig Meiner with their interpretation of the urban setting as in flux. Delaunay’s numerous views of the city and its monuments led him to his massive 1912 La Ville de Paris, a work that features representational and formal elements from his many studies of the city and the Eiffel Tower (see figure 12). The work combines fragmented Paris architecture with three nude female figures and depicts multiple identifiable views of Paris such as the Seine and the Tower. La Ville de Paris was produced for the 1912 Salon des Indépendants, and Apollinaire praised it as a summation of the artist’s efforts to date. Apollinaire wrote that the painting was emblematic of the “entire effort of modern painting,” rescuing an artistic spirit that had been lost since the “great Italian painters.” The critic thereby places the work in the Greco-Latin lineage, suggesting that Delaunay has revived artistic genius, outside the bounds of the modern nation. The artist reclaims this genius for Paris, demonstrating it to local and foreign audiences alike.

Delaunay showed the third Cardiff Team work at the Der Sturm exhibition in Berlin in January 1913. The painting was warmly received in Germany, and Delaunay wrote that in Berlin, he did not feel like a foreigner, except for his lack of facility with the German

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114 Dickerman. 19.
115 Rosenthal, 27.
116 Apollinaire as quoted by Rosenthal, 36.
Labeling Delaunay a “transnational,” or “international” artist has become part of the typical biographical discourse surrounding him, and for good reason. Franz Marc described Delaunay as a distinctly “European” artist, to which Delaunay replied that he had set his sights on developing a “universal” art. In 1914 Delaunay penned a note listing the artists he believed he had influenced, grouping them by countries (“Americans, Germans, Viennese, Russians, Italians, Turks”) under the heading “New French Universal Movement.” The concept of having worldwide influence clearly excited Delaunay. That he still aimed to unite these artists under the auspices of a kind of simultaneity not bound by national borders nonetheless suggests a degree of tension between his desires to transcend national boundaries and to assert French exceptionalism.

Gustav Vriesen writes that from 1909 to 1914, Delaunay’s work belongs as much to Germany as it does to France. The artist submitted his third Cardiff Team work to the Salon des Indépendants in 1913, where Apollinaire commented that it was the most modern work in the exhibition. The critic understood the work to be emblematic of the ideal French personalities and tendencies that made French painting the most worthwhile in Europe. Franz Marc declared that he was disappointed with the works, despite their being “very Parisian” and “very French.”

In Delaunay’s 1912 aforementioned letter to Marc, he writes that clarity, “the quality

117 Vriesen, 55.
118 Wetzel, 64.
119 Vriesen, 68.
120 Ibid.
122 Franz Marc quoted by Vriesen, 56.
of the French race, [is] a quality that helps only French inventors…I have to be satisfied with that heritage.” Where Apollinaire praised Delaunay’s works for their Frenchness, for being models of the best French artistic qualities, the artist himself seemed resigned to inheriting a national characteristic. If Delaunay found Frenchness to the exclusion of other forms of identification limiting, we can detect a desire to break down the barriers of prewar xenophobia. Vriesen’s suggestion that Delaunay’s prewar works are both German and French emphasizes this fraught negotiation between Frenchness and the world beyond.

Delaunay remained in neutral Spain from 1914, moved to Portugal in 1915, and only returned to France in 1921. Kenneth Silver interprets this avoidance of chauvinistic France as evidence of the artist’s pacifism. Delaunay was a crucial link between French and German artists before the war broke out. As the war progressed, however, while he remained in Spain and Portugal, he became increasingly jingoistic and anti-Cubist. Delaunay’s xenophobia was evident before he left France during the First World War, and collided kinds of artistic practice he denounced with derisory beliefs about foreign characteristics. In 1912, the artist wrote to his friend Nicolas Maximovitch Minksy regarding his thoughts on “real” French art and how he planned to return French painting to a purely visual realm, thereby re-instilling “greatness” akin to that found in historic Italian painting. He believed that his method of focusing on light and color would push against the “cerebral incoherences of the cubists, the futurists, centrists, rayonists, integrists, cerebrists, abstractionists, expressionists, dynamists, dynamists, [and]

123 Delaunay quoted by Rosenthal, 129.

patheticism.” Delaunay directly links these various artistic movements to “foreigners.” In this letter, he writes that these artists are not recognized in their home countries, and articulates his resentment towards them being welcomed in Paris. He condemns these practitioners for attempting to “smuggle” in their ideas and works into Paris, claiming them as French art. He singles out Picasso as one example of a foreigner participating in this insulting hoax of attempting to pass off “this dubious art as French art.” The artist understood Picasso’s return to classicism in this period as a kind of pandering to the conservative wartime regime. Silver notes, however, that at that time, Delaunay was moving toward the kind of pictorial traditionalism he condemned during the war. The artist’s views on formal artistic practice and politics are equally caught in this hypocritical web.

According to the politically dominant right, and Delaunay in his more jingoistic moments, France’s “decadence” and cosmopolitanism had led to weakness, suggesting that he may have subscribed to Poincaré’s 1914 demand for a union sacrée. Some of his writings suggest that he understood war to be a cleanser and means of reasserting the nation’s virility by putting young able-bodied men and French technological innovation to work. That Delaunay communicated his views about French art and foreign incursion in correspondence, while staying out of the country, emphasizes how confused the artist’s personal beliefs had become.

Delaunay’s desire to inspire other artists with his “universal” pictorial strategies suggests

126 Ibid., 63.
127 Silver, 147.
128 Ibid.
129 Ibid.
openness to foreign artists and their practices. His personal political leanings and artistic practice, however, seem at times to be contradictory. Regardless of Delaunay’s desire to distance himself from the Futurist movement, the artist in 1938 equated his images of the Eiffel Tower with the widespread desire for “the great cleanup, for burying the old, the past.”

In a letter he penned in December of 1916, he likened contemporary Cubist and Futurist works to “rot,” declared that they were “not French,” and that “we are now obliged to cleanse Paris—great Paris, which forever renews itself.” Here we see Delaunay turning away from the idea of Paris as a point of international cooperation and openess to envision a city that must maintain its Frenchness to the exclusion of foreign corruption, this at a moment while he himself, ironically, was living abroad.

In contrast to Delaunay’s close friendships with German artists, his marriage to Russian artist Sonia Terk, and his success with the Blaue Reiter in Germany and Switzerland, his moments of xenophobia situate him in what Henri Bergson called, in September 1914, “the French force.” Bergson explained France’s unified stance at the outbreak of the war as resting upon an ideal of justice and liberty, thereby diametrically opposed to the German force. While Delaunay’s prior exhibition history and more optimistic writings suggest his optimistic belief in transnationalism and technological progress, his later desire for Paris to be cleansed of all that was non-French placed him in an oppositional, defensive strain of nationalism. While it is possible to read individuals being subsumed into collective durée and urban progress in The Cardiff Team’s players, fragmentation, and technology, right-wing pre-war and wartime

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130 Rosenthal, 30.
131 Silver, 147.
132 Ferro, 295.
ideologies demanded that the individual be subordinated to a national collectivity and unified offensive mobilization. In this light, we can also consider the largely faceless *Cardiff Team* players as cogs in a larger military operation of the kind celebrated by post-1905 French nationalist politicians. Paris is the stage for patriotic love of the nation, which manifests itself in a dynamic urban environment, strong, anonymous militarized bodies, and appropriation of foreign sport onto French soil.

Yet Delaunay also wanted to exhibit his works on an international stage. His eagerness to participate in the 1913 New York City Armory Show was an attempt to reach beyond France’s, and Europe’s, boundaries and indicates an overall desire to achieve international success, all while maintaining a self-conscious connection to France. That the artist found a warm reception for many of his works in Russia, Switzerland, Budapest, Italy, and even Germany, among others, makes clear the increased international avenues for display and artistic exchange in the years leading up to the war. In bringing his canvases full of celebratory French symbolism to international audiences (some of whom would soon comprise the enemy), Delaunay mimics the kind of technology he celebrates. Where the Eiffel Tower and biplane connected disparate parts of the globe together technologically, his international exhibiting attempted to do the same culturally.

Delaunay’s works, personal beliefs, and exhibition practices volley back and forth between fervent xenophobic nationalism and patriotic pride in Frenchness that allows for international inclusivity. The artist wanted nothing to do with other “isms,” and yet sought international acclaim for his paintings. His *Cardiff Team* paintings can be read as a celebration of

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133 Sternhell, 56.


135 Vriesen, 50-56.
French technology, the triumph of Celtic heritage, and the centrality of Paris and France in the global sphere. The pictures can be understood, with equal conviction, as a Unanimist statement of the potential of culture to transgress national boundaries. Delaunay’s personal beliefs appear contradictory, mirroring what appears to be a constant struggle in political conviction. The *Cardiff Team* engages with Blaue Reiter universalist ideals and participates in larger abstractionist pushes for emancipation from rigid demands for mimetic representation; Delaunay wrote in the 1920s that his form of simultaneity was part of “the great contemporary movement in painting, in Europe as in America—that is to say, the liberation, through universal impressionism, of pictorial means […]”¹³⁶ Despite his declarations to the contrary, his unique combination of quasi-recognizable bodies in *The Cardiff Team* with colorful, planar fragmentation and collage-like advertising and text posit the paintings as in open dialogue with cultural and technological trends beyond France.

The Cardiff Team is a strange body of works. Formally, its Cubist fragmentation and proliferation of colors are striking. Its subject matter is layered and contradictory. Its bodies lead us into a contentious political history that both supports and, simultaneously, challenges the artist’s exhibition practices and writings. In short, this group of paintings is so complex as to evade definitive conclusions. Indeed, the multiple discourses in which this body of work participates illustrate Gerd Kumreich’s argument that domestic, foreign, and military politics in France on the eve of the First World War were inherently interdependent.\textsuperscript{137} It has not been my aim to read definite parallels between image, form, and contemporary events in Delaunay’s work. Rather, in addressing the multiple possible references, implications, and uncertainties in The Cardiff Team and some of the artist’s other paintings, I tried to convey the unease with which these works engaged with their social and political milieu.

When I began this project, I was confident that we could interpret a kind of “Frenchness” in Delaunay’s Eiffel Tower, biplane, cityscape, and rugby players. It quickly became apparent that “Frenchness” and nationalism, especially between 1912 and August 1914, are complex notions, both of which are impossible to neatly define and map onto two-dimensional imagery. Ernest Gellner has identified arbitrariness and contingency as key factors in the cultural processes of nation-building; he also points to the illusory qualities of national identities.\textsuperscript{138} This


is a helpful concept for a case like Delaunay’s: his imagery is based upon first-hand observation of urban ephemera in Paris, on images he collected from popular media, and on theories of simultaneity and optical perception. Delaunay’s works are illusory collages, perhaps mimicking the constellation of cultural and political anxieties in this period much more than they can be said to illustrate any concrete themes or ideas.

I am aware of the risk of replacing, in Christopher Green’s terms, “politically specific readings with vague generalizations.” Concrete developments immediately before the First World War in political thought, pictorial language, and cultural xenophobia have been crucial to my analysis of Delaunay’s works. The artist was deeply engaged with Paris, with its rapidly developing city fabric, its artists and inhabitants, and possible ways in which to bring the city physically and intellectually into dialogue with foreign centers. By virtue of all of this, he was implicated in disagreements between Cubist factions and right- and left-wing political groups, while still having to address the logistics of having his works shown internationally. His writings often reflect his inner turmoil over such issues. It is difficult to argue that he was unique in his reactions to his surroundings; it is perhaps more productive to take him as an illuminating example of how an artist and public figure who had achieved significant international influence attempted to navigate conflicting identities at a time of enormous cultural and political discord.

Figure 1 – Robert Delaunay, *L’équipe de Cardiff* (First version), 1913. Oil on canvas. Munich: Pinakothek der Moderne.
Figure 2—Robert Delaunay, *The Cardiff Team* (Second version), 1913. Oil on canvas. Eindhoven: Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum.
Figure 3 – Robert Delaunay, *The Cardiff Team (3rd Representation)*, 1913. Oil on canvas. Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris.
Figure 4 – Georges Seurat, *La Tour Eiffel*, 1889. Oil on wood. San Francisco: Fine Arts Museum.

Figure 5 – Robert Delaunay, *La tour rouge*. 1911-1912. Oil on canvas. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.

Figure 8 – Robert Delaunay, *Hommage à Blériot*, 1914. Oil on canvas. Kunstmuseum Basel.

Figure 10 – André Lhote, *Rugby Match*, 1917. Oil on canvas. Saint-Quentin: Musée Antoine Lecuyer.
Figure 11 – *Vie au grand air*, newspaper clipping with Delaunay’s sketches. January 18, 1913.
Figure 12 – Robert Delaunay, *La Ville de Paris*, 1912. Oil on canvas. Paris: Centre Pompidou.
Primary Sources


Secondary Sources


