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Sophie Goetzmann, *“Et les grands cris de l’Est”: Robert Delaunay à Berlin 1912-1914*. Paris: Centre allemand d’histoire de l’art and Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l’homme, 2021. 390 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. €30.00 (pb). ISBN 9-78-2735127344.

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Making sense of Robert Delaunay’s often confounding writings has been an ongoing challenge for scholars. Though meant to present his theories, they generally consist of semi-poetic, exclamatory effusions emphasizing words and phrases that appear to convey profound ideas. Plumbing the depth of those ideas has led researchers in directions as diverse as the functions of vision, the iconography of modernity, and the physics of color. Though each explanation has enlightened scholarly discourse on the artist, a lingering haze has remained between his writings and our understanding of them. Sophie Goetzmann has dispersed much of this haze by shifting our perspective outside of French culture.

In this very thorough study of Delaunay’s sojourns in Berlin between 1912 and 1914, the author has targeted and overturned prior critical assessments that saw German artists and critics as misunderstanding him in a way that worked to his benefit (*un malentendu productif*). Specifically, they tied his work too closely to German spiritualism. The presumed link provided a strong market and considerable publicity for Delaunay’s work in Germany. With it he could then represent himself in France as well as be received across the Rhine and as the leader of his own movement. Although deeply tied to French culture and in no way a Germanophile, Delaunay emerged as distinctly cosmopolitan in both Berlin and Paris. Breaking the stranglehold of national discourses (the French as devotees of clarity, reason, and classicism; the Germans as spiritual advocates of gothic mysticism), Goetzmann offers a more nuanced approach in which different personalities, both French and German, are understood to appreciate different aspects of Delaunay’s theories and works.

“Et les grands cris de l’est”: Robert Delaunay à Berlin 1912-1914 is divided into two parts, each constituting half of the book. The first contains two chapters dedicated to Delaunay’s representation and presence in Berlin. The second examines the reception of Delaunay’s work in Germany in a surprising manner, devoting each of three chapters to different creators.

The first two chapters discuss Delaunay’s two major exhibitions in Berlin, a solo show at *Der Sturm* gallery in January 1913 and a major room in the September *Erster Deutscher Herbstsalon*. Goetzmann embeds each exhibition in the carefully examined written evidence that surrounded it: Delaunay’s correspondence with German artists and with Herwarth Walden, editor of *Der*

Sturm and founder of the gallery of the same name; writings by Delaunay that appeared in *Der Sturm*; writings and oral presentations by poets Guillaume Apollinaire and Blaise Cendrars (each having accompanied Delaunay on one of his trips to Germany for these exhibitions); various reminiscences of the artist and his work by Germans; and, of course, the considerable critical response there. Goetzmann's analyses are informed by precise comparisons of multiple versions of texts and painted works and meticulous attention to their chronology. Focusing acutely and appropriately on the quality of vocabulary used in each of the writings and the potential meanings of specific words or phrases in both the primary texts and various broader contexts, she carefully interweaves this distilled information to illuminate varying intentions of the artist and the poets. Many previously unexamined allusions and innuendos emerge from her examinations of the writings of German critics and commentators. Goetzmann's conclusions uncover a diversity of concepts and themes inspired by the artist's works and writings. They also bring to light how these ideas changed over the two years under study, recognizing the ways in which Delaunay's own thinking developed in the process. One of the author's well accomplished goals is to show how ill-advised we are to seek generalized explanations of Delaunay's work and theory in the prewar period. At the same time, she demonstrates how research well outside of trodden ground can render valuable insights, giving new depth to our knowledge.

Chapter one revolves around Delaunay's first exhibition at *Der Sturm*, offering in the process a careful, blow by blow, assessment of the appearance and reception of Delaunay's theory. While so many Delaunay researchers have quite reasonably delved into contemporaneous color science and knowledge of the physiology of sight, Goetzmann, inspired by German reactions to the essays, approaches them by exploring their allusions to the cosmos. She points out that Delaunay's insistence that visual perception, rather than reason, leads to profound knowledge of the world extricated him in their eyes from the stereotype of the ever-rational Frenchman and opened the possibility for his sympathy with German sensibilities. While many German critics still saw him as an elitist and overly intellectual Frenchman, those inclined toward the avant-garde accepted him as exceptional for his "race" and explored his ideas for ways that they aligned with German artistic thought. His works sold well, the show received wide coverage, and the overall endeavor was considered a complete success.

Delaunay's assertion that vision is attached to a primitive consciousness, aroused by the phenomenon of light, corresponded not only to German spiritualism, but to a pan-European interest in the origins of humanity and the cosmos. For Delaunay, when one "learns to see," one escapes from the body and unites with ancient and eternal forces. Despite the fact that Delaunay insisted that he was not a mystic, Goetzmann points out that this is essentially the kind of ecstatic experience frequently described by German spiritualists. Seeking sources for this orientation, she offers a far more complete investigation of his reading of Péledan's translation of Leonardo's writings than previously attempted, and explores his interests in Schopenhauer and Spinoza.

Chapter two centers on the second appearance of Delaunay's work in Berlin, this time at the *Erster Deutscher Herbstsalon* where Sonia Delaunay also filled a large room. While the first exhibition contained examples of several earlier series, *St. Séverin*, the *Eiffel Tower*, the *City of Paris*, and the *Towers of Laon*, as well as a sizeable showing of the *Windows*, this exhibition offered his *Circular Forms*, products of the summer of 1913. The *Windows* image a view of Paris, including the Eiffel Tower, seen through the glass window of an upper story apartment. Emphasis is on the fracturing of light on the glass surface and the constant motion of the modern city. The *Circular Forms*, on the other hand, depict the fractured light of the sun or the moon or both

together, in notably more dramatic tones. The forms, at times violent in their motion, are circular or elliptical, foregoing the reassuring base of the cubist grid. Goetzmann applies the same precision of research to the identification and analysis of all of these visual works as she does to the theoretical documents featured in the first chapter.

During his first trip to Berlin, Delaunay had bent over backwards to please his audience and to show his appreciation to Walden. However, he returned in the fall as the imperious leader of what he now considered an international movement. Examining their correspondence, Goetzmann reveals Walden's considerable consternation and the problematic internal operations of the fall exhibition. The poet Blaise Cendrars accompanied the Delaunay family on this trip and undertook the explanation and defense of Delaunay's work in one article and two poems published in *Der Sturm* between September 1913 and January 1914 and an article that appeared in a rival journal, *Die Aktion*, in November 1913. In her elucidation of these writings, Goetzmann again concentrates on the intended meanings of the artist's primary vocabulary, showing the ways in which Cendrars' careful appropriation of Delaunay's vocabulary into his own poetic contexts effectively shifted and deepened their significance. This was a particularly important gesture at a time when Delaunay's proprietary use of the term "simultaneity" had come under attack both in France and from the Italian Futurists. Cendrars stressed Delaunay's universalism. Beyond that, he firmly situated "simultaneity" in a sexual framework, proposing that colors in simultaneous contrasts demonstrated a reunion, conjoined rather than divided, as they all originate in the encompassing light of the sun. By implication, he also sets the *Circular Forms* in sexual motion, the heat of the masculine sun and the coolness of the feminine moon joining to "give birth" to the universal light of the cosmos. Following Cendrars' lead, Goetzmann sees the overriding theme of Delaunay's second show in Berlin as one of fusion—fusion of colors in contrast, fusion of the art of husband and wife under the umbrella of Simultanism, and fusion of art and life in the extension of the *métier* of Simultanism to everyday life in the home and fashions on the streets of the modern city.

The introduction to the second part of the book features *Lesabéndio: an Asteroid Novel* by Paul Scheerbarth, published in Germany in 1913. Taking place on a planetoid, the book describes an intergalactic utopia in which an architect/hero plans to build a tower that would connect the planetoid's double star. Widely read as a cultural and political satire that contained technical-theosophical elements, it was greatly appreciated by many avant-garde artists and architects. *Lesabéndio* sets the tone for the mystical themes that emerge in the following chapters on Ludwig Meidner, Lyonel Feininger, and Bruno Taut. The variety of imagery and themes considered in each chapter makes clear that Delaunay's reception in Germany was far from uniform, with different personalities finding inspiration in different series and for different reasons. In each case Goetzmann makes fascinating forays into prevalent cultural themes never before associated with Delaunay's work.

Meidner is the focus of chapter three. Most interested in Delaunay's *Eiffel Tower* and *City of Paris* series, his own apocalyptic paintings of the modern city depicted its impending destruction, at times by astral means. They offer Goetzmann the opportunity to introduce the many frightening drawings in the German and French popular press of Halley's Comet, envisioned as colliding with the earth as it passed in 1910. Horrified by the ever-growing city, Meidner blamed the speed of the experiences it foisted on its citizens for changing human vision, dissolving individual consciousness into a primitive unity, heralding the end of the human era. Yet he, like Delaunay, considered the city to be an incarnation of the universe, pulsating to its cosmic rhythm. In this

chapter we see how the German context reveals an astral mysticism latent in Delaunay's theory and works.

Chapter four, on Feininger, an American artist in Germany, offers a far more optimistic approach to the world's future. Feininger saw Delaunay as showing the way toward the liberation of vision. His primary enthusiasm centered on the *Windows*, whose light refractions he understood as crystalline. This metaphor, which Delaunay shared, allows Goetzmann to embark on a presentation of contemporaneous literature on crystals, often taken as symbols of harmony and unity. Feininger strove to picture crystalline architecture, penetrated and inhabited by light and offering solar clarity. His goal was to depict an architecture so dominating that it would inspire devotional respect, guaranteeing universal fraternity. Like Delaunay, he was concerned with the dynamics of vision that function like a crystalline screen, a mode of access to the dematerialization of the body and liberation of the spirit. Once again Delaunay's works were understood as conveying spiritual, if not mystical content.

Chapter five, dedicated to Taut, presents an appropriate finale as it summarizes a multitude of topics. Focusing on the architect's *Glass House* of 1913, it shows how concepts of light and color, similar to Delaunay's, could be made manifest in architecture. Taut considered the *Glass House*, constructed with colored glass, as capable of destroying hate. Again, his emphasis was on the sensorial and psychological effect on the spectator. Taut's inclusion of spatial rotation in the *Glass House* accorded with the presumed mobility of the spectator's gaze, assimilating the subject and the object into the same event, not unlike Delaunay. Here Goetzmann was inspired to bring in information on kaleidoscopes and on the abundance of mechanical devices that set colored glass and lights into motion at the time. Furthermore, the author expands the reach of Delaunay's work and theories, proposing that his quest for a mobility not tied to mechanical means offered a victory over death and a radical step into a new stage of being. The link between the artist's theories and the various mysticisms so present in Germany take center stage. By lining up Delaunay's theories with Taut's, Goetzmann introduces Rudolf Steiner's theosophy, various personalities' theories about the role of the sun in the spiritual or non-spiritual universe, and the hypnotic experience of gyrating disks. In the end she makes the case that Delaunay was a mystic despite himself. She concludes that while he criticized German mysticism, the language he used in Germany was filled with Symbolist and Neoplatonic vocabulary and that he understood the positive reception such vocabulary would have there. This may have been true in some situations in France as well.

I have barely scratched the surface of the many illuminating considerations that this book offers, ranging from its detailed assessments of the dating and ordering of paintings, photographs, and documents to its overarching elucidations of such significant issues as Delaunay's universalism and his potential mysticism. Goetzmann's interpretations of Apollinaire's poetry are simply dazzling. Her exceptionally precise determination of the number and characteristics of the various versions of Delaunay's *Disks* leaves one breathless in a very different way. I could take issue with certain smaller arguments, for example how the gender-based interpretation of the *Circular Forms* series seems to slip from Cendrars' elucidation to Delaunay's intention, or how the term "fusion" is elevated to a level that makes it appear to be one of the artist's own terms. I also regretted, as I'm sure that Goetzmann did, that there were no illustrations in color. Finally, I offer that my reading experience would have benefitted from a simple chronology of the documents and events of Delaunay's presence in Germany to accompany this meticulous and complex review of the historic material. However, these small complaints in no way detract from

the importance of this formidable study. Interestingly, its surfeit of new information and its nuanced analyses of well-known texts seem to be organized in such a way that they circle, not unlike a bevy of planetoids, around the central issue of Delaunay in Berlin, approaching it from myriad directions, perhaps mirroring the fractured light contrasting and reflecting in perpetual movement in Delaunay's paintings. In the end Goetzmann presents the most complete and the most believable explanations of Delaunay's problematic vocabulary and its various meanings to date.

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