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THE PRIMITIVIST IMAGINARY IN IBERIAN AND TRANSATLANTIC MODERNISMS

Edited by JOANA CUNHA LEAL
AND MARIANA PINTO DOS SANTOS



The Primitivist Imaginary in Iberian and Transatlantic Modernisms

Taking into account politics, history, and aesthetics, this edited volume explores the main expressions of primitivism in Iberian and Transatlantic modernisms.

Ten case studies are thoroughly analyzed concerning both the circulations and exchanges connecting the Iberian and Latin American artistic and literary milieus with each other and with the Parisian circles. Chapters also examine the patterns and paradoxes associated with the manifestations of primitivism, including their local implications and cosmopolitan drive. This book opens up and deepens the discussion of the ties that Spain and Portugal maintained with their imperial pasts, which extended into European twentieth-century colonialism, as well as the nationalist and folk aesthetics promoted by the cultural industry of Iberian dictatorships. The book significantly rethinks long-established ideas about modern art and the production of primitivist imagery.

The book will be of interest to scholars working in art history, Iberian studies, Latin American studies, colonialism, and modernism.

Joana Cunha Leal is Full Professor at the Art History Department and Senior Researcher at the Art History Institute of the School of Social Sciences and Humanities—Universidade NOVA de Lisboa.

Mariana Pinto dos Santos is Associate Researcher at the Art History Institute of the School of Social Sciences and Humanities—Universidade NOVA de Lisboa and invited lecturer at the Art History Department at NOVA.

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Contributors

Mark Antliff, Professor Emeritus, Duke University, USA, is the author of *Inventing Bergson: Cultural Politics and the Parisian Avant-Garde* (1993), *Avant-Garde Fascism: The Mobilization of Myth, Art and Culture in France* (2007), and *Sculptors Against the State: Anarchism and the Anglo-European Avant-Garde* (2021). His forthcoming book focuses on radical pacifism and aesthetics.

Joana Brites is Professor at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Coimbra and an Integrated Researcher at Coimbra's University Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies. Her research and scientific production focus on the art of authoritarian regimes, colonialism and modern architecture, and dissonant heritage.

Rafael Cardoso is a member of the postgraduate faculty in Art History at the State University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and a research associate at the Free University of Berlin, Germany. His latest book is *Modernity in Black and White: Art and Image, Race and Identity in Brazil, 1890–1945* (2021).

Begoña Farré Torras is a researcher at the Art History Institute/IN2PAST, Universidade NOVA de Lisboa, Portugal. Her research focuses on twentieth-century muralism in Europe and the Americas.

M. Lluïsa Faxedas Brujats is a Modern and Contemporary Art History Lecturer at the University of Girona (Spain). She has curated *Celso Lagar and Hortense Bégué. The Catalan Years, 1915–18* (2021), and is the author of *From Symbolism to Abstraction: The Ideal of the Unity of the Arts at the Origins of Modern Art* (2018).

Joana Cunha Leal is Full Professor at the Art History Department of the Universidade NOVA de Lisboa, Portugal. She was PI for the project “Iberian Modernisms and the Primitivist Imaginary” and director of the Art History Institute of the same university between 2016 and 2022. Her forthcoming book focuses on the cosmopolitan avant-garde in Portugal.

Patricia Leighton, Professor Emerita, Duke University, USA, is the author of *Re-Ordering the Universe: Picasso and Anarchism, 1897–1914* (1989); *The Liberation of Painting: Modernism and Anarchism in Avant-Guerre Paris* (2013); and, with Mark Antliff, *Cubism and Culture* (2001); and *A Cubism Reader: Documents and Criticism* (2008). She is currently researching anarchism and photographic history.

Alejandro Mejías-López, Associate Professor, Indiana University Bloomington, USA, is the author of *The Inverted Conquest: The Myth of Modernity and the Transatlantic Onset of Modernism* (2010) and co-author of *Contemporary Colonialities in Mexico and Beyond*

(2024). His current book project focuses on gender, sexuality, and cosmopolitanism in transatlantic modernist literature.

Mariana Pinto dos Santos is a researcher at the Art History Institute/IN2PAST, Universidade NOVA de Lisboa, Portugal, curator, and lecturer also at NOVA. She is the author of *Vanguarda & Outras Loas* (2007) and is working on a book on art historiography. She was co-PI for the project “Iberian Modernisms and the Primitivist Imaginary”.

Marta Soares is a researcher at the Art History Institute/IN2PAST, Universidade NOVA de Lisboa, Portugal. She has published articles and worked on exhibitions on Portuguese modernism. In 2023 she defended her dissertation on animation and modernism.

Arthur Valle teaches Art History at the Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro /Brazil. He is a member of the Brazilian Committee of Art History, of the International Council on Monuments and Sites, and editor of the digital journal *19&20* (<https://www.doi.org/10.52913/19e20>).

Introduction

Primitivism, a difficult legacy. Iberian and transatlantic perspectives

Joana Cunha Leal and Mariana Pinto dos Santos

This book explores the expressions of “primitivism” in Iberian and transatlantic modernisms and their political, historical, and aesthetic implications.

The term “primitivism” is bonded to modernity and modernism, and it constitutes a difficult legacy to be dealt with from a historiographical stance. The mere use of the term, with or without quotation marks, usually underlines a Eurocentric viewpoint. That is, despite scholarly efforts following Edward Saïd’s criticism on “orientalism” (1978) “as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient”,¹ the concept of primitivism still voices the European and North American experience of modernity. Moreover, the binary opposition it implies (primitive vs. civilised) rests on the very conception of history based on ideals of civilisation and evolution, that legitimised colonial exploitation.

Yet, the connections and artistic exchanges between the Iberian countries and their former transatlantic colonies can add significant layers to the ingrained complexity of this term. First and foremost, the manifold, and often contradictory, manifestations of primitivism in Iberian and transatlantic modernisms bring in a notion of the “primitive” that not only looks outwards to the colonised “others”, but also looks inwards to the putatively uncivilised, belated “self”.

Indeed, Portugal and Spain were both heads of colonial empires, but by the end of the nineteenth century had lost most of their power, Spain being defeated by the United States in 1898—when the United States intervened in the Cuban War of Independence against Spain, and took possession of the Philippines—and Portugal being humiliated by the British with the 1890 Ultimatum to stop expansion in inner African territories, thus breaking the Portuguese colonial interests between Angola and Mozambique. The independence of most of the American continent radically changed the geopolitics of the world. Power relations across the Atlantic stopped being defined on East-West grounds (Imperial Europe-American colonies), establishing instead a new vertical hierarchy between North and South. As Alejandro Mejías-López thoroughly analyses in his book *The Inverted Conquest*,² that powerful line cutting the American continent in two halves had its counterpart in Europe. Portugal and Spain are Southern European countries, and despite having enjoyed a metropolitan centrality throughout their imperial history, their position within European modernity from the nineteenth century on was irrevocably peripheral.³ Therefore, they are invariably represented (both in national terms and by others), as not partaking in the European modernity that, nevertheless, they heavily contributed to build on the grounds of colonial extraction.⁴

Hegel’s philosophy of history epitomises this North-South divide in Europe, reinforcing the centuries-old Protestant/Catholic split. Enrique Dussel’s analysis makes clear the impact of Hegel’s thinking on the consolidation of European modernity, recalling that for Hegel development is dialectically linear and, as far as world history is concerned, has a direction that moves from East to West, Europe being its absolute end.⁵ This movement, as Dussel points

out, leaves Africa out. Hegel considers it “the land of childhood, which lying beyond the day of self-conscious history is enveloped in the dark mantle of night”,⁶ and therefore pertains to the timeless condition we find associated with the “primitive”. Following Hegel’s “fantastic apotheosis of racist ideology”,⁷ by which history is refused to an entire continent, Hegel furthermore elucidates that “real” Europe is Northern Europe. He identifies Europe with Germany, France and the Scandinavian countries, while the land south of the Pyrenees stands with Africa. This is why Mejías-López sharply concludes that “the Iberian Peninsula fares only slightly better than the continent to its south: although perhaps not entirely erased from history (as Africa is from Hegel’s text), the Iberian Peninsula is written out of modernity”.⁸ We will return to Hegel ahead, to further discuss his philosophy of history.

For now, we wish to point out that our question here does not dwell on the fallacy of a monolithic definition of Europe highlighted both by Dussel and Mejías-López (Piotr Piotrowski also denounces this monolithic definition while analysing the history of modernism and contemporary art).⁹ Rather, we wish to stress the paradox arising from the subaltern position newly occupied by the Iberian countries in European modernity in the face of their imperial background. While doing so, we want to draw the attention to the fact that the terms in which Néstor García Canclini discusses the contradictions of Latin America’s “Modernism without Modernization” also partially apply to Spain and Portugal (particularly his thesis on the *multitemporal heterogeneity* of modern culture).¹⁰

By looking at these contradictions and tensions, this book deals with primitivism’s engagement with colonialism, identitarian representations and the definition of the peripheries as provincial. While so doing, it furthermore analyses the international exchanges and circulations of modernist Iberian and Latin American artists, their ideas, and their artworks, reconstructing their primitivist imaginary. An imaginary that rests on, and fuels, a notion of the “primitive” that looks both outwards to the colonised “others”, and inwards to the uncivilised, belated, “self”.

Walter Mignolo uses the term *imaginary* to refer to the modern/colonial world system.¹¹ Turning his back to the Lacanian assumption of the Imaginary as a dimension distinct both from the Symbolic and the Real, Mignolo recovers the term from Edouard Glissant’s *Poétique de la relation*, for whom “the imaginary is all the ways a culture has of perceiving and conceiving of the world.”¹² This broader sense of the term ‘imaginary’ allowed Mignolo to characterise the imaginary of the modern/colonial world system as the “overarching discourse of Occidentalism”,¹³ and it was determinant in the construction of this book. Indeed, primitivism is part and parcel of that overarching discourse. This is why the primitivist imaginary involves disparate uses of the past. Its many expressions can accommodate different understandings of what that past was, should have been or could be when re-enacted in the present, but primitivism also implies *allochronism*,¹⁴ that is the presupposition that a “right” present time corresponds to a “right” geography, which coincides with Northern European (and North American) industrial civilisation.

Furthermore, while fuelling the chronological hierarchy in which it was generated and further expanding the distance between the fully developed or civilised and the underdeveloped and primitive (or folklorist, or naïve, or exotic), primitivism also became a weapon in modern art. Even if for all the wrong reasons, modernist artists bestowed “primitive” objects with a disruptive power able to threaten the bourgeois *status quo* and the highly formalised academicism institutionalised in the artistic field throughout the nineteenth century. Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton defined primitivism in the context of modernism as “an act on the part of artists and writers seeking to celebrate features of the art and culture of people deemed ‘primitive’ and to appropriate their supposed simplicity and authenticity to the project of transforming Western

art”.¹⁵ And this is how, they add, a term that had mostly negative connotations ended up having positive valences as well.

The positive valences ascribed to the “primitive” in this context arise in the framework of a look that, again, wipes all historical circumstances from objects observed. As Antliff and Leighton put it, the “primitive” belongs to the “mythic speech” as discussed by Roland Barthes, “for the label empties its referent of historical contingency and cultural specificity and instead subsumes it within an unchanging ‘nature’”.¹⁶ This a-historical framework reinstated a promise of purity and authenticity that, besides constituting an alternative to the beaux-arts academicism, and the dominant visual culture masterfully instrumentalised by modernist artists in their primitivist productions, was also prone to regionalist or nationalist appropriations. This trend does not concern the appropriation of African sculpture as an aesthetic model, but rather inward-looking ethnographical explorations that reveal the richness of folk traditions in the artistic and architectural realms.

As far from modernist tendencies as he can be, the Portuguese art historian Vergílio Correia (1888–1944), in the first of a series of articles devoted to the study of folk art published in 1915, exemplifies the kind of heavy negative connotations associated to the autochthonous “primitive”.¹⁷ Developing one of the many possible mythical viewpoints on the subject at length, and addressing topics such as “the pre-historical grounds of folk art and its universality”, Correia arrives at a discussion around the “relationship between African art and European folk art” he classifies as obvious. In a marked contrast with the Philippine author Isabelo de los Reyes’ (1864–1938)¹⁸ empowering translation of folk-lore as *el saber popular* (knowledge of the people),¹⁹ the Portuguese art historian defines folk art as the product of “an inferior artistic stratum, made of simplicity and roughness, ingenuousness and tradition”. According to Correia, this kind of artistic production appears in modern societies as a sign of “primitiveness”, and to study these art forms one must dive into the “inferior rural strata of the Europeans” that evades history and civilisation.²⁰ The diagnostic of a close relationship between the aesthetics of Portuguese rural artefacts and those executed in the Portuguese African colonial possessions by native people recurs later in 1946, in the work of the Portuguese art critic Ernesto de Sousa (1921–1988), but this time a positive value is assigned to that link. Furthermore, Sousa takes both productions as resources for a political engaged modernity, as discussed in Chapter 7.

As these brief examples show, the concept of “primitive” is quite unstable. The chapters in this book deal with its mobility, either rejected or validated in multiple expressions that respond to cultural and artistic networks, as much as to Iberian and Latin American political contexts. Moreover, art history narratives have often eluded the role played by folk art and naïf artists in the renewal of visual practices of the avant-garde, relegating it to a subaltern position. Chapter 2 repositions the centrality of folk and naïf art in the making of the Parisian avant-garde, while Chapter 3 shows how Cubism and local folk art were put side by side in Madrid’s first avant-garde exhibition.²¹

Reinstating Hegel as the source of Eurocentrism in the discourse of modernity (and thus, we add, of primitivism), Susan Buck-Morss linked Hegel’s philosophy of history with his contemporary historical events, namely the slave revolution and independence of Haiti and its later developments as read by the European intellectual elite.²² According to Buck-Morss, Hegel’s dialectics of lordship and bondage (also known as master-slave dialectics) must have been drawn, not from Ancient Greece, but from the information widely disseminated at the time of the events taking place in Saint-Domingue. These events showed that slaves could rebel successfully against their masters. Consequently, the French Revolution ideal of Liberty was not entirely European but had “world-historical implications”²³ embedded in it. In other words, “the

desire for freedom was truly universal”.²⁴ Hegel’s dialectics establishes that the master loses his dominance once he realises that he is not free, for he depends totally on the slave (from which it can be extrapolated that Europe’s and North America’s modernity rests on slave labour and extractivism). Hence, the slave-owning class “is incapable of being the agent of historical progress without annihilating its own existence”.²⁵ On the other hand, the slave’s freedom depends on gaining self-consciousness as the subject on whom the master’s wealth depends. According to Hegel, true freedom is obtained through self-consciousness and by “trial of death”: when one is willing to risk one’s own life for it. As previously mentioned, Hegel’s later writings establish the North-South divide that relegates the African continent to a primitive, barbaric and infant realm—where people lack self-consciousness—legitimising the colonial enterprise and the “civilising mission” of colonisation. Thus, the older Hegel established a hierarchy between the “primitive” and the civilised upon which modernity and the narrative of progress were built.²⁶ Yet, as Buck-Morss shows, the ideas of the younger Hegel on universal freedom can be rooted in the Haiti revolution—and not exclusively in European events or ancient history. This prompts a critical historiographical endeavour, one that recognises that the alleged universal categories established by Hegel are Eurocentric and filled with cultural bias, but at the same time, that they are driven from a wider geographical context of colonial and anti-colonial ideas and events to which Hegel’s philosophy responded. Eventually, this means we need to recognise the contingency and instability of modern categories and concepts, including the concepts of “primitive” and “civilised”.

Partha Mitter has reasoned in this direction. He writes that “asymmetrical power relations do not prevent the free flow and cross-fertilisation of ideas on the level of ‘virtuality’, as has happened across the globe in the age of knowledge and communications revolution in the previous century”.²⁷ Paul Gilroy has argued similarly about mutability, intermixture, instability of ideas in the Black Atlantic, which he defines as an “intercultural and transnational formation” that results mainly from people (and we may add, objects) on the move, either travelling, exiled, emigrated, displaced, fleeing or relocated.²⁸

As far as primitivism is concerned, this means that the concept gained cosmopolitan connotations and worldwide projection. According to Partha Mitter, there was a possibility of an “empowering concept of primitivism”²⁹ because

the very ambiguities, instabilities, and fractures within primitivism provided the colonised a singular weapon with which to interrogate the capitalist/colonial world of modernity, enabling them to produce a counter modern discourse of resistance. [...] What the periphery did was to turn the outward ‘gaze’ of Europe back to the West itself, deploying the very same device of cultural criticism to interrogate the urban-industrial values of the colonial empires.³⁰

This was not, of course, a generalised situation, but it can be found in the studies undertaken in this book, particularly in Chapters 1 and 6, the former analysing how Spanish American poets primitivised the former colony, and the latter how Brazilian *Antropofagia* rejected primitivism as a Western invention, proposing a variant of primitivism based on impurity and hybridity instead.

What is at stake here is what Susan Buck-Morss calls “porosity”,³¹ a concept she relates to the possibilities of imagining new worlds, either in the colonies or in the metropolis, and with the transformations that are implicated in circulation, movement, and also violence and inequality. If, as Mignolo argued “the imaginary is all the ways a culture has of perceiving and conceiving of the world”, porosity is the basis of the ongoing formation of the imaginary.

Considering the term “primitive” in the conceptual framework of *porosity* complexifies the diagnosis of *allochronism* previously mentioned, since primitivism implied not only certain uses of the past but also certain uses of the then present, where the multitemporal and the multi-geographical mingled. This is well exemplified in Chapter 5, dealing with Benjamin Péret’s reception of Brazilian *macumba* and *candomblé* and how these practices did not report to authenticity and original purity, but instead to an impure, composite, syncretic experience. Such an experience consists of an imaginary that combines practices of different African origins with European and South American references and that lead a surrealist to reconsider his own aesthetic imaginary.

Lina Bo Bardi, the Italian modernist designer and architect that lived and worked most of her life in Brazil, and adopted vernacular vocabulary into her projects, once said: “Linear time is an invention of the West; time is not linear, it is a marvellous entanglement where, at any moment, points can be chosen and solutions invented, without beginning or end.”³²

What this book proposes then is to treat *primitivism* as a concept that is not fixed, but fluid, and that therefore acquires different meanings and uses, while being part of the entangled discourses and temporalities that constitute the world rumour, which in turn shape an unequal, heterogeneous, and multitemporal, experience of modernity.

This book is divided into two parts, each with five chapters. Part I is titled “Circulations”, emphasising the mobility of artists, works and ideas across the Atlantic.

In Chapter 1, Alejandro Mejías-López deals precisely with the idea of primitivism as an empowering tool for poets and writers from Spanish-speaking Latin America, such as José Martí, Ruben Darío, or Carlos Reyles, amongst others, who inverted the terms and relocated the primitive in Europe, while also renewing language through the incorporation of anachronistic medieval references. This amounted to a modernist literature that came from Latin American authors and soon would also renew the Spanish literary scene. At the same time, Alejandro Mejías-López exposes how historiographical narratives, stuck to the Hegelian model that does not conceive the inversion of geographical hierarchies, have obscured the role played by Spanish-speaking Latin Americans in the renovation of Spanish literature, by attributing that renovation to “a national introspection as a result of the loss of American colonies”, while contrasting it with the “formalism” of Spanish-speaking Latin Americans who were therefore in a previous stage of development. Mejías-López exposes how it happened otherwise and how an inverted primitivism is key to the understanding of it.

In their chapter, Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighten challenge the historiographical narrative that has dominated Cubism studies since the 1920s by questioning the diffusionist thesis that placed Paris as the sole epicentre of the movement’s inception, dismissing the cubist occurrences in other geographies as mere peripheral replications. While so doing, the art historians also bring to the fore a discussion on how Paris-based Cubists circulated and embraced various folk cultures, asserting local identities from Gascony and Normandy to Spain, Portugal, Mexico, etc.

Chapter 3 engages in this debate. Its case study is the *Los Pintores Íntegros* exhibition organised by Ramón Gómez de la Serna in Madrid in 1915. Joana Cunha Leal argues that the show introducing Cubism to the Spanish capital was built upon a primitivist rationale. Gómez de la Serna intertwined the local and the cosmopolitan showcasing artworks from artists circulating internationally (Diego Rivera and María Blanchard) with those of an artist only known to a Spanish audience (Lluís Bagaría), and a completely unknown folk, non-educated artist (Agustín-Choco). Cunha Leal furthermore argues that the *Íntegros* exhibition was not only calling for the Europeanising of Spain but was also making the values of local folk art and popular culture interchangeable under the umbrella of Cubism. This trend also encompassed the Spanishisation

of the Cubist repertoire, a move that briefly anticipates Diego Rivera's alternative primitivist myth of origins, grounded in Mexican ethnicity and culture.

Chapter 4 discusses the circulation of another Latin American artist with profound ties in Spain, Joaquín Torres-García, approaching the multi-layered primitivist imaginary that his mural painting congregates. Begoña Farré Torras explores the primitivist traits that can be found in Torres-García's mural theory and oeuvre, while taking into consideration his European and Latin American background and practice, and examining the extent to which such traits were politically and ideologically informed, namely by issues of national and regional identity.

Arthur Valle's contribution in the next chapter addresses the circulation of the French surrealist poet Benjamin Péret in Brazil, by analysing the series of articles on *candomblé* and *macumba* he published in a São Paulo daily in the early 1930s. The chapter considers Péret's valuable contributions to the understanding of these Afro-Brazilian religions, exposing at the same time the primitivist and ethnocentric biases embedded in his texts. Péret's articles are furthermore examined by Valle in light of the previously conceptualised "surrealist ethnography".

Part II deals with "Patterns and paradoxes", and each chapter approaches the intricate complexity and diversity of the Iberian and Latin America uses, appropriations and transformations of primitivism.

Rafael Cardoso's chapter analyses *Antropofagia*'s anti-primitivism as a strategy that dealt with the relationship between primitivism and coloniality. Performing a genealogy of the *Antropofagia* movement, which discusses popular culture at equal stances with high culture, Cardoso goes through how the Pau Brasil movement, while exposing colonialism, still emulated a European gaze that exoticised Brazil as a primal realm to counteract civilisation and its discontents. But *Antropofagia*, according to Cardoso, goes a step further by returning "the outward gaze back to the West itself", as Partha Mitter stated. *Antropofagia* disguised its primitivism as anti-primitivism by electing the "savage" instead of the "primitive" as a model, and by refusing ideas of authenticity and purity attributed to the latter. *Antropofagia* devoured civilisation as much as indigenous references and is therefore studied as taking advantage of colonialism as much as of anti-colonialism.

In Chapter 7, Mariana Pinto dos Santos tackles the primitivist tropes in the Portuguese context, taking into consideration how concepts of "primitive" and "primitivism" were part of the narrative of Portuguese colonialism, helping to present it as a modern enterprise. Pinto dos Santos analyses the way the "primitive" operated within modern Portuguese art history in the *longue durée*, by focusing on the entanglement of the primitivist narrative in the quest for modernity and the renewal of art, the emerging anthropological interest in folk and African art, the ideological narrative of the Portuguese colonial project, and anticolonial stances taken by Portuguese artists from neo-realist and surrealist backgrounds. She further discusses the concept of belatedness and its relationship with primitive and primitivism, reviewing, through some examples, the role these concepts have played in historical narratives from the European South-Western periphery that sought to dialogue with the master narrative of art history.

In Chapter 8, Joana Brites dissects the "primitivist impulse" of the Portuguese (Azorian) sculptor Ernesto Canto da Maya. Brites demonstrates how much Maya's quest for the "simple" and "immutable" responds to the constraints he finds in modernity, and that his response encompasses a will for the regeneration of modern society and modern art. Discussing the relatively uncommon plurality of temporal and spatial references present in Maya's work, Brites also highlights how time and space are experienced under a primitivist gaze, while relating the vagueness of geographic and chronological allusions in his sculpture with the imperial definitions then in force.

Chapter 9 re-directs the discussion on the constraints associated with modernity to expressions of the primitivist imaginary via the theme of the pastoral. The pastoral projects a mythical vision of an Edenic landscape, putting forward an idyllic vision of the natural world in which animals, plants and humans live together in harmony. Yet, at the same time, it is fraught with tension caused by the rapidly-changing modern world. This tension is addressed by Maria Lluïsa Faxedas Brujats, considering the specific historical circumstances of Catalonia in the early twentieth century, namely the aesthetic challenges posited by *Noucentisme*, within the scope of a comparative analysis between Joaquim Sunyer's and Joan Miró's pictorial compositions of the Pastoral.

Also considering the many expressions of the primitivist imaginary in Spanish territory, Chapter 10 introduces the world of puppets, child art and illuminated manuscripts in the ongoing debates. Marta Soares focuses on 1920s Granada to discuss puppet shows and their primitivist resonances by addressing three shows that resulted from the collaboration between Federico García Lorca, Manuel de Falla and Hermenegildo Lanz in 1923. Soares revisits these performances, while analysing explicit uses of the word "primitive" within the field of puppetry, and the links between puppetry and animism, a concept deeply rooted in theories on "primitive" mentality and animation theory.

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Notes

- 1 Edward Saïd, *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1978, 1994 (ebook edition).
- 2 Alejandro Mejías-López, *The Inverted Conquest. The Myth of Modernity and the Transatlantic Onset of Modernism*. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press 2010, 35–40.
- 3 See Enrique Dussel, "Eurocentrism and Modernity (Introduction to the Frankfurt Lectures)", *boundary 2*, 20, 3, Autumn 1993, 65–76. Mejías-López discusses Dussel's text and also sheds light into the impact of the divide between Protestantism and Catholicism in the configuration of this North-South axis; Mejías-López, *op. cit.*, 35–36.
- 4 See for instance, Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges and Border Thinking*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000.

- 5 Dussel, op. cit., 69.
- 6 Omotade Adegbindin quoting Hegel's *The Philosophy of History*; Adegbindin, "Critical Notes on Hegel's Treatment of Africa", *Ogirisi: A New Journal of African Studies*, 11, 2015, 24.
- 7 Dussel, op. cit., 70.
- 8 Mejías-López, op. cit., 37. The author quotes Hegel: "When one is in Spain one is already in Africa. This part of the world... forms a niche which is limited to sharing the destiny of the great ones, a destiny which is decided in other parts. It is not called upon to acquire its own proper figure".
- 9 Piotr Piotrowski, "Toward a Horizontal History of the European Avant-Garde". *Europa! Europa?: The Avant-Garde, Modernism and the Fate of a Continent* (Sascha Bru and Peter Nicholls, eds.). Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009, vol. I, 49–58.
- 10 Néstor García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995, 41–65.
- 11 Mignolo, op. cit., 23.
- 12 Idem.
- 13 Ibidem, 24.
- 14 The well-known concept of *allochronism* was introduced by the anthropologist Johannes Fabian in the book *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.
- 15 Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton, "Primitive", *Critical Terms for Art History* (Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff, eds.). Chicago, IL and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003 (2nd edition), 217.
- 16 And also, "[...] by not changing, the 'primitive' is necessarily in opposition to all that does change or develop, namely the civilized."; Idem.
- 17 See Virgílio Correia, "Arte Popular Portuguesa", *A Águia*, 2, VII, 39, March 1915, 117–123.
- 18 "In 1887, at the Exposición Filipina in Madrid, a 23-year-old *indio* named Isabelo de los Reyes, living in colonial Manila, won a silver medal for a huge Spanish-language manuscript which he called *El folk-lore filipino*. He published this text in unwitting tandem with compatriot José Rizal (then aged 25), who, after wandering around Northern Europe for some time, published his incendiary first novel, *Noli me tangere*, in Berlin that self-same year. This book helped earn him martyrdom in 1896 and, later, the permanent status of Father of His Country and First Filipino."; Benedict Anderson, *The Age of Globalization: Anarchists and the Anticolonial Imagination*. London and New York: Verso, 2005 (ebook edition).
- 19 As discussed by Benedict Anderson, Idem, 26–34.
- 20 Correia, op. cit., 117.
- 21 The recent exhibition at the Sprengel Museum, Hannover, Germany, *Which Modernism? Insiders and Outsiders of the Avantgarde* (2023) attests also to the central role played by naïf artists, who often exhibited their work and socialised with the well-known artists in equal terms, and were disputed by well-established gallerists who promoted their work.
- 22 Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti and Universal History*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009.
- 23 Idem, 39.
- 24 Ibidem, 51.
- 25 Ibidem, 54.
- 26 Buck-Morss also describes this as a reaction to the news coming from Haiti, and the decline in productivity of the former French colony that was attributed to free labour. The "great experiment" was being commented as a failure, hence Hegel's ideas on the lack of maturity of people, countries, and whole continents. See Idem, 68-69. Buck-Morss further elaborates on the way the birth of free labour installed the fiction of the free will of submitting to it. "Free property, plus free labour, plus free trade added up to the newly conceived modern criterion of Liberty" creating a labour system in which forced labour and appalling work conditions and wages were part of the "Free World" of Modernity. See idem, 97-100.
- 27 Partha Mitter, "Decentering Modernism: Art History and Avant-Garde Art from the Periphery", *The Art Bulletin*, 90, 4, December 2008, 543.
- 28 Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic. Modernity and Double Consciousness*. London: Verso, 2022 (1st edition 1993), 15, 18. See especially Chapter 1, "The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture of Modernity".
- 29 Partha Mitter, op. cit., 543. Mitter is referring to Indian avant-garde artists of the 1920s.
- 30 Idem, 544.

- 31 Buck-Morss, op. cit., 111 and ff., and also 150. “The lived experience of the Atlantic as an expanded social field, shared by millions of heterogeneous, previously unconnected people, threatened every existing order of collective meaning. No cultural heritage could be transported across the Atlantic without undergoing a radical transformation. Porosity characterized the existential boundaries of what was for all participants indeed a New World.” (114); “the porosity of the space between enemy sides [is] a space contested and precarious, to be sure, but free enough for the idea of humanity to remain in review” (150).
- 32 As quoted in the video installation by Isaac Julien, “Lina Bo Bardi: a marvelous entanglement” (2019), shown in the exhibition *Isaac Julien: What Freedom is to Me*, Tate Britain, London, 2023.

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Part I

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1 Decentering primitivism

Latin America, cultural authority, and the modernist writing of the European primitive

Alejandro Mejías-López

After finishing *Los ríos profundos* (*Deep Rivers*, 1958), a landmark of Latin American *indigenismo*, Peruvian writer and anthropologist José María Arguedas traveled to Europe thanks to a UNESCO fellowship to conduct ethnographic research in Spain. Raised by quechua speakers and having already worked and published on Peruvian Indigenous and Mestizo cultures, Arguedas' project was "to study some communities in Spain in order to search, *in the present organization of those communities*, for complementary data to better understand *the history of indigenous communities in Peru*" explaining that "My belief was founded on the proven fact that Spain is one of the least evolved countries in Europe and that, hence, surviving examples there had to be greater and more intact".¹ Arguedas speaks with the authority of the anthropologist and, in so doing, not only does he displace but also reverses the dominant directionality of scientific knowledge and its modern ideological gaze. Arguedas's book is without a doubt a landmark in the history of ethnography and anthropology to the extent that he may have been the first postcolonial anthropologist to carry out research on a former metropolitan center, the first non-European to do ethnographic work on European people, seeking surviving "primitive communities".² And yet, this significant, even groundbreaking act has passed largely unnoticed despite Arguedas's gigantic status in Peruvian and Latin American studies. Although he was the first anthropologist to do so, Arguedas was not the first Latin American to project a modern gaze over Europe and think of Spain as "primitive". On the contrary, I will argue that the Peruvian ethnographer is heir to a long tradition that, starting around independence and reaching its peak with Spanish-American modernism in the 1880s, constructed the idea of Spain as a primitive country. Capitalizing on this idea of modern America/primitive Spain, Modernism appropriated old Spanish forms to renew and modernize literary expression and, arriving in Spain, took the old metropolis by storm. Not only was Spanish-American modernism the catalyst of Spain's own modernism but it also made possible its expression in a primitivism of the self. The consequences of this postcolonial process were far-reaching. It turned Latin America into a modernizing force in the Spanish cultural field in the twentieth century, granting Latin American discourse an authority over Spain that helped make possible Arguedas ethnographic study. Yet, most of these groundbreaking events remain largely invisible within dominant theoretical frameworks of modernism and primitivism still determined by a Eurocentric bias.

The trouble with primitivism

Broadly speaking, primitivism is often conceptualized in two closely related but distinct configurations of time and space. Primitivism can refer to the use of either the European past (classical, Iberian, or medieval art in Picasso's work, for instance) or rural people considered to have not yet succumbed to modern changes (Gauguin's Brittany is a classic example). The dominant

view of primitivism, however, is the one that refers to the use of non-Western art and culture by European artists (Gauguin's Tahiti or Picasso's African masks are prime examples). In this case, it is often the totality of non-Western cultures that are denied coevalness and considered "primitive", unmodern, less developed.³ As is now commonly noted, external primitivism is impossible to dissociate from the history of European colonialism and related to ethnography and anthropology. In both types, European modernity is always the reference point. Primitivism springs from the gaze of modern European intellectuals and artists on their (internal or external) others.

Recent approaches, attempting to rethink primitivism in a decolonial context and moving beyond the postcolonial critique, are shifting the focus away from Europe to reexamine the use of primitivism by non-Western artists. In *Literary Primitivism*, Ben Etherington has recently argued for a different understanding of primitivism as a radical aesthetic project of decoloniality:

As those spaces in which 'primitive' modes of existence were imagined to be possible either were directly colonized or otherwise forcibly integrated into a geographically totalized capitalist system, so dissenting spirits responded by trying to rekindle the primitive by means of their art.⁴

Primitivism, then,

was not restricted to Western artists, which is to say, those situated in or near the metropolitan centers of the capitalist world-system... Indeed, artists from colonized peripheral societies were the ones who most keenly felt the loss of unalienated social worlds, and it was they who most energetically pursued an aesthetics of immediacy.⁵

However, as decentering as Etherington's reframing of non-Western artists certainly is, the geocultural location of the categories primitive/modern and their relationship remains ultimately untouched: Europe remains the location of the modern while the primitive is located outside of Europe. Even, the idea that non-Europeans "most keenly felt the loss of unalienated social worlds" seems caught in the primitivist gaze under critique.

The problem with this widely accepted Eurocentric framework is not that there is no truth to it, but rather that it is incomplete. The problem is not what it reveals but what it prevents us from seeing. By placing modernity squarely "in or near the metropolitan centers," scholarship necessarily places the rest as always already "non-modern" (i.e., "primitive") and thus renders any other historical geocultural dynamic invisible. In other words, current critical paradigms leave no space to *see* a bicultural Peruvian ethnographer and *indigenista* writer carrying out research on "primitive" Spain. In what follows, I will look at primitivism from a different vantage point in an attempt to make visible other dynamics that, although at play in the development of modernism, have remained unnoticed or dismissed.⁶ I hope that by bringing them into focus we can open up new ways of thinking and exploring the complexity of modernism/primitivism more fully.

A shift in perspective: America's claim to the modern

The restructuring of modern time and space that makes the concept of primitivism possible has its roots in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, in the epistemological violence of the European conquest of America that decolonial theorists have called the origin of the coloniality/modernity matrix.⁷ Both apologists and critics of the conquest used the tropes that would be associated with

primitivism. Ginés de Sepúlveda stated that American Indians were “less perfect than Spaniards and lacking signs of true civilization” and had to submit like “beasts to men, women to their husbands, and children to their father”,⁸ while his opponent Bartolomé de Las Casas portrayed American Indians as children in need of protection.⁹ As global geopolitics changed during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the tables turned on Spain and Portugal and the very countries that inaugurated the European modern gaze on the Other became the object of that gaze, the exotic oriental other of Northern European Enlightenment and Romanticism. This part of the story is well known and documented, but there is another part to it that is much less so.

If we shift the geocultural focus of our lens and move to America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, we witness the emergence of a discourse on modernity that placed *Europe* in the past and wrote Spain in particular as a primitive country. As Carlos Alonso has argued, Spanish-American independence was fueled by a powerful discourse of “futurity” that posited “a shift in the relative temporal spaces occupied by America and Europe with respect to one another”, creating “a narrative paradigm in which America occupied a position of futurity vis-à-vis the ‘Old World’”.¹⁰ The birth of the first modern republics was in part a result of this powerful discourse “solidly identified with modernity, change, and futurity” to the extent that “arguments for independence were founded as much on complaints about Spanish abuses of power as *on the fundamental allegation that Spain was hopelessly tied to a past* that was now judged discontinuous with Spanish America’s essence and needs”.¹¹ James Sanders has more recently shown how for much of the nineteenth-century republicanism and modernity were firmly believed to live *only* in the Americas, where many “writing in capitals and provinces from Argentina and Chile to the United States, imagined an Atlantic world involved in a vast and titanic struggle of civilization, pitting America, modernity, liberty, and equality against Europe, retrogression, despotism, slavery, and aristocracy”.¹² Progressive intellectuals, such as Chilean Francisco Bilbao, declared “Spain is the Middle Ages. We are the future”¹³ and “mocked contemporary Spain for its despotism and backwardness”.¹⁴ For them, even France had shown to be not yet ready for democracy.¹⁵ Competing with this powerful strand of radical republican modernity was another just as proud to be modern, but scared of the potential threat of indigenous, black, and mestizo masses in the public sphere, and thus seduced, instead, by associations between Northern European whiteness and modernity. The best-known and most influential example of this strand is Argentine Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, whose text *Facundo. Civilization and Barbarism* (1845) is a landmark of this type of political and cultural thought. Nonetheless, what is most striking in the context of this essay is that, regardless of their political and ideological differences, both discourses shared the same understanding of Spain and Spanish culture as *primitive*. No coevalness was granted by either to the former metropolis and, in fact, for Sarmiento, Spain was the very epitome of barbarism, virtually on equal footing with American Indians, pre-modern and primitive. In 1846, shortly after publishing *Facundo*, Sarmiento traveled to Europe and, in Spain, everywhere he looked he “saw” examples of a primitive culture untouched by modernity: “If I had traveled in Spain in the sixteenth century” he concludes,

my eyes would not have seen anything other than what they see today; I know it in the color of the stones in the buildings, in the types of jobs people have, in the clothing and lack of hygiene, in the lack of any minor change, even by accident, that may indicate progress in the arts or modern science.¹⁶

This primitivist gaze that Sarmiento casts upon Spain shows awareness of the ties between primitivist and colonial discourses, as he states: “I am of the opinion that Spain should be colonized”.¹⁷ As these examples prove, when considered from across the Atlantic, ideas about the

future and the past, modern and primitive, were more complex than Eurocentric frameworks have generally allowed for. Examples like these abound across Latin America through the nineteenth century and they established a definitive frame, a Latin American gaze, that would determine the way Spain was viewed by many from across the Atlantic for decades to come. Nineteenth-century Latin American intellectuals often constructed a discourse in which present-day Spanish culture was conceived as embodying the primitive and this reversal of imperialist discourse became more explicit towards the end of the century as global geopolitics and the art world suffered a shift that brings us to the relationship between primitivism and modernism.

Refashioning primitive literary language, writing modernism

Literary modernism in Spanish America dates back to the late 1870s and early 1880s. Eclectic and decentered, Spanish-American modernism was radically transformative of literary language in Spanish and is widely considered a watershed moment in Spanish-language literatures and cultures. As Matei Calinescu noted many decades ago (but has been largely ignored since), Spanish-American writers were the first to coin the term *modernism* to designate what they thought was a profound transformation in Western art and literature at the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁸ Spanish-Americans were also among the first to use the language of rupture, innovation, and modernity that would be common decades later during the Avant-Garde, using militaristic metaphors like José Martí's "All are soldiers in an army on the march. All kissed by the same sorceress. In everyone the new blood boils"¹⁹ or Carlos Reyles' "glorious if battered and bloody phalanx marching to conquer the world".²⁰ Modernist literature inverted directions and was soon brought into Spain, where its profound implications for the literary and cultural fields as well as the novelty of its postcolonial condition were such that it produced heated debates in the Peninsula, where many could not accept literary innovation coming from the colonies of yesterday. The vocabulary of colonialism was ubiquitous in these debates and Spanish-American modernists themselves coded their arrival as the "conquering" of the ex-metropolitan cultural field. Thus, not only did Spanish-American modernists continue and expand Spanish-American modern discourse and its construction of Spain as the European primitive, a place where time stood still and unchanged, but they also brought this discourse with them to Spain itself.

It was in "primitive" Spain that modernists sought the source to renew a literary language that they felt was bogged down by use and academic rules. Thus, Spanish-American modernist primitivism was as much a matter of form as of content. They aimed at not only representing "primitive" cultures and people but also, and more importantly, at taking and transforming "primitive" form into a new (i.e. "modern") artistic expression. Much like Picasso appropriated African forms in his rendering of the *Demoiselles d'Avignon*, incorporating them into a new cubist expression, Spanish-American modernists appropriated Spanish forms to transform literature. Early on, José Martí said that

words are covered by layers of use: it is necessary to reach their core. In doing so, one feels something breaking down and the deep is revealed. Words must be used as they are seen in the deep, in their true, etymological, and *primitive meaning*, the only one that is robust, that secures the lasting of the idea expressed in it.²¹

One of the ways in which Martí attempted to recover the primitive in language was by creating neologisms through copy and innovation:

As a result of his keen linguistic consciousness, the words coined by him *sound and look genuinely Castilian*. They are almost always formed on recognizable Spanish roots by analogy

with existing Spanish words, and since their meaning is obvious in context, one is usually unaware that they are in fact neologisms, rather than words ‘approved’ by the Academy.²²

What Gordon describes in Martí’s use and construction of language is akin to what we have come to identify with primitivist modernism. Martí is crafting something new by employing the seemingly “primitive”, a new poetic language *that is and is not* the original but *looks and sounds like* it by appropriation and adaptation. Like the antiacademicism of modernist painting, Martí frees literary language from ruling conventions and academic norms, by transforming primitive forms into new ones:

two aspects of his word-creation do stand out. The first, and most obvious, is the apparent *casticismo* of his neologisms, the result of his careful formation of them. The other aspect is the concise expressiveness of these new words, which often require a clause, or even a sentence, to explain or replace them.

Where Gordon uses *casticismo*, we need to read *primitiveness*.²³ Aníbal González has insightfully argued that philology was central to the modernist renovation: “Words were thus turned from historically determined objects of knowledge into objects of pleasure which could be collected and combined anachronistically”.²⁴ González’s important insight must be adjusted, however. It was *because* of their historical determination and anachronism that modernists saw in those words the necessary aesthetic value to create something new; in other words, it was their *primitive* quality that turned them into a tool of *modern* literature. Moreover, this philological/archeological approach to language must be paired with another well-studied formal element of modernism: the recovery and renewal of old Spanish medieval and Golden Age literary forms, many of which (like the *romance* and *seguidilla* stanzas or the *alejandrino* verse) they profoundly reinvented and placed again in circulation. Part and parcel of their literary and artistic project was the continuation of the discursive legacy of the primitiveness of Spain which modernists expanded in poems, stories, novels, and hundreds of newspaper chronicles. All of these elements must not be seen as isolated phenomena but as a whole postcolonial project of radical innovation and cultural authority building, one that eventually changed forever literary production in Spanish, including that of Spain.²⁵

The child, the primitive, and the assault on poetry

In what is considered the first modernist poetry collection, *Ismaelillo* (1882), Martí already combines different elements associated with the primitive: medieval lyrical forms, biblical and medieval imagery, and a child’s worldview. *Ismaelillo* is among the first modernist works to perform the paradoxical gesture of using the “primitive” to “modernize” art. Thematically, the primitive functions as a leitmotif in the abundance of premodern imagery (princes, kings, knights, vassals, warriors, angels, demons, and giants), childhood, the natural, and the sacred. *Ismaelillo*, the fictional name of the son of the poet in the book, is the endearing Spanish form for Ishmael, a name that links the text to Genesis, where Ishmael is the outcast from (Abrahamic) civilization and embodies “the forces of nature”.²⁶ Ishmael is also connected to Arabic culture, a recurrent motif that plays with the orientalist/primitivist trope, often associated with Spain.²⁷ But in *Ismaelillo* primitivism is also a matter of poetic form. Martí’s new use and combinations of verses of 7, 6, and 5 syllables imitate the *cantigas*, *villancicos*, and other medieval forms known as “primitive” lyrical poetry, dating back to Al Andalus. The *seguidilla*, for instance, emblematic of the collection, was a medieval form still alive in the oral tradition and popular music of Spain.²⁸ Martí’s appropriation and reworking of these primitive Spanish forms launched modernist poetry and

his renovation goes hand in hand with the continuation of the legacy of Spanish-American discourse on Spain as the primitive other, which for Martí (still a colonial subject at war with the European metropolis) was also an openly anti-colonial gesture:

With our pure creole chests and arms, we will expel from Cuba the bad government of Spain, because a *lazy, divided, underdeveloped, cruel*, and faraway people *cannot, in the modern world at the very gates of a new humanity, rule over a flexible people*, united by both their will to better themselves and the concept of a better world, *a people already in the modern age*.²⁹

Using the tropes of the “uncivilized”, Martí presents Spain as a primitive, underdeveloped country unfit to govern those already firmly living in the modern age.

In this context, the metapoetic “Mischievous Muse”, one of the best-known poems of the collection, can be read as an allegory of the birth of modernist poetry. The poem ostensibly describes an otherwise common family scene, a child interrupting a parent while at work. Ismaelillo bursts into his father’s studio and, laughing, climbs up to the desk, throwing away the poet’s dusty books full of weak verses and foggy thinkers (“versillos frágiles/brumosos pensadores”) and setting ideas free from imprisonment (“De águilas diminutas/puéblase el aire/son las ideas que ascienden/rotas sus cárceles”). The child then begins to dress up as he keeps throwing around his father’s books and papers. He takes an Arabic cloth, fabricates a quiver with his father’s pens and breaks a bookcase looking for a flintstone (“Hala acá el travesuelo/mi paño árabe;/allá monta en el lomo/de un incunable;/un carcax con mis plumas/fabrica y átase;/un silex persiguiendo/vuelca un estante”); finally he puts on an Indigenous war bonnet and brandishes a gold pen meant for political action, both of which were, until then, only used as decorative pieces in his father’s studio (“Del muro arranca y cíñese/Indio plumaje;/aquella que me dieron/de oro brillante,/pluma, a marcar nacida,/frentes infames,/de su caja de seda/saca y la blande”). Thus armed, under the sun, the blond child becomes a golden figure reminiscent of the first mythical golden men (“Del sol a los requiebros/brilla el plumaje, que baña en áureas tintas/su audaz semblante/de ambos lados el rubio/cabello al aire”) and ridding his father of his current pen and inkwell, sends him into a new creative path (“por cauce nuevo/mi vida lance”), satiating the father’s thirst for purity (dame a que harte/esta sed de pureza). Through Ismaelillo’s mischievous assault on the poet’s writing desk, their roles are reversed as the father claims to have been recreated by the child, to have in fact become the son of his son (hijo soy de mi hijo/él me rehace).³⁰ The apparent simplicity of Martí’s use of the medieval *seguidilla* stanza is imbued with completely new rhythms and images. The primitive is embodied in the child and thematized in his progressive dressing in Arabic and Indigenous outfits and the references to the Golden Age and to purity.³¹ It is this “primitive”, “uncivilized” Ishamel that forces the poet to do away with his “civilized” books, pen, and ink, liberate his ideas and his verses through a return to the primitive, the natural, the sacred, also represented in the poem by Jacob’s ladder. The primitive form of the poem and the primitive tropes that the child encapsulates, all work to free the poet from his creative constraints. Notably, Martí does not present an appropriation of the primitive by the civilized poet, but rather the child/primitive launching an assault on his civilized desk, throwing it all away and sending him into a new path, a child who, like “primitive” art forms, is both past and future of modern art.

A modern Indian poet conquers the primitive Spaniards

A few years later, Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío published *Azul...* (*Azure...* 1888), a poetry and short story collection that, reaching across the Atlantic, shattered and reinvented the way poetry

would be written also in Spain. It was famously reviewed by Juan Valera, a prominent Spanish author and critic, for whom the modernity of the book and its cosmopolitanism were as undisputable as they were unsettling. Literary history has obsessively singled out to a fault Valera's assessment that Darío's book suffered from "mental galicism" when, in truth, Valera's comment had far more to do with Spain's sense of self than with French influence. At the time, "French" was often code for "modern" and, in a country that came to its national consciousness against the French occupation, it implied Spain's "backwardness" by contrast, which Valera (and many of his Spanish contemporaries) found difficult to bear, especially coming from a poet from the former colonies and one who, as he would later find out, was visibly *mestizo*.³² While Valera did not use the term "primitive", he clearly identified a contrast between French/modern ideas and Spanish/primitive poetic form in what was something new and original: "you have been able to assimilate all the elements of the French spirit, albeit keeping the Spanish form which is what unites and organizes those elements turning them into your own substance".³³ And he notes, "the form is most *castiza* in your poetry. Your verses look like Spanish verses of other poets, yet they are original".³⁴ Valera was among the first in Spain to identify the modernity of Ruben Darío's book and its confluence of modern/primitive, coding it as French/*Castizo*. His comments about Darío's verses are much like Gordon's remarks about Martí's neologisms, made to look like primitive Spanish without being so, transformed into a new poetic language.

By 1892, and definitely after the publication of *Prosas profanas* (*Profane Medieval Hymns*, 1896), a title and a book that played with the medieval/present, primitive/modern, sacred/profane, Darío was no longer a new and unknown poet in Spain but already admired and followed by a new generation of Spanish writers. In 1898, he was commissioned to write a series of chronicles on Spain for what was likely the most important Spanish-language newspaper at the time, Buenos Aires' *La Nación*. Darío projects his modern gaze over the country, seeing the primitive everywhere in Spain, not unlike Sarmiento half a century earlier. To his American readers, Darío offers his impression of a Madrid unchanged by time: "Madrid is unchangeable in its spirit, today like yesterday, and those verbal caricatures of Madrid people by don Francisco de Quevedo could be, without much difference, applicable today",³⁵ which is followed by a general assessment of Spanish backwardness: "you must know that here modern machines are almost completely unknown, that the harvest is done in a primitive way"³⁶; "religious teaching in the interior of Spain remains primitive, in the pastoral talk that precedes Catholic idolatry of figures that are also primitive"³⁷; in Andalucía, images "are dressed like Byzantine queens" and in the north, "you can still see the Middle Ages with its fearful and idolatrous devotion... There, human blood pours out literally every Holy Thursday".³⁸ Discussing bullfighting, Darío states, "there is no doubt that, collectively, Spaniards are the clearest example of regression to primitive ferocity".³⁹ There are examples at every turn of something "primitive" to describe or comment upon. Even Catalonia, whose modernity Darío acknowledges, is viewed at times through a primitivist lens:

Healthy and robust *are these people since ancient times. Natural and simple*, full of the lively blood with which their fertile land provides them; ...the landscape ... is of *Homeric excellence*. There are children, females, peasants, that seem destined to be part of one of those paintings by Puvis de Chavannes in which *you see the primitive life and grace of the world*.⁴⁰

Darío the modernist poet cannot be separated from Darío the Nicaraguan traveler describing the European "primitive" to his readers and neither of them can be separated from Darío the person whose body was an unsettling signifier for many of those Europeans. From Valera to

Unamuno, from Jiménez to Ortega y Gasset, Spanish writers would constantly comment on Darío's ethnicity, his "Indianness", making puns about his Indian "plumas" (both fountain pen and feather in Spanish) or remarks about his allegedly enigmatic Indian character.⁴¹ Such insistence is a clear symptom of the extent to which in a Spain used to centuries of imperialist civilizing discourses on America, the American body of Darío projecting his modern gaze on a "primitive", uncivilized, unmodern Spain was unsettling.

In 1896, Uruguayan novelist Carlos Reyles began publishing a series of short novels called *Academias* (Art Sketches) which he presented as a new type of novel. The first one was called *Primitive* and, according to him, it aimed to reveal the complexity of the "modern soul", claiming, again, to arrive to the modern through the primitive. He did so by having a *gaucho* as its protagonist, the very figure that for Sarmiento embodied the legacy of Spanish primitiveness. The novel opens with a prologue "To the Reader", a sort of manifesto of the modernist novel in which Reyles presents himself and his generation as the innovators, the modernizers of a genre that according to him has not changed in Spain since the sixteenth century. As expected, and as was the case with his fellow Spanish-American poets, the reception of both the prologue and novel by the Spanish establishment was far from smooth. Spanish-American novelists would continue to engage in the writing of Spain as "primitive" in novels like Enrique Larreta's highly successful *The Glory of Don Ramiro* (1908) with its painstaking reenactment of sixteenth-century Spain down to its language, Reyles's also widely successful *El embrujo de Sevilla* (*The Enchantment of Seville*, 1922) and Augusto D'Halmar's *Pasión y muerte del cura Deusto* (*Pasion and Death of Father Deusto*, 1924), first novel to explore same-sex love mixing different types of Spanish primitivism, that of the Andalusian gypsy and the "primitive" Basque.

Even when the initial debates full of imperialist attitudes towards modernism subsided and young Spanish writers had fully embraced it, a difficulty acknowledging the reversal of power lingered for decades, arguably until today, leaving traces all along twentieth-century literary history. Spanish-American modernists were aware of both their postcolonial reversal and the issues many had about it in Spain. In 1908, Venezuelan novelist Manuel Díaz Rodríguez wrote an essay defining modernism. After claiming that modernism had "returned liberty, rhythm, and nimbleness to a Castilian language that was senile and stagnant like an old paralytic maid",⁴² he defines it as the confluence of a "return to primitive sources" and "a clear spiritual vision of things and beings" that he called "mysticism".⁴³ Neither was fully new, he said, but both together were behind the revolutionary process that came to Spain from America: "It must be said, *because many pretend not to know*, that a kind of *inverted conquest* took place in which the new caravels, departing from the old colonies, set course for the coast of Spain".⁴⁴ Primitivism, modernism, postcoloniality, and a reversal of authority were all connected and clearly visible, yet some in Spain preferred not to acknowledge it.

The generation of 98: modernism in Spain and the primitivism of the self

Not only had the modern gaze reversed directionality, but Spanish-American modernists had also brought the artistic tools necessary to turn the primitive into modern literature. In other words, Spanish writers learned to see and write themselves through the modern gaze of their American peers, to seek and write about the primitive within; it was through that primitivism of the self, we may say, that Spanish writers made such significant contributions to modernism in a period known in Spain as the "Silver Age". Modernism had indeed arrived at a fertile ground as some Spanish intellectuals were already looking for ways to renew Spanish culture and society. Seeing themselves as part of a larger international literary and cultural renovation, Spanish-Americans showed young Spanish writers how to do it and a new understanding of literary

modernity. Spanish-American modernists soon helped young writers establish themselves, lending them their well-accrued cultural capital through prologues to their works, dedicatories, letters, and reviews, opening their international horizons and expanding their reading public through Latin American connections and invitations to write for important newspapers. Yet, the “inverted conquest” was still a hard pill to swallow for many in a Spain soaked in imperial nostalgia. By 1913, when modernism was fully dominant on both sides of the Atlantic, Spanish intellectuals (and since then literary history) fabricated a new name for it, “generation of 98”, and an imperial reason to go with it: the generation of 98 had renovated literature through national introspection as a result of the loss of the remaining American colonies, and had developed a new literature opposed to the formalism of Spanish-American modernists. This convoluted maneuver, aimed at diminishing the importance of Spanish-American influence did not go unnoticed. That same year, Díaz Rodríguez felt the need to remind his Spanish peers about the “inverted conquest” and to call them out for their sudden amnesia:

Peninsular writers often talk today about their literary generation of 98, not remembering, as they should, that this Spanish renaissance or blossoming was awakened by the vigorous current—call it Modernism or whatever you want—that renewing Castilian prose and poetry departed from America and rooted in Spain where it has remained since then best represented in the hour and name of Rubén Darío.⁴⁵

Because of these postcolonial dynamics, the self-primitivism of Spanish modernism (aka generation of 98) was a complex one, at constant odds with itself and with its debt to Spanish-American modernism *and* primitivism.

Literary history has since turned primitivism at best into a footnote of the dubiously called generation of 98 and has mostly ignored it in Spanish-American modernism, a symptom of both the postimperial/colonial dynamics haunting the field and the incredible force of Eurocentric narratives and theoretical frameworks. However, references to primitivism directly or symptomatically connected to Spanish-American discourse are not hard to find at the time, even in writers who literary history has constructed as “generation of 98” members opposite to Spanish-American modernists. That is the case of Unamuno who, reflecting on Darío after the poet’s death in 1916, wrote in *La nación*:

I do not know if Darío was or not an American writer, since I don’t quite know what that means, ...[his work] has had an enormous influence in the young generation of Spanish poets... Because *Darío was very close to the spirit of the cancionero poets of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. There was much of the primitive Spanish. Even more than he thought. And he certainly thought so.*⁴⁶

Even when reluctant to grant Americans an identity, Unamuno recognizes both Darío’s role in the creation of modern Spanish poetry and the place of primitivism in that creation. That same year and getting ready for his first trip to America, Ortega y Gasset wrote an article on Azorín that seems to almost mimic Spanish-American modern discourse on Spain: “Nothing more opposite to America than a book of Azorín”, he says, for America evokes “promises of innovation, of the future, of the beyond”⁴⁷ while Azorín is a “poet of the past” which is the present of Spain:

Spain’s present is the enduring of the past...Spain does not change, does not vary; nothing new begins, nothing old fully expires. Spain does not transform, Spain repeats itself, it repeats

yesterday today, and today tomorrow. To live here is to do the same again. That's why Azorín says that for him, to live is to return.⁴⁸

Ortega concludes: "Azorín's work must be studied as a case of regression to 'primitive' taste, of the same kind as the work of certain contemporary painters".⁴⁹ Ortega's and Azorín's views of an unchanging Spain reproduce almost verbatim Darío's "today like yesterday" about Madrid, while Ortega's comment about Azorín's primitivism echoes Darío's "regression to primitive ferocity" of Spaniards. It is the American gaze ("the promise of the future") and literary language that informs Spanish inward-looking primitivism.

In an exploration of Azorín's primitivism prompted by Ortega's comment, González Echeverría concluded in 1969 connecting Azorín and Picasso's primitivism, albeit ignoring Spanish America altogether (which, by then, had been thoroughly occluded in literary history).⁵⁰ But Ortega's remark could refer to Picasso and to any number of Spanish artists where this inward-looking primitivism can also be found, such as Ignacio de Zuloaga, Julio Romero de Torres, and Ricardo Baroja. In fact, in 1911, Ortega had already written about Zuloaga in primitivist terms:

Es la española una raza que se ha negado a realizar en sí misma aquella serie de transformaciones sociales, morales e intelectuales que llamamos Edad Moderna... cuando [Zuloaga] ha querido enaltecer una raza cuyas virtudes específicas son la *energía elemental, el espíritu precivilizado*, ha seguido la tradición viejísima del arte.⁵¹

Writers and artists moved in the same circles and were part of the same *tertulias*. In an early piece on Julio Romero de Torres, Valle-Inclán described his paintings as "having an archaic and modern charm, which is the essential condition of any work that aspires to beauty in order to last over time".⁵² Ricardo Baroja in his *Gente del 98 (People of 98)* remembers an intellectual world of *tertulias* and friendships between Spanish and American writers and artists sharing a common project:

In general, artistic and literary youth is more interested in the art and literature produced in their time than in the past. Without disdaining the coetaneous, we tried to root our work in the past...It was a logical, natural, and simple preference. But our contemporaries did not understand it or did not want to. They despectively called us 'modernists' when it would have been more appropriate to call us 'archaists' or 'futurists'.⁵³

The connection between modernism and the modern/primitive was seemingly quite clear at the time. It was in this artistic milieu of interaction and cross-contamination of writers and artists from Spain and Latin America where Picasso, already immersed in a similar environment in Barcelona, spent some time during the months of his *Arte Joven* project in Madrid.⁵⁴

New waves of new world modernists: "Indoctrinating" new Castilian generations

As the century moved forward, both literature and art changed modes of expression, but primitivism can still be traced in the best-known works of the period such as Federico García Lorca's lecture *Cante Jondo: Primitive Andalusian Song* (1922) and his poetry collections *Poema del Cante Jondo* (1922, 1931), *Canciones* (1927), and *Romancero gitano* (1928), as well as Luis Buñuel's *La edad de oro* (1930) and *Las Hurdes* (1932).⁵⁵ Spanish-American writers and artists

were by now numerous in Spain, often in transit to or from Paris, but also residing there for extended periods, active agents in the Spanish cultural field. In art, it is difficult to tell the story of Spanish modernism without references to Spanish-American artists such as Torres-García, Rafael Barradas, and Diego Rivera, among others, in whose work we find some of the same primitivist tropes. Writers, on their part, continued forging the Spanish-American modern discourse on “primitive” Spain. In his *Cartones de Madrid* (*Sketches from Madrid*, 1917), Mexican intellectual Alfonso Reyes, who describes the city and its people as if still in a picaresque novel, argued how, beyond Picasso’s nationality, cubism itself had some of its origins in Spanish Golden Age writers.⁵⁶ New generations of poets like Chilean Vicente Huidobro, whose Creationism sparked the birth of *Ultraismo* in 1918, the only avant-garde movement in Spain, kept serving as catalysts of innovation in the Peninsula and being both admired and scorned for doing so. Playing with the already well-established tradition, Huidobro used a favorite primitive trope in his modernist novel on the Castilian medieval epic hero *Mío Cid Campeador* (1929), constantly overlapping medieval and present-day Spain: “To approach [Mío Cid] is to approach the true Spaniard, is to touch the root of the Spanish race, hard, rude, primitive, square. To move away from him is to become foreign, refined, polished, subtle”.⁵⁷ Translated into English in 1931 and prefaced by a personal letter to Hollywood actor Douglas Fairbanks, who had expressed interest in playing the Cid, Huidobro’s filmic novel *Mío Cid* is already a prime example of the role that Latin American writers had as international mediators of Spanish “primitive” culture, a role that would intensify in the following years.

Before arriving in Spain in 1926, Peruvian poet César Vallejo, whose *Trilce* (1922) had revolutionized poetry yet again, was already being welcomed with a backhanded compliment in the Madrid press: “There is a renewal. The light comes to us from America. The poets of the New World are ready to indoctrinate new Castilian generations in their rhythm”.⁵⁸ As had previously been the case with Darío and Huidobro, Vallejo is portrayed as a dangerous innovator, an indoctrinator of Castilian youth. In response, Vallejo jokes that the only reason anyone goes to Spain is to see the first expression of Spanish in the parchments of *El Cid* and, deploying the well-known primitivist trope, concludes: “tonight, when I start my trip towards Madrid, I feel an unprecedented and endearing emotion: I have been told that only Spain and Russia, among all European countries, conserve their primitive purity”.⁵⁹ Much further went Chilean poet and future Nobel Laureate Gabriela Mistral in a private letter written during her time as consul in Madrid. Depicting Spaniards as characters from a picaresque novel like Reyes had done, she described Spain in harsher terms: “national grime and poverty”, “illiterate”, “without basic hygiene, without doctors”, “disdain for justice”, “feudal system”, “millennial tyranny”.⁶⁰ When the letter was leaked to the press, Mistral had to be moved to a post in Lisbon to avoid scandal. Another future Nobel Laureate, Chilean Pablo Neruda, who also lived in Madrid in the late 1930s, became close friends with Spanish modernists like García Lorca, whom he had met in Buenos Aires, Rafael Alberti, Teresa León, Manuel Altolaguirre, Concha Méndez, Maruja Mallo, etc. In his memoirs, he recalls the contrast between Latin American cosmopolitanism and Spanish provincialism and explains: “when Desnos and Crevel came to Madrid, I had to act as an interpreter, so that they and the Spaniards could communicate”.⁶¹ It is precisely Neruda’s image of the interpreter, of the mediator between Spain and others, that I propose we read as symbolic of the form that primitivism would take during the Spanish Civil War.

Explaining Spain to the world: mediation and authority in times of war

During the Spanish Civil War, most Latin American writers and artists became strong supporters of the Republic and the “Spanish people”, fighting and writing in their defense.

Necessarily, the terms of engagement with Spain became different. In the face of a brutal civil war caused by a fascist coup, Republican Spain was now portrayed as the land of hope for the future of humanity against the rise of international fascism. Yet, some of the same primitivist tropes still appeared, even if in a different light. We see them, for instance, in the primitive image of Spain in poems like Neruda's "Cómo era España" ("How Spain was") and "España pobre por culpa de los ricos" ("Spain, poor because of the rich") or in Cuban Wifredo Lam's primitive painting *Dolor de España* (1938).⁶² But what emerges most clearly from this body of work on the Spanish Civil War is the degree to which the century-long Spanish-American modern gaze over Spain and the modernist literary revolution had created and fueled an undeniable sense of authority in Spanish-American writers and artists. They do not only speak with that authority *about* Spain but also *for* Spain. Many works on the Spanish Civil War, particularly Vallejo's *España aparta de mí este cáliz* (*Spain, Take this Cup from Me*, 1937) and Neruda's *España en el corazón* (*Spain in My Heart*, 1938), function, like Neruda's image, as acts of interpretation, of explaining Spain to others. The American cosmopolitan voices in these works serve as mediators between Spain and the world, calling the world into action to save Spain from oblivion, as in Vallejo's "Children of the world/If Spain falls.../Out, children of the word, go & look for her".⁶³ If for a century Spanish-American discourse had been reversing the direction of the primitive/civilized opposition of the imperial gaze, born in sixteenth century works like Sepúlveda's defense of the conquest, it is now the "soft" side of imperial primitivist discourse that is reversed, a kind of Lascasian denunciation of the atrocities taking place in Spain, as in Neruda's famous repetition of verses in "Explico algunas cosas" ("I Explain A Few Things") in *Spain in my Heart*: "Come see the blood in the streets/ Come see/the blood in the streets/ Come see the blood/ in the streets".⁶⁴

In his chronicle "A Symbolic Gesture", Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier recalls stopping at Manglanilla, a Castilian village full of war-displaced children where: "An old lady, wrinkled to an incredible degree, with a dark headscarf folded over her well-combed grey hair, approached me and told me these words that I will never forget 'Defend us, you who know how to write'".⁶⁵ After listening to a speech by the also Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén, "the only one with enough valor to talk to the august and moving people of Manglanilla",⁶⁶ the writers left the town for besieged Madrid. The symbolic gesture of the title ostensibly refers to writing, which Carpentier feels is insufficient in the face of the helplessness and hope of those "Castilian peasants"⁶⁷; but the symbolic gesture can also be read in a different light: the very old wrinkled lady as a metaphor of "primitive" Spain seeking help from Spanish-American modern writers.

Republican Spain fell, the utopian future it was made to embody crushed under the fascist bombs and the fascist regime that ensued. World War II took the conflict to a global scale and scores of Spanish writers, artists, and intellectuals found refuge in Latin America, while Spain remained isolated and stagnant for decades under the repressive weight of Francoism. Latin American literature continued its own innovative path in which Spain itself hardly mattered anymore. But the legacy of modernism lived on, not only to the extent that much of contemporary literature in Spanish finds its roots there but also in the empowerment and authority that modernism attained through the "inverted conquest" of the "primitive" former metropolis. It was that legacy that allowed a Peruvian writer and anthropologist, brought up by quechua-speaking people, to break new ground in 1958 by setting out to study the "primitive" people of Europe. It is a testament to the power that Eurocentric narratives still hold, even when under critique, that this legacy and events remain mostly unacknowledged in modernist and primitivism studies.

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Notes

- 1 José María Arguedas, *Las comunidades de España y del Perú*. Lima: Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, 1968, 10 (my emphasis). All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.
- 2 Idem, 17.
- 3 See Colin Rhodes, *Primitivism and Modern Art*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1994; Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton, “Primitive”, *Critical Terms for Art History* (Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff, eds.). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1996; and their *Cubism and Culture*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 2001.
- 4 Ben Etherington, *Literary Primitivism*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018, xi.
- 5 Idem, xi–xiii.
- 6 In an otherwise excellent collection (and the only sustained exploration of primitivism in Latin America), Erik Camayd-Freixas and José Eduardo González approach primitivism within the same Eurocentric framework by focusing on “how Latin American subjects employ a Western construct to look at themselves and appropriate it for their own purposes”, in *Primitivism and Identity in Latin America. Essays on Art, Literature, and Culture*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2000, viii.
- 7 See Aníbal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America”, *Nepantla. Views from South*, 1, 3, 2000, 533–580; Enrique Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas: The Eclipse of the “Other” and the Myth of Modernity*. New York: Continuum, 1995; and Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs. Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges and Border Thinking*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000.
- 8 Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, *Tratado sobre las justas causas de la guerra contra los indios*. Mexico D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1986, 153.
- 9 Modernist primitivism would continue this long-standing association with children. See Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton, “Primitive”, op. cit., on how primitivism merged different types of ‘otherness’, including age, gender, race, and class.
- 10 Carlos Alonso, *The Burden of Modernity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, 8.
- 11 Idem, 9 (my emphasis).
- 12 James Sanders, *The Vanguard of the Atlantic World. Creating Modernity, Nation, and Democracy in 19th Century Latin America*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014, 141.
- 13 Idem, 154.
- 14 Ibidem, 155.
- 15 Ibidem, 154.
- 16 Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Viajes por Europa, Africa y Norteamérica*. Miami: Stockcero, 2003, 267–268.
- 17 Idem, 268.
- 18 Matei Călinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity. Modernism. Avant Garde. Decadence. Kitsch. Postmodernism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1987.
- 19 José Martí, *Selected Writings* (Esther Allen, ed. and trans.). New York: Penguin, 2002, 44.
- 20 Carlos Reyles, *Academias y otros ensayos*. Montevideo: Claudio García & Cia, 1940, 38.
- 21 José Martí, *Obras Completas*, vol. 17. La Habana: Editorial Ciencias Sociales, 1991, 164 (my emphasis).
- 22 Alan Gordon, “The Neologisms of José Martí”, *North/South*, 3, 5/6, 1978, 200.
- 23 Idem, 207. Gordon did not have primitivism in mind, but his use of *casticismo* has a similar meaning, a term used in Spain to refer to expressions of “pure” Spanish lineage, autochthonous and unchanged by time or outside influence. The word dates back to the fifteenth century and would develop racial meaning. As we will see, Valera noted it immediately in Darío’s early poetry and later Spanish modernists, most famously Unamuno, would also often use the term in a sense akin to primitive.
- 24 Aníbal González, *La crónica modernista hispanoamericana*. Madrid: Gredos, 1987, 9. See also Aníbal González. *A Companion to Spanish American Modernismo*. London: Tamesis, 2007.

- 25 See Alejandro Mejías-López, *The Inverted Conquest. The Myth of Modernity and the Transatlantic Onset of Modernism*. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2010. In his early groundbreaking works on modernism, critic Ángel Rama identified some of this primitivist dynamic (archaisms he called them), but his theoretical framework ultimately prevented him from fully exploring its implication. On Rama's view of the archaic in modernism as a step towards his concept of transculturation in Latin American literature, see José Eduardo González, "Dialectics of Archaism and Modernity: Technique and Primitivism in Ángel Rama's 'Transculturación narrativa en América Latina'", *Primitivism and Identity in Latin America. Essays on Art, Literature, and Culture* (Erik Camayd-Freixas and José Eduardo González, eds.). Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2000, 89–107.
- 26 Enrique Mario Santi, "'Ismaelillo', Martí y el modernismo", *Revista iberoamericana*, 52, 1986, 823.
- 27 Although he doesn't make the connection with Spain, Santi notes that *Ismaelillo's* orientalism is also present in some of the drawings that accompany the first edition, which Martí curated to its finest details. On the child/savage connection, see also Jorge Camacho, "Ver/imaginar: el niño y el salvaje. El modernismo, la percepción del color y la evolución de los sentidos", *Confluencia*, 18, 2, 2003, 32–41.
- 28 As his contemporary Spanish philologist Ramón Menéndez Pidal states "Together with the octosyllabic *cuarteta*, the *seguidilla* is the second most used stanza in popular music today in Spain [...] but its antecedents are lost in time." Ramon Menéndez Pidal, "Cantos románicos andalucés. Continuadores de una lírica latina vulgar", *Boletín de la Real Academia Española*, 31, 133, 1951, 224.
- 29 Martí, *Obras completas*, op.cit., vol 5, 336 (my emphasis).
- 30 Martí, *Ismaelillo. Versos libres. Versos sencillos* (Ivan Schulman, ed.). Madrid: Cátedra, 1987, 71–76.
- 31 In 1889 Martí wrote several issues of a children's magazine entitled *The Golden Age*. Also, despite his radical commitment to an inclusive Latin America, Martí often refers to American Indians as "primitive" people.
- 32 See Alejandro Mejías-López, *The Inverted Conquest*, op. cit., 85–92.
- 33 Juan Valera, *Cartas Americanas*. Madrid: Fuentes y Capdeville, 1889, 216.
- 34 Idem, 225 (my emphasis). See footnote 22 on the confluence of "castizo" and "primitive".
- 35 Rubén Darío, *España contemporánea*. Madrid: Alfaguara, 1998, 52.
- 36 Idem, 59.
- 37 Ibidem, 151.
- 38 Ibidem, 152–153.
- 39 Ibidem, 163.
- 40 Ibidem, 44–45 (my emphasis).
- 41 Mejías-López, *The Inverted Conquest*, op. cit., 106–108.
- 42 Manuel Díaz Rodríguez, *Camino de perfección y otros ensayos*. Caracas: Edime, 1968, 32.
- 43 Idem, 55.
- 44 Ibidem, 61 (my emphasis).
- 45 Ibidem, 152.
- 46 Miguel de Unamuno, *Obras completas. Tomo VIII. Letras de América y otras lecturas*. Barcelona: Afrosio Aguado, 1958, 535 (my emphasis).
- 47 José Ortega y Gasset, *Obras completas. Tomo II. El espectador (1916–1932)*. Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1963, 158.
- 48 Idem, 176.
- 49 Ibidem, 191.
- 50 Roberto González Echeverría, "El primitivismo de Azorín", *Revista de Occidente*, 76, 1969, 95–103.
- 51 José Ortega y Gasset, *Obras completas*, op.cit., 542–544 (my emphasis). For Zuloaga's primitivism, see also Alberto Castan Chocarro, "Simbolismo e identidad nacional: Zuloaga y la pintura española en torno a 1900", *ILCEA*, 44, 2021, 1–21.
- 52 Ramón María del Valle-Inclán, "Un pintor", *El mundo*, 3 May 1908.
- 53 Ricardo Baroja, *Gente del 98*. Barcelona: Juventud, 1952, 49.
- 54 See Patricia Leighton, *Re-Ordering the Universe: Picasso and Anarchism, 1897-1914*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989, and "The White Peril and *L'Art Negre*: Picasso, Primitivism, and Anticolonialism", *The Art Bulletin*, 72, 4, 1990, 609–630; Javier Herrera, *Picasso, Madrid y la generación del 98: la revista 'Arte Joven'*. Madrid: Cátedra, 1997.
- 55 *Las Hurdes* was based on an ethnographic study by Maurice Legendre, whose work had been influenced, in turn, by modernists Ángel Ganivet and Unamuno. Buñuel, who had direct family connections

- to Cuba through his father, was born in Aragon, about which he would write “you can say that in the town where I was born the Middle Ages lasted until World War I. It was an isolated and static society”. Luis Buñuel, *Mi último suspiro*. Barcelona: Plaza & Janés, 1994, 14. Surrealist primitivism would be present in some of his later films as well.
- 56 Alfonso Reyes, *Cartones de Madrid*, 2ª ed. Madrid: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1989, 55.
- 57 Vicente Huidobro, *Mio Cid Campeador*. Mexico DF: Universidad Autonoma Metropolitana, 1997, 54–55.
- 58 César Vallejo, *Desde Europa. Crónicas y artículos (1923-1938)*. Lima: Fuente de cultura peruana, 1987, 81.
- 59 Idem, 81, 83.
- 60 Gabriela Mistral, letter to María Monvel and Armando Donoso, 15 May 1935 [manuscript]. Archivo del Escritor, Biblioteca Nacional Digital de Chile.
- 61 Pablo Neruda, *Memoirs* (Hardie St Martin, trans.). London: Penguin, 1977, 116–117.
- 62 Primitivism is also present in Spanish works, most famously in Picasso’s *Guernica* and in the use of medieval popular forms in the *Romancero de la Guerra civil* (1936) and other *romanceros* about the war.
- 63 César Vallejo, *Spain, Take This Cup from Me* (Clayton Eshleman and José Rubia Barcia, trans.). New York: Grove Press, 1974, 69.
- 64 Pablo Neruda, *Selected Poems of Pablo Neruda* (Ben Belitt, trans.). New York: Grove Press, 1963, 113.
- 65 Alejo Carpentier, *Obras completas. VIII. Crónicas 1. Arte, Literatura, Política*. Mexico: Siglo XXI, 1985, 124.
- 66 Idem, 126.
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2 Cosmopolitan cubism, provincial Paris

Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton

Introduction

How is it that cubism developed into a global language that a multiplicity of avant-gardes across Europe and the Americas identified as expressive of an emerging sense of modernity? Reflecting on this issue, we want to consider first how this question challenges the canonical discourse on cubism, which defined the movement in terms of the center/periphery narrative.¹ This narrative has acted to differentiate artists deemed central to cubism from those regarded as peripheral, while simultaneously identifying Paris as the sole generative epicenter of the movement.² In this discourse, time and space become intermingled: Paris is cast as the creative font, and its geo-temporal impact can only spread gradually, in a unidirectional form, from center to periphery. As a result, the diffusion of cubist idioms beyond Paris and the geo-political borders of France has been dismissed in terms of the language of imitation.³ Artists from far-flung locales such as Lisbon, Amsterdam, or Prague are held by historians wedded to this narrative to have merely adopted cubism as a style, while making no significant impact on the movement's development. As Joana Cunha Leal has pointed out, a related paradigm identifies the center with high, cosmopolitan culture, and the periphery with low, regional, and folk culture.⁴ Thus, as the product of a metropolitan center, Parisian cubism purportedly embodied a purely international style freed of the taint of local culture.

Within the context of Paris itself, this same narrative has been deployed to identify Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque as creative leaders who subsequently inspired Juan Gris and Fernand Léger to develop the style further, while relegating artists such as Albert Gleizes, Henri Le Fauconnier and Jean Metzinger to the status of mere followers whose contribution was of little importance. This discourse had its roots in the wholesale adoption—by an important constellation of Anglo-American critics—of dealer Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler's privileging of Picasso and Braque in his wartime book, *The Way of Cubism*, combined with the rise to prominence of the French critic Maurice Raynal.⁵ In the postwar years, Kahnweiler's and Raynal's Neo-Kantian terminology, with its reference to the so-called analytic and synthetic phases of Picasso's and Braque's cubism, was adopted by key dealers, critics, museum curators, and historians, including Alfred Barr, Clement Greenberg, Douglas Cooper, and John Golding, author of the highly influential *Cubism: A History and Analysis* (1959).⁶ Such thinking was reinforced with the publication of Edward Fry's *Cubism* in 1966, which brought together selected text fragments written by artists and critics supportive of the movement. Like Golding, Fry divided the cubists between the "primary progenitors" Picasso and Braque, "secondary innovators" Gris and Léger, and their even "lesser" associates who began exhibiting paintings labeled "cubist" in 1910. The first section of Fry's introduction—"The History of Cubism"—charts the formal evolution of a cubist vocabulary, beginning with a discussion of the development, by Braque

and Picasso, of cubist techniques of *passage* and multiple views, wholly in response to the influences of Paul Cézanne, African/Oceanic sculpture, and each other.⁷ Asserting that Braque and Picasso were without followers until 1909, Fry then claimed that Léger, who met Picasso towards the end of 1910, was the first artist to follow Picasso's lead in transforming Cézanne's pictorial innovations into a cubist vocabulary. Léger's *Nudes in a Forest* of 1909–1910 was said to possess qualities in common with the contemporary work of Picasso and Braque, but to have still “created a traditional hollowed-out space”, a “traditional illusionistic effect” purportedly avoided by Picasso and Braque.⁸ Other artists were also found wanting: Metzinger, who knew Picasso by 1910 if not before, reportedly “shows a knowledge of Picasso's attempts to abandon closed form” in his *Nude* of 1910, “but did not apply the idea consistently or with sufficient understanding”. Thus, Fry concludes that while 1911 saw the spread of cubism beyond the circle of Picasso and Braque, “none of these painters, however—Gleizes, Metzinger, Le Fauconnier, and many others—contributed anything new or essential to the cubism of Picasso and Braque; and few, if any of them, really understood it”.⁹ With equal confidence, Fry noted that while cubism had become the universal language of avant-garde painting on the eve of World War I, its practitioners throughout Europe and the Americas almost invariably “reflected only the slightest understanding of the style”. Moving to the development of cubism after 1914, Fry concluded that by 1925, “all the potentialities of the style had been realized by its creators, while the lesser followers, by their prolific and mediocre production, were only hastening its decay”.¹⁰

Such thinking continued to shape the discourse on cubism in the museum world into the early twenty-first century, as evidenced by the abundance of cubism exhibitions devoted to the so-called “Essential Cubists”—Braque, Picasso, Léger and Gris—when compared to artists such as Gleizes, Metzinger, Le Fauconnier, André Lhote, and Roger de La Fresnaye.¹¹ Moreover, the last major Anglo-American exhibition fully to survey the movement, Cooper's *The Cubist Epoch* of 1971, enshrined the center/periphery narrative. He structured the catalogue around a unilinear history of the movement, from generative beginnings with the “true cubists” Picasso and Braque, to the emergence of a cubist movement in Paris made up of artists reportedly unconcerned “with true cubism in its essential aspects”,¹² to the subsequent dispersal of the cubist style throughout Europe and North America, and ending with the rise of Purism in 1920. As Cooper stated in his conclusion, “in the seven-year period between 1907 and 1914, the true cubists made all their essential discoveries and innovations”, only to have their conceptions “imitated, misconstrued, travestied, but sometimes...enlarged upon by their contemporaries”.¹³ Cooper's narrative was stridently reinforced by his close ally John Richardson in a chapter of his Picasso biography of 1996, titled “The Other Cubists: Jackdaws in Peacock Feathers”; there Richardson went so far as to accuse Gleizes, Le Fauconnier, and other cubists of having set out to “hijack Cubism” by clumsily imitating Picasso and Braque for purposes of their own self-promotion.¹⁴

This discourse has since been challenged on a number of fronts as art historians have begun critiquing the prejudices underlying the center/periphery narrative with reference to cubism. For instance, Cunha Leal has analyzed how this discourse has distorted our appreciation of the Portuguese painter Amadeo Souza Cardoso, who is commonly viewed as a minor convert to Robert Delaunay's doctrines of Orphic Cubism and Pure Painting.¹⁵ Souza Cardoso had a substantial career while living in Paris from 1906 to 1914, where he forged his initial ties with Delaunay and Sonia Terk-Delaunay in 1911. The Delaunays joined him in Portugal in 1915, during the war, where they collaborated with a group of artists and writers in founding a cooperative exhibition society. While in Portugal Souza Cardoso conflated references to high and low/center and periphery in his art: thus, in his 1915 painting *Popular song—La russe et le Figaro*, he evokes internationalism through the stenciled lettering for the Parisian newspaper *Le Figaro*, while paying homage to Terk-Delaunay's Ukrainian ethnicity and to the Delaunays' fascination

with brightly colored Portuguese figurines, textiles and pottery. As Cunha Leal notes, historians have repeatedly referenced such work to fault Souza Cardoso for adapting the circular forms and vibrant colors—which Delaunay associated with his doctrine of pure painting—to decorative ends as signified by these folkloric elements.¹⁶ Thus the decorative is ascribed a pejorative meaning as a sign of peripheral provincialism, when compared to ‘pure’ paintings’ universal and abstract aspirations.

By contrast, such value judgments have led historians to separate Delaunay’s own subject matter from his abstract language in paintings such as *Portuguese Still-life with Woman Pouring Jug* (1915), so as to maintain a strict division between the universalism associated with abstract form and such regional references. Michel Hoog concludes that such work “is less concerned with picturesque or anecdotal details, than with the rhythms and beautiful shapes and colours” of these newfound subjects.¹⁷

In his catalog essay for the *Colección Cubista de Telefónica* and related exhibition held at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in 2018, Eugenio Carmona has likewise challenged the distinction between center and periphery, leaders and followers, charting Gris’ development of a new form of poetic cubism during the war with his friends the poet-critic Vicente Huidobro and fellow cubists Metzinger and María Blanchard.¹⁸ This transformation occurred while Gris and his allies were living far from Paris in a village south of Tours. As Carmona notes, Gris played a key role in interpreting this new form of cubism from the standpoint of Kantian precepts. The terms “analytic” and “synthetic” gained general traction in cubist criticism only after the war, and usually with reference to Gris’s painting. Thus, Kahnweiler’s retrospective attribution of such terminology to Braque’s and Picasso’s pre-war innovations had more to do with his complex relations to Gris than to any accurate description of cubism’s early philosophical origins. Such findings indicate that epicenters of cubist innovation also emerged outside of Paris independent of Braque and Picasso. Moreover, the role of Metzinger and Blanchard in furthering such developments suggests that we need to move beyond Fry’s tidy distinction between creators and imitators to recognize the broader constellation of creative agents within a diverse movement.

The canonical center/periphery narrative is also transformed by identifying other metropolitan centers in a symbiotic and creative dialogue with cultural developments in Paris. We show that cubism was a cosmopolitan movement from its very beginnings, with no single center.¹⁹ From this perspective, we reveal how so-called minor cubists—such as Le Fauconnier and Metzinger—profoundly influenced the movement’s development and facilitated the creation of new cubist idioms in such cities as Amsterdam and Prague. We will also address those aspects of the movement that were less transmittable beyond the geo-political borders of France by virtue of their grounding in cultural politics internal to France itself. By doing so, we consider such artists as Gleizes, Léger and Tobeen (Félix-Élie Bonnet), all of whom were involved in nationalist or regionalist movements that challenged more conservative attempts to define French identity in terms of a Latin and classical heritage. When we factor in such culture wars, it becomes clear that some Paris-based cubists embraced localized cultures—the Duchamp brothers and the *Société Normande* are the best known—thereby highlighting the peripheral and provincial, rather than exclusively international, dimension of the movement.

Part 1: cosmopolitanism

Bergson and cosmopolitan cubism

We can begin by considering an alternative philosophical source for cubism, which served to define the movement along markedly different lines from the Kantian precepts later championed

by Kahnweiler. Before 1914, the French philosopher Henri Bergson had a profound impact on the cosmopolitan avant-garde, and especially on the cubist painters Gleizes and Metzinger, who co-authored the first overview of the movement, *On 'Cubism'*, in 1912.²⁰ The book's philosophical premises were arguably shared by all the cubists, which would account for Gleizes' and Metzinger's inclusion of works by Braque, Picasso, Léger and Gris among *On 'Cubism'*'s illustrations. This manifesto, which proclaimed the cubists' pictorial innovations as expressive of a new form of realism, was quickly translated into English, Czech, and Russian in 1913 and became a guidebook for artists around the globe who sought to plumb the mysteries of cubist aesthetics.²¹

The cubists' allegiance to Bergson further augmented the movement's international appeal. Bergson was the most celebrated thinker of his day, whose publications were international best-sellers. Before 1914, Bergson disseminated his ideas through public lectures at the Collège de France in Paris, and in lecture tours that took him to Italy, England and America.²² His books *Time and Free Will* (1889) and *Creative Evolution* (1907) famously refuted scientific determinism and described the temporal dimension of human consciousness as synonymous with creative freedom. This notion of creative time, or *duration*, led him to promote intuition as a faculty superior to rational thought in its ability to grasp time in all its manifestations.

Bergson's pervasive impact on cubist circles is well documented.²³ From 1907 onward, Braque and Picasso, together with their literary ally André Salmon, frequented the home of American avant-garde writer Gertrude Stein, where Bergson was a frequent topic of discussion.²⁴ Salmon recorded the mounting enthusiasm for Bergson in cubist circles in the popular newspaper *Paris-Journal*, noting Gleizes' and Metzinger's intention to meet with Bergson in November 1911; he also recorded Bergson's tentative agreement (later unfulfilled) to write a preface for the first major retrospective of cubism, the *Salon de la Section d'Or* exhibition, scheduled for fall 1912.²⁵ We can grasp Bergson's impact on the cubist movement by considering Metzinger's *Nude* of 1910, later illustrated in *On 'Cubism'* and indebted to works like Picasso's *Woman with a Mandolin* of 1910. Metzinger's painting both registers Braque's and Picasso's influence and allies the formal devices co-developed by the cubists with a particular philosophical paradigm, showcasing Bergson's contrast in *Time and Free Will* between normative clock time and the subjective experience of duration.²⁶ His close friend the critic Roger Allard addressed this Bergsonian paradigm in his assessment of the *Nude* when it was first shown at the Autumn Salon in 1910.²⁷ Recognizable elements of the work mentioned by Allard include a 3/4 length female nude; an armchair with scroll arm visible in the lower left; a pedestal table with a vase of flowers; and objects on a shelf, including a clock whose hands read 4:10. The figure of the woman dominates the center of the composition. From top to bottom, we can see her head with its dark hair, shadowed eyes and small 'x'-shaped mouth, the semi-circles suggesting the movement of her left shoulder, and, below, the partial spirals evoking both the movement and the fullness of her hips. "Thus is born", writes Allard, "an art which offers to the viewer's imagination the elements of a synthesis situated in the passage of time", a temporal experience distinct from the normative time registered on the clock face.²⁸

How did Bergson's philosophy serve to justify such a radical turning away from the conventions of academic art? The answer lies in Bergson's separation of intellectual, scientific modes of enquiry from the faculty of intuition, which he related to artistic perception. According to Bergson, intellectual time—the conception of time propagated within the natural sciences—should not be confused with the time we experience as sensate beings. The time of science is a mathematical conception, symbolized as a unit of measure by clocks. In keeping with the quantitative nature of such measuring instruments, scientific time is represented as an extended, homogeneous medium, composed of normative units (years, hours and seconds). But these

symbols or units distort, rather than reflect or express, our inner experience of time; they satisfy the impersonal, practical conception of time that regulates society, but are inadequate as symbols of individual, felt experience of time in our daily lives.²⁹

Bergson condemned Euclidean geometry on the same basis, claiming that our embodied experience of space was inseparable from our experience of time, manifest as our spatial awareness of what Bergson called “extensity”.³⁰ In *Time and Free Will*, Bergson argued that we must “distinguish between perception of extensity and the [rational treatment] of space”, which had its pictorial equivalent in single-vanishing point perspective.³¹ In *Creative Evolution*, Bergson asserted that the artist, as one who recovers felt experience, may also apprehend the qualitative properties of color, time and space.

In *On ‘Cubism’*, Gleizes and Metzinger asserted that color and volumetric form, as qualitative sensations, were integral: “every inflection of form is accompanied by a modification of color, every modification of color engenders a form”.³² Thus, spatial volume is no longer subjected to quantitative division and normative measurement. *On ‘Cubism’* defined cubist space in Bergsonian terms by rejecting normative systems of measurement, such as single-vanishing point perspective, in favor of an embodied concept of space grounded in bodily sensations and our mnemonic imaginations. In their various writings, Gleizes and Metzinger called on artists to combine volumetric forms with multiple views to further capture the mixture of time and space that Bergson associated with felt “extensity”. In his 1910 text, “Note on Painting”,



Figure 2.1 Jean Metzinger, *Le Goûter*, 1911. Oil on cardboard, 75.9 × 70.2 cm. Philadelphia Museum of Art: The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection, 1950, 1950-134-139. © 2022, Jean Metzinger/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SPA, Lisboa.

Metzinger stated that Picasso, in works such as his *Portrait of Vollard* of 1910, conjoined “visual perceptions” with “tactile perceptions” to create what he called “a free, mobile perspective”.³³ In *On ‘Cubism’* Gleizes and Metzinger returned to this paradigm, claiming that, “to establish pictorial space, we must have recourse to tactile and motor sensations and to all our faculties”.³⁴ Thus the pictorial space generated by the cubists not only registered their visual response to a given motif but also to other subjective sensations, including touch and muscular movement. “Motor space” has been associated by scholars of cubism with the physical movement of the artist around a motif to capture multiple views of a subject, but Gleizes and Metzinger actually expanded that concept to include subjective imagery that was the product of memory and imagination as well as bodily movement. Multiple views in a cubist painting could evoke a complex series of mental associations between past and present muscular, tactile or olfactory sensations, in tandem with an artist’s physical movement.

This interplay of visual, tactile and motor spaces is fully operative in Metzinger’s *Le Goûter* of 1911 (Figure 2.1), a work illustrated in *On ‘Cubism’* that portrays an artist’s model, semi-nude, with a cloth draped over her right arm, as she takes a break between modeling sessions. Here Metzinger alludes to a variety of sensory experiences: ‘le goûter’ in French means “snack”, but can also suggest “taste” in the aesthetic sense of good taste: Metzinger includes the square frame of a canvas in the background to remind us of the studio setting. His model is both in the act of tasting and touching. As her left hand grasps the cup and saucer, her finger touches the table, taking on its color to evoke the sensation of the wood’s texture, and her right hand delicately suspends the spoon between cup and mouth. This suspension between two moments is given pictorial play in the “simultaneous” conflation of moments in time throughout the painting: for instance, the cup and saucer are shown in profile and three-quarter views, as is the head of the sitter. The canvas as a whole is intersected with colored volumetric planes, whose diaphanous interpenetration merges the female model with the surrounding environment. According to *On ‘Cubism’*, qualitative space produces a “complex rhythm” expressive of “notions of depth, density and duration”.³⁵ Gleizes’ and Metzinger’s illustrated book gave aspiring avant-gardists a guide to the formal innovations and psychological paradigms expressive of the cubist antipositivist revolt against the kind of state-sanctioned art produced by art academies around the globe.

Cubism’s multiple centers: Le Fauconnier in Paris/Amsterdam

While Gleizes and Metzinger rode the wave of Bergson’s popularity to win over an international audience for the movement, their colleague Le Fauconnier moved beyond Parisian circles to develop an alternative version of cubism. To date, scholars have tended to follow Golding and Fry in dismissing Le Fauconnier as a negligible figure within the movement, but such a view is untenable if one examines his seminal role in the development of cubism in Holland, where he joined the group of Dutch artists who formed the *Moderne Kunst Kring*, or Modern Art Circle.³⁶ This group was founded in 1910 by the artist and critic Conrad Kikkert to promote interchange between avant-garde groups in Paris and Amsterdam. Kikkert had moved to Paris in 1910, where he quickly became friends with Le Fauconnier and the Dutch artist Lodewijk Schelfhout, who had lived in Paris since 1903. He introduced Kikkert to the circle of poets and cubist painters who attended the informal meetings held by the Neo-Symbolist poet Paul Fort in Montparnasse. From 1910 to 1913, Kikkert’s home and Schelfhout’s studio became meeting places where Gleizes, Léger, Le Fauconnier and Metzinger interacted with members of the *Moderne Kunst Kring*, including Piet Mondrian and Petrus Alma. Such interchange inspired Le Fauconnier and Léger to join the group officially in 1912.

Between 1911 and 1913, the *Moderne Kunst Kring* held three exhibitions in Amsterdam. At the beginning, Cézanne’s status as the progenitor of the new art was celebrated with a display of



Figure 2.2 Installation photograph of ‘Hall of Honour’ exhibition, from *Moderne Kunstkring* (Musée Municipal [Stedelijk], Amsterdam, 6 October–7 November 1912). Photograph published in *A Cubism Reader: Documents and Criticism, 1906–1914* by permission of Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie, The Hague, Netherlands.

28 of his paintings in a “hall of honour”. In the second exhibition of October–November 1912, the Kunst Kring committee symbolically bestowed comparable status on Le Fauconnier: no fewer than 33 of his paintings were hung in the “hall of honor”, opposite 12 works by Picasso and a representative selection of paintings by other cubists (Figure 2.2).

The catalogue accompanying the show included a newly-minted manifesto by Le Fauconnier, entitled “The Modern Sensibility and the Picture”.³⁷ By 1913 Le Fauconnier’s influence had become paramount; the 1913 *Moderne Kunst Kring* exhibition was dominated by Le Fauconnier and artists from his immediate circle, while paintings by other cubists were conspicuously absent. Concurrently, Kikkert organized a Dutch Room at the 1913 *Salon d’automne* in Paris where cubist-inspired works by Mondrian, Scheffhout and Alma were exhibited along with work by a student of Le Fauconnier, Marcel Gromaire. Thus the *Moderne Kunst Kring* was a truly cosmopolitan organization, with headquarters and exhibition venues in Paris and Amsterdam.

In 1914, Le Fauconnier further cemented these ties by moving to Holland, where he had a significant influence on the Bergen school of modernists, who took up the synthesis of cubism and expressionism that Le Fauconnier had promoted in his 1912 manifesto on “The Modern Sensibility”.³⁸ In that Bergsonian text, Le Fauconnier counseled artists to merge cubist methods for the portrayal of modern dynamism through *passage*, multiple views and the fragmentation of form, with a new emphasis on painterly abstraction to capture the artist’s expressive reaction to modernity. From 1912 onward, Le Fauconnier and his Dutch colleagues began transforming cubist technique through gestural brushwork and the use of impasto, as evidenced by Le Fauconnier’s *The Tree* of 1914. While Gris and his colleagues were developing a new form of poetic cubism in rural France, Le Fauconnier and his allies, shortly before and during the war, were forging an expressionist version of cubism in Holland.

Cubist art schools: la Palette

Another important way in which cubism-in-the-making was transmitted almost simultaneously throughout Europe and the Americas was through the remarkable rise of cubist art schools, where artists including Le Fauconnier, Metzinger and Léger taught cubist technique to aspiring artists from around the globe. The critic and cubist ally Olivier Hourcade published an article

in March 1912 announcing that the Académie de La Palette, a private art school in Paris, had entrusted its directorship to Le Fauconnier and that the new director had hired Metzinger.³⁹ The school was ideally placed to attract a local artists' community dominated by foreigners because instruction was offered in both French and English. Following the appointment of Le Fauconnier and Metzinger in February 1912, La Palette was able to expand this cosmopolitan base to include French, Danish and Russian artists newly arrived in Paris. Among the cubists' students were the French Gromaire, Danish Albert Naur and Russians Marc Chagall, Lyubov Popova and Nadezhda Udal'tsova. In her memoirs of 1933, Udal'tsova confirmed the dominance of foreigners among those studying with the cubists: "Americans, Swedes and Russians studied in our studio: but the French didn't come for some reason—they considered it a mad-house".⁴⁰ She recounted the routine at La Palette in the winter of 1912–1913:

Le Fauconnier and Metzinger used to visit the studio once a week. Le Fauconnier offered pictorial solutions for the canvas, while Metzinger spoke of Picasso's latest accomplishments [...]. Le Fauconnier was a ferocious expert, and many students trembled before the canvas. Both Le Fauconnier and Metzinger responded positively to my works, and I was so happy when Metzinger told me two weeks later, "You have made extraordinary progress".⁴¹

Metzinger also encouraged Udal'tsova and Popova to keep abreast of Picasso's work along with that of other cubists: thus Popova—in a letter to Udal'tsova in 1913—excitedly recounted a recent excursion "to see the new Picassos at [Wilhelm] Uhde's and Kahnweiler's."⁴² Evidently, Metzinger regarded cubist experimentation as a collective endeavor, with little separation made between leaders and followers.

Metzinger's art pedagogy in Prague

News of the school's cubist pedagogy spread quickly by way of articles showcasing the new techniques being taught by Le Fauconnier and Metzinger. One such article appeared in the United States in 1913,⁴³ but the most significant, devoted wholly to Metzinger's teachings, appeared in Prague. Metzinger's article on "Cubist Technique" in the Czech journal *Volné Směry* (*Free Directions*) bore witness to a split orchestrated simultaneously in Paris and Prague between rival cubist camps.⁴⁴ *Free Directions* was the official publication of the Mánes Society of Fine Artists, an association founded in 1887. The Society was the most progressive organization representing modern artists in Prague until a younger faction led by the modernist Emil Filla broke away in 1911 to form a pro-cubist circle known as the Group of Plastic Artists. Filla's group founded the avant-garde journal *Umělecký měsíčník* (*Art Monthly*) in October 1911, which the artist and art critic Josef Čapek edited until April 1912.

Over these same years, Filla, Čapek and the influential art critic and collector Vincenc Kramář all made trips to Paris to keep abreast of developments in the art world; as a result, they were well aware of an unfolding campaign by Braque's and Picasso's dealer Kahnweiler to distance his stable of artists from those cubists exhibiting at the annual Parisian Salons. These Paris-based debates soon impacted the Prague school: sometime in late 1912, Čapek and a group of close allies split from Filla's circle and rejoined the Mánes Society, claiming that the Group of Plastic Artists was not sufficiently open to all tendencies within the cubist movement. To publicize his views, Čapek gained editorial sway over *Free Directions* in 1913, re-oriented the journal towards contemporary art, and initiated a polemical debate over the status of cubism with Filla's *Art Monthly*. In this context, *Free Directions* published a translation of Metzinger's essay "Cubist Technique", written specifically for the journal, as well as a Czech version of Le Fauconnier's influential 1912 manifesto, "The Modern Sensibility and

the Picture". Concurrently, *Art Monthly* propagated a Kahnweiler-inspired history of cubism in articles such as Kramář's wilting review of Le Fauconnier's 1913 Munich retrospective.⁴⁵ This strategic narrative casting Le Fauconnier, Gleizes and Metzinger as untalented "imitators" of Picasso and Braque would be more fully developed in Kramář's highly influential post-war publication *Kubismus* (Cubism) of 1921, which drew inspiration from Kahnweiler's polemic *The Way of Cubism*.⁴⁶

In 1914 the confrontation between these two Czech factions took symbolic form in rival exhibitions held in Prague: on the one hand, the Group of Plastic Artists' last exhibition, which included paintings by Braque, Picasso and Derain, and, on the other, the huge Salon Cubist retrospective organized by Čapek and Alexandre Mercereau under the auspices of the Mánes Society. Although Čapek tried to persuade Kahnweiler to lend works by Braque, Derain and Picasso, he failed, possibly due to Filla's interventions with the dealer. Thus, the appearance of Metzinger's pedagogical essay on "Cubist Technique" in *Free Directions* implicated the French artist in a highly contentious debate shared by artists and critics in Paris and Prague.

Exhibitions in other urban centers

So, from as early as 1910, exhibitions in urban centers across Europe and North America played a very important role not just in disseminating cubism as a style, but in fostering the development of unique versions of cubism abroad. Between 1910 and 1914, cubist exhibitions took

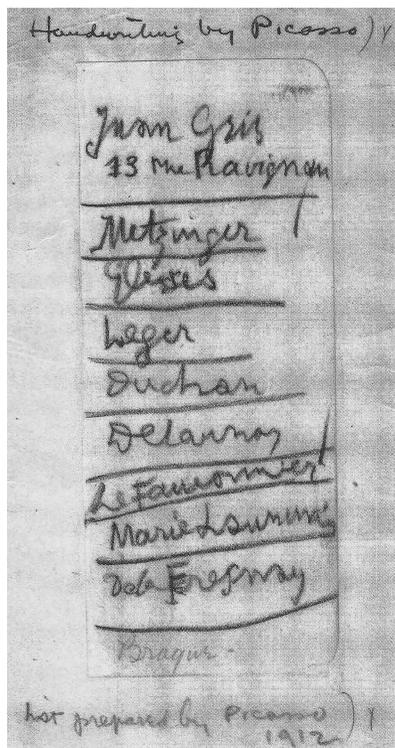


Figure 2.3 Pablo Picasso, List of recommended artists given to Walt Kuhn for the Armory Show, New York, 1912. © Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society. Photograph courtesy of the Walt Kuhn, Kuhn Family Papers, and Armory Show records, 1882–1966, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. © 2022, Succession Pablo Picasso/SPA, Lisboa.

place in at least 19 cities across Europe, the Americas and as far away as Tokyo. Some of these exhibitions showing cubist works are legendary, for example Barcelona's *Galería Dalmau* exhibition of April-May 1912, which was the first self-declared group exhibition of cubist painters anywhere.⁴⁷ An annual presence of cubist works in Munich and Berlin had an enormous impact on the German Expressionists, while in London, the Grafton Gallery shows of 1910 and 1912 and the Doré Gallery show of 1913 inspired the development of the Vorticist movement.⁴⁸

Likewise, New York's Armory Show of 1913, which traveled to Chicago and Boston, introduced European modernism to America with force and forever changed modernism there.⁴⁹ In 1912 Walt Kuhn went to Paris with introductions to Picasso and others to consider works for inclusion in the Armory Show, to be held the following year in New York. While there, Kuhn consulted Picasso's opinion on artists to include in a survey of the *avant-garde*. The list of artists in Picasso's handwriting (Figure 2.3) is a rare indication of those Picasso thought best represented Parisian modernism—and perhaps more specifically cubism—in 1912. Clearly, it was not Picasso who authored the critical treatment of him and Braque as isolated from the other cubists.

Part 2: anti-cosmopolitanism

One of the lingering myths of the cubist movement is that what developed in Paris was not only influential on groups of modernist artists in other parts of the world but was also wholly transportable there. If—as was the case in the mid-twentieth century—cubism is understood as a style of abstraction, following from various theories or not, then this could seem to be true. But viewed as a more complex social and historical phenomenon, there are local features of cubism in Paris specific to the cultural and political milieu there, aspects not translatable or useful to artists negotiating other social forces and artistic structures in other cities. Thus, the kind of localized cultural politics usually associated with the periphery can also be found in abundance at the supposed center—cosmopolitan Paris—which negates a distinction fundamental to the center/periphery narrative. We need to reconsider the Parisian cubist movement in light of these tensions, as its members—including those of French heritage—were also negotiating their regional or national identities. Such negotiation should come as no surprise given the ethnic diversity of the cubist movement.

Paris was a cosmopolitan city before World War I, with many foreign artists migrating to an environment that might foster their art and innovation.⁵⁰ Among important figures in the Parisian cubist movement, relatively few were actually from Paris. It is telling to list them in this light: Parisians included Gleizes, Delaunay and Francis Picabia, who was French-Cuban and made much of it. Braque, Jacques Villon, Raymond Duchamp-Villon, Marcel Duchamp, Léger, La Fresnaye and André Mare were from Normandy and participated in the *Société normande de la peinture moderne* exhibitions. Le Fauconnier and Amédée Ozenfant were from Northern France and Metzinger from Nantes, near Brittany. Lhote and Tobeen were passionate regionalists from Gascony in the south. Among the foreigners in Paris, Picasso, Gris and Blanchard were Spanish. Kikkert, Mondrian and Schelfhout were Dutch. Louis Marcoussis [Markous] and Alice Halicka were Polish, and Terk-Delaunay and Alexander Archipenko were Ukrainian. Popova and Udal'tsova were Russian, Charles-Eduard Jeanneret Swiss and Diego Rivera Mexican. Among the major critics of cubism, Salmon, Mercereau and Raynal were Parisian, and Hourcade was a fierce Gascon regionalist. Guillaume Apollinaire was Polish-Italian, and Kahnweiler was German.

Hence the cubist movement was inherently international—and even internationalist—in its earliest development and in its earliest reception and promotion, which deeply characterized

the movement. Yet many of these artists and critics shared a desire to proclaim their hybrid status as both cosmopolitan and ethnically distinct⁵¹; moreover, the retention of such localized allegiances not only pertained to foreigners who were new to France but also to the French themselves, including artists native to Paris. For instance, among cubist circles in Paris, subgroups among the French sought to promote their regional identity within this polyglot movement.

Regionalist self-fashioning

The first regional cubist movement grew out of the Norman Society of Modern Painting, founded in 1909 by Pierre Dumont as a vehicle for painters native to Rouen and the surrounding region in northwest France.⁵² Duchamp, Léger and Villon were among the original members. Following Dumont's move to Paris in 1910, the Norman Society became increasingly cubist in orientation, leading to lively exchanges between Gleizes, Metzinger and the Normandy group. The camaraderie generated by these meetings culminated in their collaboration on the October 1912 exhibition, the Salon de la Section d'or.⁵³ That summer, the Norman Society held an exhibition in which Gothic subject matter and cubist distortions were purposely intertwined in paintings like Dumont's *Rouen Cathedral*. A bewildering array of geometrical shapes repeat themselves across the canvas, sculpting out spaces for clouds, trees and buildings rather than flattening them. In the center is the cathedral, whose elements, such as the statue of a saint, are spatially divorced from the building's façade, while the cathedral itself merges with its architectural surroundings.

André Mare, also Norman and a member of the Dumont circle, turned to the decorative arts in part as a response to a broader national "crisis" over the poor quality of French design compared to that of Germany.⁵⁴ To reassert the cultural hegemony and commercial viability of French decorative art, Mare consciously rejected such international styles as art nouveau in favor of those tied exclusively to French tradition. As David Cottingham has demonstrated, Mare's allusion to the rural art of Normandy in his *Maison cubiste* at the Salon d'Automne in 1912 indicated his endorsement of the socialist and Republican celebration of folk art as the indigenous, cultural "glue" that could aid in uniting all classes in France.⁵⁵ Mare's eclectic ensembles referenced both aristocratic and rural styles in an attempt to create a uniquely French modernist style, untainted by foreign influences. In this instance, regionalism and competition with Germany mingled in a critical success for the radical new art.

The most ardent regionalist among the art critics was Olivier Hourcade, a nativist from Bordeaux, who founded the journals *Les Marches du Sud-Ouest*, which trumpeted his native Gascony, and *La Revue de France et des pays français*, which promoted regionalist movements throughout French-speaking Europe and North America.⁵⁶ By 1911 Hourcade participated in regular meetings of the Salon Cubists and Norman Society group held at Villon's studio in Puteaux. In an article of 1912, he pushed his regionalist agenda, arguing that cubist painter Tobeen, "with the fervor of a primitive [...] wants to convey his [Basque] homeland".⁵⁷ Tobeen's paintings:

sing tunes in patois and in Basque. That pink soil is made of the union, in the painter's soul, of the thousand lights that illuminate the Basque region, and maintains within itself the dominant hue of the pink sand of Ciboure. [...] It is not unusual [...] to find, on the canvas, a corner of pink fresco painted with the dirt of his home region.⁵⁸

This fierce regionalism on the part of Hourcade had its counterpart in some foreign artists' use of cubism as a means to combine their cosmopolitanism with their ethnic and/or national



Figure 2.4 Diego Rivera, *Paisaje Zapatista*, 1915, oil on canvas, 57 × 49.2 in (145 × 125 cm), Museo Nacional de Arte, Mexico City. Reproducción autorizada por el Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura, 2023. ©Diego Rivera/ADAGP, Paris/SPA, Lisboa, 2022.

identity. For instance, Diego Rivera alluded to his Mexican-ness (*mexicanidad*) in his mature wartime cubism.⁵⁹ The most significant work in this regard is *Zapatista Landscape* (Figure 2.4), in which he achieved a unique cubist style in a painting that summed up his own history. Based loosely on a photograph of Emiliano Zapata wearing a wide hat, sarape and cartridge belts while holding his rifle, the painting was later described by Rivera as revealing “the inmost truth about myself” and as “probably the most faithful expression of the Mexican mood that I have ever achieved”.⁶⁰ The “Mexican mood” in 1915, with Zapata as a reference point, was in revolt against attempts to stabilize a new government without the egalitarian changes demanded by revolutionaries like Zapata. Through its location and focus on the accoutrements of this revolutionary leader, Rivera positions himself in Mexico and with the Zapatistas.⁶¹ The brilliant cubist layering of planes, forms and decorative surfaces—including sarape, woodgrain and striped wallpaper—cluster in front of a *grisaille* landscape of volcanic mountains in the Valley of Mexico, familiar from Rivera’s earlier work. He reminds us of his roots in Spanish academic realism with a *trompe l’oeil* image of a note pinned to the bottom right of the canvas. By drawing on a variety of approaches—from realism to abstraction—Rivera’s painting takes us on the long journey of his career from art student to modernist, simultaneously Mexican and international.

The politics of Revanche

While regionalism was a trope that could be shared among French and non-French alike as a way of proclaiming or marketing their distinct identities within the broader cubist movement, other features were less translatable across geo-political divides. In the case of France, these signifiers pertained to nationalist discourse and a series of culture wars that served to define cubism as uniquely French and qualitatively distinct from other European modernisms. The French cubists' embrace of such themes is especially important when considered in light of the rhetoric of revenge that became a rallying cry among French nationalists following the humiliation of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 and the emergence of Germany as a rival European power. Led by Charles Maurras, founder of the royalist and antisemitic organization Action française, and the polemicist Maurice Barrès, who propagated a blood-and-soil version of French nativism, these conservatives joined prominent anti-Republican Catholics in calling for the rapid remilitarization of France in the face of a German threat.⁶² Thus, in the heart of the Parisian metropolis, there were reactionary forces strongly opposed to the cosmopolitanism that characterized much of the avant-garde.

Among the cubists, the painter and decorative artist La Fresnaye was the chief promoter of such militarism before 1914.⁶³ The aristocratic son of a military officer, he drew inspiration from the work of playwright Paul Claudel, whose medievalizing plays combined themes of military heroism, chivalry and valor with those extolling the Catholic faith and spiritual sacrifice. At the 1912 Independents Salon, La Fresnaye exhibited *Artillery*, a painting whose militarist theme derived from Claudel's religious play *Head of Gold* (1889), and a cubist *Joan of Arc*, underscoring his enthusiasm for that symbol of militant Catholicism revered by reactionaries Barrès and Maurras.⁶⁴ This nationalist orientation also informs La Fresnaye's most famous cubist painting, *The Conquest of the Air* (1913). As Kenneth Silver has shown, La Fresnaye's inclusion in the painting of a hot-air balloon in close proximity to an enormous French flag celebrated France's pioneering role in the development of aeronautics.⁶⁵ The French military widely viewed aviation as a new weapon that could tip the scales in favor of France should war break out with Germany. Thus, La Fresnaye's ode to France's "conquest of the air" was no innocent homage to the wonders of modern technology. His choice of themes may also account for the limited circulation of his nationalist paintings outside France. During the pre-war period, La Fresnaye only exhibited in Germany once, when he sent four small-scale black and white drawings to the second Blue Rider exhibition in Munich in 1912.⁶⁶

As Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel has demonstrated, a similar pattern occurred in the case of Delaunay, despite his greater popularity among the German avant-garde.⁶⁷ In 1913–1914, when he exhibited in Paris such overtly nationalist works as his 1914 homage to French aviator Louis Blériot, he sent abstract works with abstruse titles and cosmopolitan messages to exhibitions in Germany, such as his series of *Windows* and *Simultaneous Contrasts*. His bifurcated exhibition strategy foregrounded the universalism associated with abstract form for a German audience, while his representational work increasingly catered to a Parisian viewership animated by nationalism.

Classicism and Celtic nationalism

This cubist response to French/German rivalry was accompanied by an internal debate in France, and within the cubist movement, over what constituted true French culture. Figures from a vast political spectrum—including anarchists, republicans and monarchists—laid claim to a version of French culture, meaning that art and politics were integral when it came to

matters of art and “tradition”. The cubists and their literary allies responded to those claims, giving rise both to cubist theories of “classicism” and to arguments over whether France was in essence “Latin”, with a cultural genealogy in the Greco-Roman “south”, or “Celtic”, based in the Gothic “north”.⁶⁸

“Classicism” was a lightning-rod term within these culture wars. Long before cubism made its appearance, Maurras had developed a theory of classicism as the cultural counterpoint to his monarchical rejection of republican politics.⁶⁹ Claiming that French culture had reached its zenith in the seventeenth century, Maurras and his literary allies argued that France should return to the “rational” order of government and culture of the Sun King. Cartesian rationalism and the art of Nicolas Poussin were manifestations of this order and part and parcel of France’s Greco-Latin heritage, with roots in the south/Midi. After the French Revolution of 1789, argued Maurras, France had fallen victim to the forces of irrationalism: citizenship under the first Republic privileged individual rights over the collective good. Under the Republic, base motives of greed and epicurean indulgence superseded the self-discipline that came with collective responsibility.⁷⁰

In response, the cubists and their allies actively opposed the royalists’ trumpeting of Cartesian classicism with a counter-definition of classicism based on Bergson’s anti-Cartesian doctrine.⁷¹ Beginning in 1910, Gleizes and Metzinger condemned the imitation of past art and equated classicism with aesthetic innovation on the basis of the radical heterogeneity of *duration*, in which no event is absolutely repeatable. The imitation of past art forms, they argued, denied the classical tradition itself, which was a succession of previous innovations, attuned to the qualitative duration of a given period. In an earlier rebuke of Maurras’ nativist classicism, Metzinger had expanded his notion of cubist classicism to encompass Picasso, thus acknowledging this Spaniard’s role in nurturing a new form of classicism on French soil. As he wrote in his “Note on Painting” (1910), “Picasso, Braque, Delaunay, Le Fauconnier [are] highly enlightened and do not believe in the stability of any system, even if it were to call itself classical art”.⁷² In *On ‘Cubism’*, Gleizes and Metzinger reiterated this claim, stating “the only possible error in art is imitation; it is an infraction of the law of time”.⁷³ Thus the cubists reclaimed “classicism” from the ultra-right Action française and self-consciously allied that term with Bergsonian “irrationalism”.

In 1913, Gleizes intervened in these culture wars with “Tradition and Cubism”, which rejected the Latin South in favor of the Gothic North and placed cubism in the context of the antiroyalist, syndicalist, racial ideology of the Celtic League.⁷⁴ Founded in 1911, the Celtic League sought to unite Celtic regions of Northern Europe into a cultural and political alliance in opposition to the Greco-Latin cultural politics espoused by the nationalist Action française.⁷⁵ In his various publications, the founder Robert Pelletier outlined the League’s artistic purpose as the promotion of medieval corporatism, federalism and the idealist and pantheistic spirit personified by artisans of the Gothic era. By 1913 the league’s membership had expanded to include many figures associated with the cubist movement, including the publisher of *On ‘Cubism’*, Eugène Figuière and the critic Hourcade. Gleizes’ manifesto was another part of a concerted campaign to reclaim the mantle of French culture from the radical right.

In December 1912, Gleizes traced the lost period of French cultural dominance back to the Gothic era, whose cultural representatives were “our primitives and [the humble artisans who built] our cathedrals”.⁷⁶ In turning to the Celtic roots of their own culture, French artists were instructed to extract “the elements that are part of its essence” and to employ intuition to integrate the plastic qualities of design and form, so that the spectator could “appreciate the painting as an altogether independent organism”.⁷⁷

This organic synthesis is evident in Gleizes' *Chartres Cathedral* of 1912, in which he subjected the Cathedral to spatial displacements, combining views of the transept windows and spires with the building's central nave and the humble houses flanking it. Gleizes purposely integrated the Cathedral with its urban surroundings to indicate the building's status as an expression of the collective labor of the local community. His eulogy to Gothic art and the Celtic roots of plebian culture had its most monumental expression in *Harvest Threshing* (1912), a celebration of peasant life and the centerpiece of the *Section d'Or* exhibition. In a panorama of domesticated nature, numerous figures engage in harvesting the ripe wheat. Multiple views and geometrizing planes synthesize a complex series of vignettes, in which figures set a harvest table, reap the wheat, or converse in the village. The pictorial rhythms and earthen palette binding the painting into an organic whole evoke an idealized harmony, wherein the rhythm of human labor is at one with the organic rhythm of the seasons. *Harvest Threshing* pictorially and ideologically confirms Pelletier's praise of the collective spirit and *durée* of the Celtic peasant, which was at the heart of Gleizes' Bergsonian and regionalist cultural agenda by the autumn of 1912.

This pre-war association of the Gothic with the common people was also promoted by Léger as a sign of his own socialist allegiances. As Robert Herbert showed, Léger valued the collaborative spirit of medieval guilds and drew comparisons between Gothic art and his own cubism.⁷⁸ In 1913, Léger disparaged the Italianate classicism of southern Europe in comparison to the art of the "Gothic" north, concluding that northern artists "seek their dynamic means by developing color".⁷⁹ In his various writings, Léger described his turn to abstraction as emulating the art of French 'Primitives' and Gothic artisans. Léger claimed that these artists native to France employed unmodeled surfaces and "pure color". He attempted to modernize such techniques by applying unmixed colors to unprimed canvas, which lent a chalky, matte appearance to his colors and a tactile solidity to the forms. Léger regarded his abstractions as the modern equivalent of Gothic ornamentation, deriving his forms from popular advertisements, the dynamism of the new film medium and the reflective qualities of metal, making them, in theory, more accessible to the people. Thus, Parisian cubism in its most abstract manifestation was saturated with the localized politics of French nationalism, and, to Léger's mind, compositional form and content were integral to this partisan vision.

Conclusion

In sum, rather than interpreting cubism to be a singular style, we should instead speak of multiple cubisms, emanating from a diverse array of metropolitan centers, each with its own internal dynamics. In this model, Braque and Picasso, and Paris itself, are not granted privileged status in the histories narrating the development of these many cubisms. Such thinking allows us to gain a better appreciation for the role of exhibitions, journals, ideas, art schools and local artists' societies in the rapid development of cubist movements, as well as their shared grounding in local cultural politics, including those operative in Paris. An avant-garde group may have proclaimed itself cubist as a sign of allegiance to modernity, but that version of modernity, and that form of cubism, was always culturally specific. Artistic developments in Paris, like those in Amsterdam, Lisbon, or Prague, were thus subject to forces that integrated cubist style and content with cultural debates particular to that region. We need to pay more attention to what was qualitatively distinct about these various locales to better understand the style's function as an adapted idiom.

In some instances, constellations of artists, critics or dealers promoted a particular cubist style in a bid for cultural hegemony that transcended geo-political borders. Kahnweiler and his allies Kramář and Filla did so in Paris and Prague, while Gleizes and his allies promoted Celtic

cubism among North European avant-gardes in their culture wars with the Action française and the notion of classicism promoted by Europe's academies. Likewise, we should recognize that champions of cubism were not the only avant-gardists actively promoting their style on the international stage: in this respect, the cubists' cultural politics need to be measured against those of their arch-rivals, the Italian Futurists.

We also follow Enrico Castelnuovo and Carlo Ginzburg in recognizing that cultural developments on the so-called periphery could serve as signs of resistance to the hegemonic aspirations of movements emanating from a nominal center.⁸⁰ For instance, the culture wars that served to divide the Milanese Futurists and Parisian cubists, as well as the efforts of both groups to promote their movements abroad, were actively resisted by avant-gardists in locales such as Moscow or London. Artists from both cities subverted puritanical distinctions between these two movements by developing hybrid forms of Cubo-Futurism, which eventually gave birth to qualitatively distinct avant-garde movements, such the Anglo-American Vorticism.⁸¹

Still further afield, we should recognize the complex role that cubism played in the development of global avant-gardes during the era of European colonialism. In an international conference on cubism in Asia held in Tokyo in 2005, scholars analyzed the synthesis of cubism and expressionism in the Japanese artist Yorozu Tetsugoro's *Self-portrait* of 1912 in terms of his efforts to adapt cubism to metaphysical values native to Japan and to his nation's claim to modernity.⁸² During the late nineteenth century, Japan had rapidly industrialized in a successful bid to resist colonial incursions. Tetsugoro and his colleagues arguably extended this campaign to the cultural sphere by adopting cubism as a sign of their own modernity and of Japanese resistance to Western stereotypes of orientalism.

In short, in assessing cubism's international impact, we need to move beyond questions of style to consider the motivating socio-economic and political forces that made style a local concern. Cubism's international allies thought globally, but they acted locally. It is the tension between these two positions that serves to define the importance of cubism as a cosmopolitan movement.

Notes

- 1 See Enrico Castelnuovo and Carlo Ginzburg, *Centro e periferia nella storia dell'arte italiana*. Milano: Officina Libraria, 2019, and the earlier English version, "Centre and Periphery", *History of Italian Art*, I, (Peter Burke, Enrico Castelnuovo et al., eds.), Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994, 29–112. Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, "Provincializing Paris: The Center/Periphery Narrative of Modern Art in Light of Quantitative and Transnational Approaches", *Artl@s Bulletin*, 4, 1, Spring 2015, 41–64, has productively considered this issue from the standpoint of digital art history with reference to the Parisian avant-garde before 1945. We have charted this discourse with reference to the modernist trope of primitivism; see Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton, "Primitive", *Critical Terms for Art History* (Robert Nelson and Richard Schiff, eds.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013, 217–233.
- 2 John Golding, *Cubism: A History and an Analysis, 1907–1914*. London: Faber and Faber, 1959; Edward Fry, *Cubism*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966; Robert Rosenblum, *Cubism and Twentieth-Century Art*. New York: Abrams, 1961; and Douglas Cooper, *The Cubist Epoch*. New York: Phaidon, 1971.
- 3 Some exceptions to this focus include David Cottington, *Cubism in the Shadow of War: The Avant-Garde and Politics in Paris, 1905–1914*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998; and Cécile Debray and Françoise Lucbert (eds.), *La Section d'Or: 1925, 1920, 1912*. Paris: Éditions Cercle d'Art, 2000.
- 4 Joana Cunha Leal, "An Introduction: Around Southern Modernisms", *RIHA Journal* 0131, 15 July 2016, np.; and "Trapped Bugs, Rotten Fruits and Faked Collages: Amadeo Souza Cardoso's Troublesome Modernism", *Konsthistorisk tidskrift/Journal of Art History*, 82, 2, May 2013, 99–114.
- 5 See Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton, *Cubism and Culture*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2000, 203–205.

- 6 Alfred Barr, *Cubism and Abstract Art*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1936; Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture: Critical Essays*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1961; Douglas Cooper, *The Cubist Epoch*; and, with Gary Tinterow, *The Essential Cubism: Picasso, Braque and Their Friends, 1907–1920*. London: Tate Gallery, 1983; and John Golding, *Op. cit.* Contemporary collector Leonard Lauder’s ongoing building of his impressive cubism collection is also indebted to this legacy, and especially to Cooper’s outlook; see Leonard A. Lauder and Emily Braun, “A Collector’s Story”, *Cubism: The Leonard A. Lauder Collection* (Emily Braun and Rebecca Rabinow, eds.). New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2014, 3–19.
- 7 Edward Fry, *Op. cit.*, 11–18.
- 8 *Idem*, 19.
- 9 *Ibidem*, 22 and 25.
- 10 *Ibidem*, 35.
- 11 Douglas Cooper, *op. cit.*; Cooper and Tinterow, *op. cit.*; and, most recently, *Cubism: The Leonard A. Lauder Collection*, *op. cit.*
- 12 Cooper, *op. cit.*, 263.
- 13 *Idem*.
- 14 John Richardson, *A Life of Picasso: 1907–1916, The Cubist Rebel*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 207–219.
- 15 Cunha Leal, “Trapped Bugs, Rotten Fruits and Faked Collages”, *op. cit.*
- 16 Cunha Leal, *idem*, 104–105.
- 17 Michel Hoog, *R. Delaunay* (A. Sachs, trans.). New York: Crown Publishers, 1976, 20.
- 18 Eugenio Carmona, “Experiences and Narratives of the Modern”, *Colección Cubista de Telefónica* (Alicia Carabias Álvaro, ed.). Madrid: Fundación Telefónica, 2012, 384–409.
- 19 Joyeux-Prunel, “Provincializing Paris”, *op. cit.*, 42–45, has explored this paradigm with great acuity from the standpoint of avant-garde and Cubist exhibition practices before 1914.
- 20 Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger, *Du ‘Cubisme’*. Paris: Eugène Figuière, 1912, trans. in *A Cubism Reader: Documents and Criticism, 1906–1914* (Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighten, eds.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008, 418–435.
- 21 See Mark Antliff, *Inventing Bergson: Cultural Politics and the Parisian Avant-garde*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993.
- 22 See R.C. Grogin, *The Bergsonian Controversy in France, 1900–1914*. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1988; and Frederick Burwick and Paul Douglass, “Introduction”, *The Crisis in Modernism: Bergson and the Vitalist Controversy* (Frederick Burwick and Paul Douglass, eds.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, 1–12.
- 23 See Mark Antliff, *Inventing Bergson*, *op. cit.*, 39ff.
- 24 Joseph N. Riddel, “Modern Times: Stein, Bergson, and the Ellipses of ‘American’ Writing”, *The Crisis in Modernism*, *op. cit.*, 330–367.
- 25 André Salmon, “Bergson et les cubists”, *Paris-Journal*, 29 November 1911 and “La Section d’Or”, *Gil Blas*, 22 June 1912.
- 26 Antliff and Leighten, *Cubism and Culture*, *op. cit.*, 80–83.
- 27 Roger Allard, “Au Salon d’Automne de Paris,” *L’Art Libre* [Lyons], November 1910, 441–443, trans. in *A Cubism Reader*, *op. cit.*, 84–86.
- 28 Allard, “Au Salon d’Automne de Paris”, *op. cit.*, 443.
- 29 Antliff, *Inventing Bergson*, *op. cit.*, 44.
- 30 For an exploration of the cubists’ embrace of non-Euclidean geometry, see Linda Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983.
- 31 Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will* (1889), authorized trans. F.L. Pogson. London: G. Allen & Company, Ltd. and New York: The Macmillan Company, 1910, 1889, 96; for further discussion see Antliff, *op. cit.*, 47.
- 32 Gleizes and Metzinger, *On ‘Cubism’*, *op. cit.*, 428.
- 33 Metzinger, “Note sur la peinture”, *Pan*, October–November 1910, 49–52, trans. in *A Cubism Reader*, *op. cit.*, 75–78; “Note on Painting”, 76.
- 34 Gleizes and Metzinger, *On ‘Cubism’*, *op. cit.*, 424.
- 35 Gleizes and Metzinger, *idem*, 421.
- 36 Information on the Dutch cubist circles is drawn from Jan Van Adrichem, “The Introduction of Modern Art in Holland: Picasso as pars pro toto, 1910–1930”, *Simiolus*, 21, 3, 1992, 162–211; and *Henri Le Fauconnier: Kubisme en Expressionisme in Europa*. Haarlem: Frans Hals Museum, 1993.

- 37 *Moderne Kunstkring* (Musée Municipal [Stedelijk], Amsterdam, 6 October–7 November 1912).
- 38 Le Fauconnier, “La sensibilité modern et le tableau”, *Moderne Kunstkring*, 1912, 17–27, trans. in *A Cubism Reader*, op. cit., 384–388.
- 39 Olivier Hourcade [pseud. of Olivier Bag], “Enquête sur le cubisme”, *L’Action*, 17 March 1912, trans. in *A Cubism Reader*, op. cit., 237–244; “Survey on Cubism”, 237. For information on La Palette, see *A Cubism Reader*, op. cit., 551–554.
- 40 Nadezhda Udal’tsova, *Жизнь русской кубистки: дневники, статьи, воспоминания/Zhizn’ russkoi kubistki: dnevniki, stat’i, vospominaniia* [Life of a Russian Cubist: Diaries, Articles, Memoirs]. Moscow: Literaturno-khudozh. agentstvo “RA”, 1994; cited in *Women Artists of Russia’s New Age, 1900–1935* (Anthony Pardon and M.N. Yablonskaya, eds.). New York: Rizzoli, 1990, 171.
- 41 Cited in *Amazons of the Avant-Garde* (John Bowlt and Matthew Drutt, eds.). New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 2000, 343–344.
- 42 Idem.
- 43 Yvonne Lemaître, “Interview with Metzinger on Cubists and What They Are Doing in the Art World”, *Courier-Citizen* [Lowell, MA] 12, May 1913, 7, repr. In *A Cubism Reader*, op. cit., 547–551.
- 44 Metzinger, “Kubistická Technika [Cubist Technique]”, *Volné Směry* 12 (Prague), 1913, 279–292, trans. in *A Cubism Reader*, op. cit., 602–612. Information on Czech Cubism is drawn from *A Cubism Reader*, op. cit., 612–616; and Naomi Hume, “Contested Cubisms: Transformations of the Czech Avant-Garde, 1910–1914”, Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 2004.
- 45 Vincenc Kramář, “Chapter on -isms: On the exhibition of Le Fauconnier in Munich”, *Art Monthly* (Prague), 2/4-5, February 1913, 115–130.
- 46 Vincenc Kramář, *Kubismus*, Prague, 1921, trans. *Le Cubisme* (Erika Abrams and Hélène Klein, eds.). Paris: École nationale supérieur des Beaux-Arts, 2002; see Yve-Alain Bois, “Préface,” in Kramář, *Le Cubisme*, op. cit., ix–xxi.
- 47 Robert Lubar, “Cubism, Classicism and Ideology: The 1912 Expositió d’Art Cubista in Barcelona and French Cubist Criticism”, *On Classic Ground: Picasso, Léger, de Chirico and the New Classicism, 1910–1930* (Elizabeth Cowling and Jennifer Mundy, eds.). London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1990, 309–323; and *A Cubism Reader*, op. cit., 294–296.
- 48 Fry, op. cit., 183–185, includes a chronological list of global Cubist exhibitions before 1914.
- 49 *The Armory Show at 100: Modernism and Revolution* (Marilyn Satin Kushner and Kimberly Orcutt, eds.). New York: New York Historical Society, 2013.
- 50 See *Foreign Artists and Communities in Modern Paris, 1870–1914* (Karen L. Carter and Susan Waller, eds.). Farnham: Ashgate, 2015; Ihor Junyk, *Foreign Modernism: Cosmopolitanism, Identity, and Style in Paris*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013; and Richard Sonn, *Modernist Diaspora: Immigrant Jewish Artists in Paris, 1900–1945*. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, Inc., 2022.
- 51 For a related paradigm, see Junyk’s analysis of Archipenko’s subversion of French nationalism and assertion of foreignness in his work, op. cit., 46–50.
- 52 *A Cubism Reader*, op. cit., 57; François Lespinasse, “Les événements de la vie artistique de 1878 à 1914”, *L’École de Rouen de l’impressionnisme à Marcel Duchamp, 1878–1914* François Lespinasse and Claude Pétry-Parisot (eds.). Rouen: Musée des Beaux-Arts de Rouen, 1996, 33–35.
- 53 *La Section d’Or. Numéro Spécial consacré à l’Exposition de la “Section d’Or,”* 1/1, October 9, 1912, was simultaneously edited by Dumont, with its lead article by Guillaume Apollinaire, “Young Painters, Do Not Come to Blows!”, trans. *A Cubism Reader*, op. cit., 332–350.
- 54 *A Cubism Reader*, op. cit., 229–231; Nancy Troy, *Modernism and the Decorative Arts in France: Art Nouveau to Le Corbusier*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991, 79–102.
- 55 David Cottingham, “The Maison Cubiste and the Meaning of Modernism in Pre-1914 France”, *Architecture and Cubism* (Eve Blau and Nancy Troy, eds.). Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986, 17–40.
- 56 *A Cubism Reader*, op. cit., 223–225; Patricia Leighton, *The Liberation of Painting: Modernism and Anarchism in Avant-Guerre Paris*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013, 103–104.
- 57 Hourcade, “La tendance de la peinture contemporaine”, *La Revue de France et des Pays Français*, February 1912, trans. *A Cubism Reader*, op. cit., 215–223; for a fuller discussion, see Leighton, *Liberation of Painting*, op. cit., 103–104.
- 58 Hourcade, “La tendance de la peinture contemporaine”, op. cit., 218–219.
- 59 Ramón Favela, *Diego Rivera: The Cubist Years*. Phoenix: Phoenix Art Museum, 1984; David Craven, *Diego Rivera as Epic Modernist*. New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1997; Leighton, “Embattled Cubism: Picasso, Rivera and World War I,” in *Picasso and Rivera: Conversations Across Time*. Ex. cat., Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2016.

- 60 Diego Rivera (with Gladys March), *My Art, My Life: An Autobiography*. New York: Citadel Press, 1960, 114.
- 61 Craven, 40.
- 62 Antliff, *Inventing Bergson*, op. cit.; Neil McWilliam, *The Aesthetics of Reaction*. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2021.
- 63 Germain Seligman, *Roger de La Fresnaye: with a Catalogue raisonné*. Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1969; and *Roger de la Fresnaye: cubisme et tradition* (Françoise Lucbert, ed.). Paris: Somogy, Éditions d'art, 2005.
- 64 Antliff and Leighton, *A Cubism Reader*, op. cit., 577–581; Lucbert, op. cit., 48–55.
- 65 Kenneth Silver, “The Heroism of Understatement: The Ideological Machinery of La Fresnaye’s ‘Conquest of the Air’”, *Self and History: A Tribute to Linda Nochlin* (Aruna D’Souza, ed.). London: Thames & Hudson, 2001, 177–226.
- 66 Lucbert, op. cit., 180–189.
- 67 Joyeux-Prunel, op. cit., “Provincializing Paris,” 42.
- 68 Antliff, “Cubism, Celtism, and the Body Politic,” *The Art Bulletin*, December 1992, 655–668.
- 69 McWilliam, op. cit., 153–157.
- 70 Antliff, *Inventing Bergson*, op. cit., 119–120; McWilliam, op. cit., 166–169.
- 71 Antliff, idem, 16–38.
- 72 Metzinger, “Note on Painting”, op. cit., 75.
- 73 Gleizes and Metzinger, *On ‘Cubism’*, op. cit., 419.
- 74 Gleizes, “La tradition et le cubisme” [Cubism and Tradition], *Montjoie!*, February 1 and 2, 1913, trans. *A Cubism Reader*, op. cit., 460–466.
- 75 On the Celtic League, see Antliff, “Cubism, Celtism, and the Body Politic”, op. cit.; McWilliam, op. cit., 249–258.
- 76 Henriquez-Philippe, “Le cubisme devant les artistes”, *Les Annals Politiques et Littéraires*, July–December 1912, 473–475, trans. *A Cubism Reader*, op. cit., 438–446; Gleizes’ response, idem, 445–446.
- 77 Henriquez-Philippe, op. cit., 445.
- 78 Robert Herbert, “Léger, the Renaissance, and ‘Primitivism,’” *From Millet to Léger: Essays in Social Art History* (Robert Herbert, ed.). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002, 143–151.
- 79 Fernand Léger, “Les origines de la peinture et sa valeur représentative”, *Montjoie!*, 29 May 1913, 7 and 14–29, trans. in *A Cubism Reader*, op. cit., 535–543; Léger quotation, idem, 539.
- 80 Castelnuovo and Ginzburg, op. cit.
- 81 Rebecca Beasley, “Vortorussophilia”, *Vorticism: New Perspectives* (Mark Antliff and Scott Klein, eds.). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, 33–50.
- 82 *Cubism in Asia: Unbound Dialogues*. Ex.cat., Tokyo: Tōkyō Kokuritsu Kindai Bijutsukan: Kokusai Kōryū Kikin, 2005; and *International Symposium 2005, “Cubism in Asia: Unbounded Dialogues” Report* (Furuichi Yasuko, ed.). Tokyo: The Japan Foundation, 2006.

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3 *Los Pintores Íntegros*

A primitivist rationale for Iberian and transatlantic modernisms

Joana Cunha Leal

This chapter discusses the *Los Pintores Íntegros* exhibition curated by Ramón Gómez de la Serna (1888–1963) in Madrid in 1915.¹ While analysing the exhibition’s significance to the introduction of Cubism in the Spanish capital, this article also discusses how Gómez de la Serna’s rationale contributes in asserting a primitivist bedrock for the show—a topic that has yet to be addressed in the literature. Bearing in mind Patricia Leighton’s insights into how an “anticolonial crisis” can be associated with the praise of African art, and the concurrent pluralisation of the political, historical and aesthetic implications in modernist uses of primitivism arising from this paradigm,² I will consider Gómez de la Serna’s thought along with some of the artworks shown in the 1915 exhibition. I will particularly address works exhibited by Diego Rivera (1886–1957) on that occasion. As I hope to demonstrate, the primitivist background of *Los Pintores Íntegros* paved the way for intertwining the local and the cosmopolitan (1) by calling for the Europeanising of Spain via the presentation of Cubism and the inscription of Madrid in the geography of international avant-garde exhibitions; and (2) by making the values of local folk art and popular culture interchangeable under the umbrella of Cubism, a process that, I will claim, encompassed the Spanishisation of the Cubist repertoire presented by the “íntegros” painters just before Diego Rivera fabricated an alternative primitivist myth of origins, grounded in Mexican ethnicity and culture.

A “rotative” portrait by Diego Rivera

I will begin by looking at the famous Gómez de la Serna portrait by Rivera, presented at the gallery window in the immediate aftermath of the “íntegros” exhibition.³ In his memoirs, the artist highlights this portrait among his Cubist experiments.⁴ Earlier in Majorca, Rivera writes, he had tried “new textures and tactile effects by mixing substances such as sand and sawdust in oils”, composing what he believed were “interesting landscapes”. Once in Madrid, he experimented with other genres, painting at least two important portraits: that of Gómez de la Serna (Figure 3.1) and Jesús T. Acevedo (Figure 3.4), a Mexican friend, architect and art critic “whom a turn of Mexican politics forced to remain in Madrid”.⁵

Rivera described his Gómez de la Serna portrait as depicting:

The head of a decapitated woman and a sword with a woman’s hair on its point, plainly the weapon which had beheaded the woman. In the foreground was an automatic pistol. Beside it and in the centre of the canvas was a man holding a pipe in one hand, in the other a pen with which he was writing a novel. He had the appearance of an anarchistic demon, inciting crime and the general overthrow of order. In this Satanic figure everyone recognised the

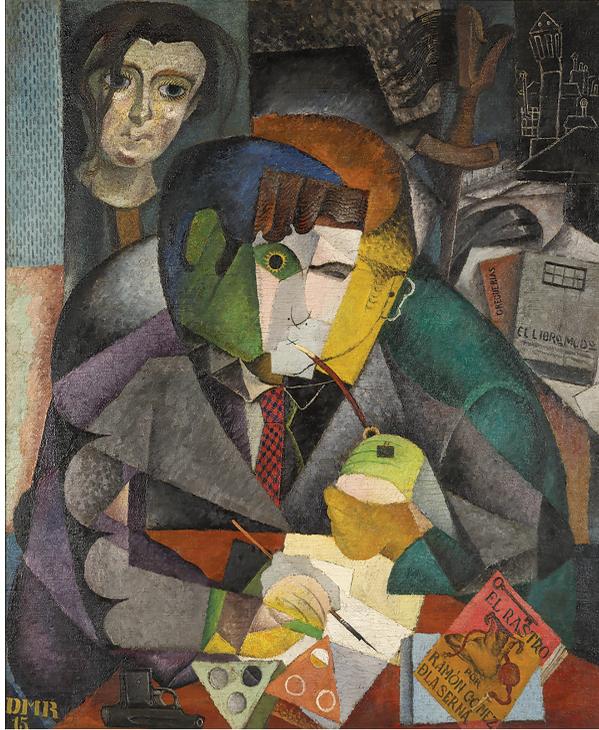


Figure 3.1 Diego Rivera, *Retrato de Ramón Gómez de la Serna*, 1915. Oil on canvas, 109.6 × 90.2 cm. Colección Malba, Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires. Photograph by Gustavo Sosa Pinilla. © 2023 Banco de México Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, México, D. F./ARS, New York/SPA, Lisboa.

features of Serna, notorious for his opposition to every conventional, religious, moral, and political principle.⁶

The reception of this portrait in 1915 is a kind of saga in its own right, significantly escalating the disruption prompted by the *Los Pintores Íntegros* exhibition. Before discussing it, I want to highlight the fact that Gómez de la Serna's figure, the "anarchistic demon" writing and smoking a pipe surrounded by some of his latest and most prominent authored books, such as *Greguerías* and *El Rastro*, is portrayed by Diego Rivera as a dual character. Half of the figure stands in the light that pours from the smoking pipe. The corresponding part of the face is washed in bright yellow and the hair is red. The light reaches the writing hand, that is also coloured yellow. The other half of the figure is represented in nocturnal tones, with a violet apparel, green complexion and blue hair. The fact that the centre of Gómez de la Serna's face, resulting from the two inward-looking profiles is united by Rivera in an imperfect white triangular surface, does not diminish the startling difference in his depiction of the eyes (one is opened in a sun-shaped form, the other one is closed), nor the line dividing neck-tie and shirt into two completely different halves. Also doubled, and represented in different colours, are the triangular ink pots resting on the writing table. There is a black ink pot and a reddish ink pot, the latter clearly associated via its colour tones with the cover of the book *El Rastro*.⁷

Gómez de la Serna chose this portrait for the cover of his *Ismos* book, published a few years later in 1931. *Ismos* brings together several texts written from the 1910s onward, and had a first partial appearance in 1921, under the title *El cubismo y todos los ismos*.⁸ The book asserts the author's devotion to modernist ideology and the corresponding triumph of the new. With few exceptions—namely a chapter on African sculpture—individual protagonists in literature and the visual arts are celebrated throughout the book.⁹ Diego Rivera is entitled to a chapter, which gives Gómez de la Serna the opportunity to write about Rivera's "rotative" portrait of him.¹⁰ Taking the painting by Rivera as a perfect example of Cubist portraits' potential, where, to the benefit of representation, allegory superseded likeness,¹¹ Gómez de la Serna also highlights the different colours separating the two halves of the depicted figure: "The heaviness of one part of my body needed a darker colour and with a certain thickness, just as the levitation of the other part is blurring and vivid colour, more vivid than it appears to be".¹²

A strange melting pot?

As in the case of the Delaunays and so many other fellow artists living in Paris, the war led Diego Rivera and his partner, the Russian painter Angelina Beloff (1879–1969), to stay in neutral Spain. After brief sojourns in Majorca and Barcelona, the couple arrived in Madrid, where they reencountered an avant-garde clique with which they were already familiar.¹³ Their long-time friend María Blanchard (1881–1932) took part in this clique, as much as Gómez de la Serna, who by that time had already risen to prominence as a prolific avant-garde author, long-time editor and journalist, and who would soon be the head of the new Pombo café *tertulia* where they all met once a week from 1915 on.

In March 1915, right at the moment of Pombo's "sacred crypt" inauguration, the Madrilenian writer put together *Los Pintores Íntegros*. The exhibition held at the *Salón de Arte Moderno* (formerly the *Salon Kühn*) from 5 to 15 March 1915 displayed eleven paintings by Diego Rivera, seven paintings by María Blanchard,¹⁴ eleven artworks by the caricaturist and painter Lluís Bagaría (1882–1940) and ten sculptures by Agustín-Choco (?-?). Thus, Gómez de la Serna's exhibition showcased the work of a relatively unknown Mexican painter in conjunction with that of a likewise relatively unknown Spanish woman painter, both with Parisian avant-garde backgrounds and a sophisticated knowledge of the Cubist idiom. These artists, whose works guaranteed the overall reception of the exhibition as a Cubist show, were in turn shown alongside a well-known, Madrid-based Catalan caricaturist and illustrator who also painted. Lastly, there was an unknown sculptor in the group, referred to by Gómez de la Serna in the catalogue text as "the savage".

Was there a rationale behind the organisation of an exhibition that brought together two Parisian Cubists with two other completely different artists, be it in terms of the media they used, their artistic languages and backgrounds? Or is the art historian Jaime Brihuega right to consider this "strange melting pot" the simple result of Gómez de la Serna's arbitrary choices, and to (dis)qualify it as lacking any programmatic purpose?¹⁵

Alberto Nulman Magidin and Ana Luisa Montes de Oca Vega, in a recent article that stands out as the most in-depth study of this exhibition written to date, have rightly pointed out that for Gómez de la Serna, the show was a kind of precursor of the Pombo café group he was about to launch. In his contribution to the catalogue, read out loud at the exhibition opening, the writer referred to "nosotros" (we), meaning not only those directly involved in the show but also the wider group he was about to bring together at the Pombo café's weekly encounters.¹⁶ In addition, the authors highlight how in *La Proclama del Pombo* (The Pombo Proclamation), a loose sheet appearing a few months later, Gómez de la Serna reused the expression "íntegros" to refer to the political resistance and the heroic ethics of a group of nineteenth-century Spaniards fighting against absolutism, whose

honourable behaviour was associated with the Pombo clique: “Our attitude is as lonely and as final as that of those men full of integrity [íntegros] in the unforgettable painting by (Antonio) Gisbert, *The execution of Torrijos and his companions (on the beaches at Malaga)*.”¹⁷

Together with the act of resistance represented in Gisbert’s painting, Rivera’s assertion that Gómez de la Serna “dubbed our group *Los Íntegros*, because of our wish to express ourselves with complete integrity”¹⁸ helps us to further clarify how notions of honesty, sincerity and virtue go with the notion of integrity that defines the association of the four artists participating in the 1915 exhibition. Moreover, Gómez de la Serna retained the word “íntegros” from a chapter of his earlier book *El Rastro*, where he wrote about the young visitors to the flea market, acclaiming the “personal reality, the last and the first conquest of man, [that] lives in these young people full of true frankness with themselves”.¹⁹ So, apart from a possible pun involving the ultra-conservative Spanish Catholic party known as Partido Integrista,²⁰ Gómez de la Serna’s idea of integrity has its lineage in the “concept of the artist as a ‘primitive’—anti-rational, spontaneous, and above all ‘authentic’” that, according to Patricia Leighton and Mark Antliff, “informed the entire Cubist movement throughout the pre-World War I period”, and took as its exemplars artists as disparate as Paul Cézanne and the Douanier Rousseau.²¹

A Cubist show with a primitivist bedrock

It is my contention that there is a rationale behind the 1915 Madrid exhibition grounded on its primitivist bedrock. Highlighting the “primitivist” underpinnings of *Los Pintores Íntegros* does not belittle its Cubist affiliation, but it definitely emphasises the need for “a reconfiguration of our understanding of Cubism within politicised concepts of the ‘primitive’”, highlighted by Patricia Leighton in her study on modernism and anarchism in avant-guerre Paris.²²

Indeed, the fact that Gómez de la Serna entitled the exhibition *Los Pintores Íntegros* did not alter its immediate reception as a Cubist show.²³ The newspaper *ABC* quickly clarified that “these young people of ‘arbitrary and abstruse inspiration’ presented nothing but ‘a new modality of Cubism’”.²⁴ A few days later, the *Nuevo Mundo* made a small note on the exhibition also suggesting that the public attention it had been raising was probably due to its “displaced” Cubist affiliation.²⁵ In the same vein, José Francés’s negative criticism suggests that “íntegros” was nothing but a euphemism for Cubism in his piece for *Mundo Gráfico* (Figure 3.2).²⁶ In *La Ilustración Española y Americana*, the art critic Manuel Abril, a modern art sympathiser and a



Figure 3.2 Fresno, La Srta. Gutierrez Cueto e el Sr. Ribera, pintores íntegros, que han celebrado una Exposición de obras cubistas en el salón “Arte Moderno”, *El Mundo Gráfico*, 17 March 1915.

founding member of the Pombo café *tertulia*, also addressed the need to explain Cubism to its audience directly responding to the exhibition.²⁷

Gómez de la Serna openly discussed Cubism in the catalogue's text, bringing to the fore the question of representation in painting. He argues that the expression "pintores íntegros" emphasises that the "Cubist formula evolved in these artists" so that, in Favela's synthesis, they could "find their own integrity and autonomous (arbitrary) identity which they also applied to the nature of their subjects and the way they depicted them".²⁸ But the idea that Cubism constituted the basis on which artists such as Diego Rivera and María Blanchard renewed their approach to representation and expanded the material possibilities of painting during the war years is key and quite accurately expressed in the catalogue.²⁹

In addition, Gómez de la Serna discusses the difference inscribed by Lluís Bagaría's work in this regard, highlighting the fact that his association with Rivera and Blanchard depends on his caricatures rather than his paintings. Indeed, as Patricia Leighton argues in her study about modernist caricature, the "expressive freedom, bold simplifications, violent deformations, and strikingly abstract compositions" we find in cartoons by modernist artists "suggest a stronger formal relationship to the development of modernist painting than has been supposed".³⁰ Precisely, Gómez de la Serna maintains that Bagaría "has been one of the forerunners of this new art", adding that he is, "perhaps, one of the primitives in this bold and revealing way", that "dispensing with all disturbing elements and all vile debris, (...) shows the electrical and essential line with an instant assurance that I have not seen in any other".³¹ In other words, Bagaría's integrity manifests itself in the elemental qualities of his drawing in terms that allowed the curator to champion him as a "primitive" of the new art, despite the difference between his work and Rivera's and Blanchard's sophisticated Cubist experiments.³²

Lluís Bagaría is not the only artist adding an extra primitivist layer to the Cubist exhibition. The fourth participant in this collective show is a sculptor about whom we know almost nothing: Agustín Mediavilla, known as "El Choco", who worked at the Madrilenian atelier of the Catalan sculptor Julio Antonio (1889–1919).³³ Despite the academic foundation of his work, Julio Antonio was a regular Pombo *tertulia* attendant and a personal friend of Rivera, Bagaría and Gómez de la Serna.³⁴ Conversely, Agustín Choco reportedly equalled his exhibition partners by virtue of the "daring and laconic eloquence" of his sculptures.³⁵ Gómez de la Serna furthermore introduced him as

the savage, the man without any prejudice and without ideals, the Manchego who works the fields, the rustic man who has only been to the Museum once, who does not know how to read or write, who has not learned from anyone, who allows himself to be naively deceived (...). He doesn't know how to explain things about himself, although he is prudent and eclectic enough to admit all explanations.³⁶

El Choco is at once the naïve, candid, innocent, folk, non-educated artist producing "human and touching" pieces carved in stone. The sculptures shown at the exhibition are mainly heads, with few statuettes and reliefs, identified with plain titles such as "the monster", "the warrior", "the sorcerer", "the mute", "Adam and Eve", etc. In front of these sculptures, Gómez de la Serna writes, "a dark revelation pierces our hearts like a well-aimed arrow thrown at us by the clairvoyant and mysterious savage".³⁷

The "primitivist" credentials that Agustín "El Choco" reportedly brought to the exhibition were also singled out by an author (known only as S.A.) in the pages of the *Heraldo de Madrid*—who referred to Mediavilla as an "artist of primitive ingenuities" (*artista de candideces primitivas*)³⁸—and by Manuel Abril's comparable characterisation of "El Choco" in the already mentioned article. The latter makes clear that Cubists "highly praise the art of children, of primitive man, and of those who do not have any formal education whatsoever" because they

believe that their productions are ingenuous and free of academic prejudices. Abril agrees that “El Choco” is a perfect example of such belief, since “by intuition, by impulse, he was able to shape a couple of heads full of character in their ingenuity that merit attention and study”.³⁹

We can only regret that Agustín Choco’s sculptures are apparently lost, but my point here is Gómez de la Serna’s rationale. It seems like the 1915 exhibition is not meant to stress Cubism’s Parisian roots, or the fundamental role of its main avant-garde protagonists (either Picasso and Braque, or the Salon Cubists) as had happened in Barcelona in 1912.⁴⁰ To substantiate my argument, it is important to recall that artists such as the Delaunays, Lipchitz and Marie Laurencin were living in Madrid at that time and that they could have easily been invited to join the exhibition.⁴¹ By contrast, following the catalogue layout, where “El Choco” pieces are numbered 1–10, it is inferable that the exhibition displayed a visual sequence connecting Cubism with the putatively universal languages of “primitive” arts. And despite the fact that Gómez de la Serna was clearly familiar with the association of the movement with the “African arts”—in *El Rastro* he writes about how he lost two “black idols”,⁴² an episode that he later recalls (with a twist) in the pages of *Ismos*—the interesting nuance here is his focus on local folk contributions. That is, rather than presenting Cubism as a completely foreign modern art movement, Gómez de la Serna’s rationale associates it with Spanish (in fact, Castilian) folk art. The exhibition showcases a curatorial narrative that adds rural La Mancha (the very home of Dom Quixote) to the international constellation of “primitivisms” affiliated with modern art, and Cubism in particular. By assimilating an ultra-peripheral reference (La Mancha), and Madrid itself, into the cosmopolitan transnational world of modern art, the exhibition *Los Pintores Íntegros* brings to the fore three complementary arguments: (1) that manifestations of the “primitive” in Spanish folk art should be taken into account when evaluating Cubism and its developments; (2) that this expression of first-hand “primitive” art is simultaneously local and global, and therefore both represents and transcends national or regional boundaries; and finally (3) that Madrid can no longer be considered a cultural backwater, since it is now being inscribed into the circuits of modern art (and literature) via Gómez de la Serna’s initiatives. Finally, I contend that the politicised concept of the “primitive” supporting the exhibition allowed Gómez de la Serna to go against the isolationist thesis on Spanish cultural identity endorsed by the Generation of 1898.⁴³ By the same token, the *Los Pintores Íntegros*’ rationale was meant to reinforce the Europeanising of Spain as it was put forward in the early 1910s by the philosopher José Ortega y Gasset.

Local and cosmopolitan

As the historian Renée M. Silverman has shown, José Ortega y Gasset’s *perspectivism* responded to the isolationist ideals prevalent in the Generation of 1898, including the subjectivist perspective of *casticismo* constructed by Miguel de Unamuno in the 1910s.⁴⁴ To re-orient Spain politically and geographically towards Europe, the philosopher rejects both inward-looking nationalism he associates with subjectivism, and the rationalist objectivism that would go against it, since it would not produce any particular perspective upon which a positive conceptualisation of national identity could be built. Ortega finds that a balance between these two attitudes is needed “for reconciling self and other, both within and among nations” via an intersubjective space of encounter, of exchangeable reciprocal perspectives.⁴⁵

Associating Ortega’s thought and efforts with the interchangeable open spaces of *Ultraist* poetry, Renée Silverman furthermore writes:

The discursive strategies formulated by Ortega and [Guillermo] de Torre re-map Spain’s borders according to a revised vision of nationhood which recognises the particular conditions of post-World War I and post-imperial Europe. It is also (...) the starting point of

a much needed exploration of the relationship of subjectivity to the imagined spaces of the nation, for this same link should also be examined in terms of the intersubjective. The Europeanising geography of Ortega's *Perspectivism* and de Torre's *Ultraísmo* generates the productive exchange of subject positions and identities across borders because each distinct viewpoint is at once firmly rooted in the soil of cultural identity, yet permitted to shift with the terrain of an adjustable perception.⁴⁶

Ortega y Gasset's first journalistic project, the *España* magazine (published from January 1915 onwards), is a good example of that kind of intersubjective space for, as discussed by Ascunce Arenas, the contents of *España* implied that the future of the country depended both on its regions working together and the Europeanisation of Spain.⁴⁷ The will to renew the lost faith in Spain is stated on the cover of the first issue, and to do so, the weekly publication tackled a vast array of cultural topics, combining them with a liberal political focus. Different perspectives converged in its discussions of "national life", including Spain's colonial war in Morocco and the "Catalan problem", while it endorsed the general stance of supporting the Allies in the ongoing war. Bagaría had a major role in the publication, being "crucial in communicating an anti-German sentiment through his caricatures".⁴⁸ *España* also reinforced the construction of cultural identity by publishing a regular section documenting different types and customs of Spanish people in the twentieth century—"Los españoles pintados por sí mismos"—that updated the *costumbrista* tradition.⁴⁹

Renée Silverman also argues that "the turn towards the perceptual in the aesthetics of the first Spanish avant-garde" doubles the quest for the intersubjective space and international relations that was being theorised by Ortega y Gasset from the 1910s onward.⁵⁰ Indeed, the paradigm of those intersubjective and international relations is the optical synthesis of different perspectives that are taken to be the very basis of Cubism by, for instance, Manuel Abril. As pointed out earlier, the art critic addressed the need to explain Cubism to the *Los Pintores Íntegros*' audience, and while so doing he keenly pointed out:

When a mountain is contemplated from whichever angle—the Cubists come to say—we lost the thousands of visions of that mountain made possible by a change of viewpoint (...). (...) Copying it from any of these observing points, ignoring the others, is equivalent to wasting ninety-nine percent of the eloquent manifestations that each thing contains.

Hence the first Cubist principle: one must copy the object by moving around it in order to discover all its aspects and to know it in its entirety, not in the very partial and absurd façade which it presents to an immobile spectator.⁵¹

Some points of convergence connecting Ortega y Gasset's philosophy, Gómez de la Serna's thought and Cubism's modes of perception and representation have been recently explored by Ricardo Fernández Romero, who argues that this is evidence of shared phenomenological orientation that first emerged in the early 1910s.⁵² However, I would argue that an additional and perhaps more historically grounded explanation for this convergence can be found in the primitivist rationale informing the 1915 show and the inversion of the isolationist thesis on Spanish cultural identity it initiated, through its display of the ultra-localised "primitive" art pieces by "El Choco" alongside Rivera's and Blanchard's Cubist paintings.

The balance between the local and the cosmopolitan we find there points to the kind of intersubjective space of encounter that Ortega y Gasset would identify with the Europeanising of Spain. While inscribing Madrid in the geography of the international avant-garde, Gómez de la Serna is also stressing the specificity of folk references and local contributions in an attitude frequently read as a "renovated costumbrismo".⁵³ Further, the "primitivist" bedrock of the exhibition adds a political dimension to this cultural project. Retrieving a perspective that puts

forward “primitivism” as essential for understanding what’s at stake in modern art, Gómez de la Serna manages to bridge the gap between local references and folk art, and international avant-garde contexts without jeopardising Cubism’s revolutionary and cosmopolitan dimensions.

Both María Blanchard’s and Diego Rivera’s paintings exhibited in 1915 are suffused with local references. Two photographs published in the press of the day, together with the reproductions of the displayed paintings featured in Manuel Abril’s article, help us to accurately identify at least two paintings by Blanchard and several others by Rivera.⁵⁴ Corresponding to numbers 25 and 28 in the catalogue we find “Figure in motion” (*figura en movimiento*) and “Madrid” among Blanchard’s selection. The former most probably designates one of the versions of her well-known *Woman with a fan*,⁵⁵ in which the fragmented volumes and space seem to reproduce the movements of the woman dressed in a vivid red gown. As Magidin and Vega have rightly demonstrated, the canvas entitled “Madrid” must correspond to the triptych appearing on the left side of the two existing photographs. Its analysis requires some archaeology, since the central part of the canvas representing a feminine nude later appears in an autonomous form, isolated from the two side urban landscapes that originally completed the composition and are now lost.⁵⁶ Blanchard’s painting was considered “disgusting” (*repugnante*) by the art critic José Francés in 1915.⁵⁷ Thirty years later this same work was nicknamed “The Venus of Madrid” by Gómez de la Serna, who declared the painting to be remarkable,

[...] a find because she [Blanchard] had superimposed a naked woman—in a teratological but attractive nude—on the façade of the most characteristic Madrid rococo house, because the architect had coupled large mirror balls, purple, silver, blue, gold, among the match of bricks, the original house shining with joyful melancholy under the sun of the days under the moon of the nights.⁵⁸

The city of Madrid was also the *leitmotiv* of one of the canvases probably presented by Rivera at the exhibition. Although paintings do not have recognisable titles in the catalogue, it is commonly accepted that his 1915 *Plaza de Toros* was included in the show. Favela defines it as an “epic Cubist landscape” that “dramatically combines exhilaratingly tilted simultaneous views of the height and depth of the famous bullring” recently built on the outskirts of the city where Rivera lived.⁵⁹

Towards the Mexicanisation of Cubism

Perhaps even more interesting from the perspective of Rivera’s fusion of local and popular references with his high cosmopolitan Cubist compositions is *Spanish Still Life* (also known as *Still Life with Demijohn*) (Figure 3.3) clearly discernible in the two aforementioned photographs. The painting testifies to Rivera’s continuing exploration of textural elements, as evidenced by the variety of tactile effects found in the work (widely used in his earlier Majorcan landscapes) and his combination of such elements with the fragmentation and intersection of planes. Rivera superimposed different planes of representation: for instance the structure and the top of the table with its *trompe l’oeil* wood grain covering overlaps with the chequerboard tile floor. A large earthenware jug rests on the table projecting a blue-green shadow. Around it, we find what appears to be a sugar bowl, plus a bottle and other objects all shown from different viewpoints with a multiplicity of cast shadows. On the left, the painter included a *molinillo*, a small wooden whisk used to make the traditional chocolate drink of Mexican origin, which was subsequently adopted in Spain as a national beverage as a result of colonisation.⁶⁰

The kind of ambivalence introduced by the complete absorption into Spanish popular culture of the Mexican *molinillo* for making chocolate, will be key in reinforcing the turn towards



Figure 3.3 Diego Rivera, *Nature Morte Espagnole*, 1915. Oil on canvas, 110.5 × 90.5 cm. Gift of Katherine Graham, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. © 2023 Banco de México Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, México, D. F./ARS, New York/SPA, Lisboa.



Figure 3.4 Diego Rivera, *El Arquitecto*, 1915–1916, oil on canvas, 144 × 113.5 cm. Acervo Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil, Mexico City/INBAL/Secretaría de Cultura. Reproducción autorizada por el Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura, 2023. © 2023 Banco de México Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, México, D. F./ARS, New York/SPA, Lisboa.

an “Anáhuac Cubism”, a formulation put forward on the account of the New York exhibition curated by the Mexican caricaturist Marius de Zayas (1880–1961) a year later, in October 1916.⁶¹ Indeed, Laura Moure Cecchini has shown that Rivera’s *Spanish Still Life* was recast in this exhibition through de Zayas’ pairing of his work with Aztec objects, in his quest to develop a new primitivist paradigm.⁶²

The Mexicanisation of Cubism by Rivera is also associated with another painting shown at *Los Pintores Íntegros*—i.e. *The Architect*, also known as the portrait of Jesús T. Acevedo (1882–1918), a childhood friend, architect and art critic, exiled in Madrid for his revolutionary activities in Mexico in 1914 (Figure 3.4). As in Gómez de la Serna’s portrait, Rivera painted Acevedo seated at a desk, depicting him both frontally and in profile, amidst a combination of geometric planes. The superimposed planes forming the head are more complex in Acevedo’s portrait; the central triangular face surface brightly coloured in orange, yellow and brown. Yet, the startling effect of dissimilar eyes is repeated. Only this time, we find a “half-moon eye replacing the burning illuminating sun of Ramón [Gómez de la Serna]’s signic eye”.⁶³ The other eye and moustache, as well as the configuration of the forehead, are more naturalistically rendered. In addition to the chequerboard tile floor (also present in the *Spanish Still Life*) and the many textures produced by “modulated impastoed brush techniques” highlighted by Favela,⁶⁴ the figure’s red apparel right at the centre of the composition and its combination with a green shadowy tone on one side and a more airy white reflection on the other deserves our attention.

For Sylvia Navarrete, the most striking attribute of this portrait is precisely Rivera’s palette of “luminous expression and intensity”, where she signals the “reappearance of green, red and white (the colours of the Mexican flag), along with black, brown, and several shades of blue—an indication of the greater chromatic range in many of Rivera’s paintings that year”.⁶⁵

The idea that *The Architect* adds a step towards Rivera’s Mexicanisation of Cubism is reinforced not only by Acevedo’s nationality and the predominant colours constructing the portrayed figure but also by the well-known fact that from 1915 onward, the painter would systematically include references of Mexican folk and indigenous art in his Cubist compositions, constructing a persona that emphasises his Mexican identity. Two other 1915 paintings are fundamental to this process: the *Portrait of Martín Luis Guzmán*, and the *Zapatista landscape*. As Patricia Leighten has indicated, the conspicuous coloured Mexican serape in both paintings is “no mere nationalistic reference”, for it “evokes Mexican folk culture, both a symbol of the peasant uprising and a primitivist manoeuvre on Rivera’s part, laying claim to his own creative authenticity and *mexicanidad*”.⁶⁶

We may point out with Laura Moure Cecchini that “Rivera retrospectively conceived his appropriation of Mexican folklore as a way of producing an art that would be authentic as well as universal, and make him stand out among the other modernists”.⁶⁷ This is perhaps why the dualism of Gómez de la Serna’s portrait and the hybridisation introduced by *The Spanish Still Life*’s *molinillo* is soon to be replaced by the centred compositions and unambiguous national iconography of his two key “Anáhuac Cubism” canvases: *Portrait of Martín Luis Guzmán* and the *Zapatista landscape*. Indeed, the level of complexity brought about by these two Rivera’s works of 1915 incorporates new challenges, clearly evidenced in their different use of primitivism, associated with different, perhaps even contradictory, cultural and identitarian politics. Eventually, what must be also pointed out in Rivera’s Mexicanisation of Cubism, is the fact that it completely disrupted the established (hierarchical) order of the cultural exchanges between European countries and their former transatlantic possessions. For Rivera it was not only a matter of primitivising colonial references but also of bringing a core European avant-garde to the heart of anti-colonial resistance and revolutionary Mexican culture of that time. Be as it may, complex forms of Cubist primitivism were here at play, but the cultural politics informing that paradigm were in constant flux, as the interrelation of avant-gardism to changing conceptions of national and transnational identity evolved into a global phenomenon.

Notes

- 1 Ramón Gómez de la Serna is a major protagonist in Spanish literary avant-garde and his close connection to the European and Transatlantic artistic and literary cosmopolitan milieus in the 1910s and 1920s is well known. An overview of Gómez de la Serna's contributions can be found in the catalogue *Los ismos de Ramón Gómez de la Serna y un apéndice circense*. Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2002. See also Nigel Dennis (ed.), *Studies on Ramón Gómez de la Serna*. Ottawa: Dovehouse Editions, 1988.
- 2 Patricia Leighton, *The Liberation of Painting: Modernism and Anarchism in Avant-Guerre Paris*. Chicago, IL and London: University of Chicago, 2013 (particularly Chapter 2).
- 3 Diego Rivera, *My Art, My Life: An Autobiography* (with Gladys March). New York: The Citadel Press, 1960, 64.
- 4 Quotations are taken from Rivera, op.cit., 64–66.
- 5 In Madrid, Rivera encounters several Mexican friends, arriving from Mexico, or Paris, including Jesús T. Acevedo and Martín Luis Guzmán. Rivera also paints the portrait of the latter, “a colonel under the Mexican Revolutionary forces of Pancho Villa” in 1915. Guzmán's portrait stands out as one of Rivera's first paintings with Mexican motifs; see Ramón Favela, *Diego Rivera: The Cubist Years*. Phoenix: Phoenix Art Museum, 1984, 90, 99.
- 6 Rivera, op.cit., 65.
- 7 *El Rastro* is a miscellaneous book about Madrid's flea market; see Ramón Gómez de la Serna, *El Rastro*. Valencia: Editorial Prometeo, 1914. Rivera painted a small canvas paying homage to Gómez de la Serna's *El Rastro*. As Ramón Favela puts it: “Gómez de la Serna was an avid frequenter of Madrid's famous flea market, *El Rastro* which he described with proto-Surrealist lucid fantasy in one of his earliest published books by the same name. *El Rastro* was also the title and subject of a small painting Rivera executed in Madrid which incorporates some passages from Ramón's book in its iconography.”; Favela, op.cit., 96.
- 8 Published in Madrid by Biblioteca Nueva. Also, in 1929 and 1930, Gómez de la Serna publishes several essays in the Madrilenian *Revista Occidente* that will soon appear as chapters in the *Ismos* volume; see, for instance “Completa y verídica historia de Picasso y el Cubismo” (*Revista Occidente*. Ns.73 and 74, July and August 1929). As Ioana Zlotescu asserts, the “writing dates of the various chapters are often uncertain. The author collects scattered fragments of articles or texts slightly changed, cut, lengthened, rewritten.” (“Las fechas de escritura de los distintos capítulos son a menudo inciertas. El autor recoge, de acá y de allá, fragmentos de artículos o textos ligeramente cambiados, recortados, alargados, reescritos.”); see Ioana Zlotescu, “Preámbulo”, *Ramón Gómez de la Serna. Obras Completas XVI: Ensayos, Retratos y Biografías*. Barcelona: Círculo de Lectores, Galaxia Gutenberg, 2005, 19.
- 9 A general discussion of the *Ismos* book can be found in the 2002 MNCARS catalogue *Los ismos de Ramón Gómez de la Serna*.
- 10 He singles out the portrait as “rotative” and states: “Everything is correct in this portrait, even the position of the hand that has the pipe when smoking in its three moments: first, that of bringing the pipe to the mouth; second, that of having it in the mouth, and third, that of resting the pipe in the bowl of the hands (...);” Ramón Gómez de la Serna, *Ismos*. Madrid: Ediciones Guadamara, 1975 [1931], 334, 341.
- 11 Idem, 338.
- 12 Ibidem, 341.
- 13 Rivera, op.cit., 64.
- 14 In 1915, Blanchard was still known by her maiden name: María Gutierrez; Ramón Gómez de la Serna, *Los Pintores Íntegros: catálogo-invitación*. Madrid: s.n., 1915 (exhibition catalogue).
- 15 Jaime Brihuega, *Las vanguardias artísticas en España, 1909–1936*. Madrid: Istmo, 1981, 183. Brihuega's view is often repeated by subsequent art historians.
- 16 Alberto Nulman Magidín and Ana Luisa Oca Vega, “Pero Madrid no quiso recibir la comunión de la locura: Los Pintores Íntegros y los inicios de la vanguardia em Hispanoamérica”, *De la modernidad ilustrada a la ilustración modernista: homenaje a Fausto Ramírez* (Jaime Cuadriello, María José Esparza Liberal, and Angélica Velázquez Guadarrama, eds.). México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2021, 373–426. Magidín and Vega state that “(...) in March 1915 the writer's main project was the construction of a nosotros: the Pombo tertulia (...). (...) One doesn't have to go too far to find correspondences between the Exposición de los Pintores Íntegros and the artists and

- writers that attended the café on Carretas street (...) every Saturday night” (378). Also, for Magidin and Vega, the term “íntegro” helped Gómez de la Serna to “associate the group of exhibitors to the same code of values that animated his tertulia”, but that doesn’t mean that these artists represented the tertulia.
- 17 Apud Magidin and Vega, *idem*, 379. Any doubt about the importance of the historical reference in Gisbert’s painting as a paradigm of integrity is washed off by its image put right at the center of the *Proclamation*.
 - 18 Rivera, *op.cit.*, 64.
 - 19 Gómez de la Serna, *El Rastro*, 192 (“La realidad personal, la última y la primera conquista del hombre, vive en estos jóvenes llenos de verdadera franqueza consigo mismos”).
 - 20 See, for instance, Ignacio Fernández Sarasola, *Los partidos políticos en el pensamiento español*. Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2009, 152.
 - 21 Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton, *Cubism and Culture*. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2001, 61. The art historians furthermore explain: “Modernist primitivism as an act of self-authentication — whether modelled on the art of children, the folk, or ‘savages’ — locates the source of creativity within the artist, in a romantic merger with the elemental that serves to liberate the self. The idea of the unique perspective of the individual in turn justifies the sorts of ‘naïve’ distortions and extreme simplifications that emulate ‘primitive’ art and intimately connect with the first steps towards what would become Cubism. In this light, the appeal of the work of Henri ‘Le Douanier’ Rousseau and Paul Cézanne in this same period is no contradiction” (49).
 - 22 Leighton, *The Liberation of Painting*, 85.
 - 23 See for instance Andrew A. Anderson, *La recepción de las vanguardas extranjeiras en España: Cubismo, Futurismo, Dada*. Sevilla: Editorial Renacimiento, 2018, 36 e ss.
 - 24 “Los Pintores Íntegros”, *ABC*, 7 March 1915; quoted by Magidin and Vega, *op.cit.*, 374.
 - 25 “lo dislocado del género cubista que allí se exhibe”; see “Varias notas de actualidad”. *Nuevo Mundo*, 13 March 1915, 18.
 - 26 “Si yo creyera que la señorita Gutiérrez Cuelo y el señor Ribera, los dos pintores más caracterizadamente “íntegros” (antes cubistas) de esta Exposición se habían refugiado en ese modo de manchar lienzos más ó menos geométricamente, porque no sabían hacer otra cosa ó porque eso les iba á producir el dinero que aqui no le produce la pintura á nuestros grandes artistas contemporáneos, hubiese guardado el más absoluto de los silencios.”; José Francés, “Los pintores ‘íntegros’”, *Mundo Gráfico*, 17 March 1915, 6.
 - 27 Manuel Abril, “El Cubismo”. *La Ilustración Española y Americana*, 8 March 1915, 146–147.
 - 28 Favela, *op.cit.*, 92.
 - 29 See Gómez de la Serna, *Los Pintores Íntegros*, 3–4. I therefore disagree with Magidin and Vega’s argument on how the exhibition was not meant to be understood as a cubist show.
 - 30 Leighton, *The Liberation of Painting*, 31. The author shows that not only the reading of caricature as primitivist prevails, but also Cubist works are frequently read as crude and “elemental” in a manner that imitated the techniques of the caricaturist.
 - 31 “Bagaría es, por la caricatura más que por la pintura, el hermano carnal de Rivera y de María Gutiérrez, aunque en la pintura sea integro de otro modo, en una combinación distinta, pero viéndose el ojo central y distribuidor en sus lienzos. Bagaría ha sido uno de los precursores de este arte nuevo. Es, quizá, uno de los primitivos de esta manera audaz y reveladora. La cifra, el logaritmo de cada carácter le ha preocupado siempre, y, prescindiendo de todo elemento perturbador y de todo ripio vil, con un valor inusitado y gallardo, muestra la línea eléctrica y esencial con una expedita seguridad que no he visto en ningún otro.”; Gómez de la Serna, *Los Pintores Íntegros*, 6.
 - 32 Although recently arrived from Barcelona, by 1915 Lluís Bagaría was quite well known in Madrid for his collaboration, as a caricaturist and illustrator, in key journals, such as the *España* magazine edited by José Ortega y Gasset, in which pages his drawings famously took a political position expressing a clear anti-German sentiment. Bagaría was also a regular attendant of the Pombo tertulia. In August 1915 in *España* a famous caricature of the writer Azorín, whose primitivism is proclaimed by Ortega y Gasset in 1916, as discussed by Alejandro Mejías-López in this book (Chapter 1). On Bagaría see Aranzázu Ascunce Arenas, *Barcelona and Madrid: Social Networks of the Avant-Garde*. Lanham, MD: Bucknell University Press, 2012, 141. See also Manuel Menéndez Alzamora, “Trazos políticos: sobre los usos políticos de la palabra escrita y el retrato dibujado en el contexto del 98”, *Los Retratos de Azorín. VII Coloquio Internacional* (Pascal Peyraga, ed.). Pau: Instituto Alicantino de Cultura Juan Gil-Albert, 2007, 155–170.

- 33 Gómez de la Serna writes about Júlio António as early as 1910 in the pages of the *Europa* magazine (n. 7, 104–105); see Ricardo Fernández Romero, “Meditaciones de Ramón: La práctica y las ideas estéticas de Ramón Gómez de la Serna y José Ortega y Gasset en paralelo (1910–14)”, *Hispanic Research Journal*, 20, 6, 2019, footnote 4. The non-signed on-line article “Julio Antonio. Escultor” published by *MAMT QR*, publishes a photograph of Julio Antonio’s atelier showing Agustín Mediavilla among other collaborators, <https://www.dipta.cat/mamtqr/en/content/julio-antonio-escultor>; downloaded in 30 May 2022.
- 34 Magidín and Vega, *op.cit.*, 393–394.
- 35 Gómez de la Serna, *Los Pintores Íntegros*, 7.
- 36 “Agustín ‘el choco’, como le llamamos en confianza sus íntimos, es coincidiendo en atrevimiento y lacónica elocuencia con sus compañeros de exposición, el salvaje, el hombre sin prejuicio ninguno y sin ideal, el manchego que labora el campo, el hombre rústico que sólo ha estado una vez en el Museo, que no sabe leer ni escribir, que no ha aprendido de nadie, que se deja engañar ingenuamente y un día cree que un gigante que quiere ver sus cosas, al no poder entrar en el cuarto en que trabaja, asomara un ojo tremendo por la ventana; otro día cree de verdad que sus cosas valen un millón, y espera al multimillonario que le anuncian, que ha anunciado su llegada desde Chicago. El no sabe explicar sus cosas, aunque es lo bastante prudente y ecléctico para admitir todas las explicaciones. Y aun siendo así, nada más lleno de sonrisas ingenuas y relampagueantes, nada más ágil e intencionado, nada que sea más de piedra, por su candidez valiente, ni nada más humano y conmovedor que todo esto del ‘choco’. Ante estas esculturas, una revelación oscura traspasa nuestro corazón como una flecha certera que nos arroja el salvaje clarividente y misterioso.”; *idem*.
- 37 *Ibidem*.
- 38 S.A., “Arte y artistas: Salon Kuhn”. *Heraldo de Madrid* (night edition), 8 March 1915, 1.
- 39 Abril, *op.cit.*, 146–147.
- 40 See Mercè Vidal, 1912: *L’Exposició d’Art Cubista de les Galeries Dalmau*. Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona, 1996.
- 41 Even if the Delaunays were not yet as familiar with Gómez de la Serna as they would be in the 1920s, they were reachable via, for instance, Diego Rivera, whom the Delaunays entertained in Madrid as shown by the letter of excuse addressed to Robert Delaunay by Rivera in 12 May 1915 saying: “Je vous demande mil fois pardon d’avoir manqué à notre rendez-vous d’aujourd’hui, il m’était entièrement impossible d’être à votre atelier à l’heure — à cause de me trouver ce matin en train d’arranger une affaire très urgent qui m’a pris trop de temps. Si notre départ pour Paris ne se précipite pas je viendrai, si vous le permettez, après demain mercredi entre 11 heures et midi.”; BNF — *Fonds Sonia et Robert Delaunay. III Lettres et manuscrits reçus par Robert et Sonia Delaunay*, f. 168 (NAF 25654).
- 42 “two black idols that were no longer there when I returned that afternoon!... What a mark they left on me, what figuration, what emptiness, what a longing shadow!... They were grotesque, but they revealed a concept of man and of the woman less confused than that of the other sculptures, more alive, more sensual, more approachable, more anarchic...”; Gómez de la Serna, *El Rastro*, 216.
- 43 In Renée Silverman’s words, the Generation of 1898 responds to “Spain’s *fin de siècle* crisis — its psychic transition from the imperial to the post-colonial following the loss of Cuba to the United States in 1898. (...) As early as 1913, principal philosopher of the (...) inward-looking Generation of 1898 Miguel de Unamuno launched his famous diatribe against Europeanization. (...) Effectively closing all borders against the importation of all influences not indigenous to Spanish soil, the cordon separating Spain from Europe becomes the limit of Unamuno’s map. The roots of subjectivity—Spanish cultural identity—are thus circumscribed by national boundaries”; Renée Silverman, “A Europeanizing geography. The First Spanish Avant-Garde’s Re-Mapping of Castile (1914–1925)”, *The Invention of Politics in the European Avant-Garde (1906–1940)* (Sascha Bru and Gunther Martens, eds.). Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006, 218.
- 44 “In ‘Social Pedagogy as Political Programme’ (1910), one of Ortega’s earliest texts on the subject of national identity, he proclaims Spain’s non-existence as a nation; his hyperbole effectively exposes Unamuno’s metaphysical Castile as a phantasm of the political imagination.”; Silverman, *op.cit.*, 221.
- 45 *Idem*, 219.
- 46 *Ibidem*, 219–220.
- 47 Arenas, *op.cit.*, 331–332.
- 48 *Idem*, 141.
- 49 See María Ascención Fernández Pozuelo, *Ramón Gómez de la Serna y el costumbrismo*. Zaragoza: Universidad de Zaragoza, 2016, 25–26.

- 50 “The viewing ‘I/eye calibrated by abstraction then makes ‘an effort similar to that which this ocular adjustment makes unavoidable in order to contemplate life’, by which Ortega refers to the establishment of a certain comfort level with the defamiliarization of perception. The perfect observer comes to perceive the fragmented spaces of abstract art, such as in the Cubist still-lives of Picasso and Braque, with the same ease as when encountering a mimetically represented object.”; Silverman, *op.cit.*, 221–222.
- 51 “Cuando se contempla una montaña desde un punto cualquiera — vienen á decir los cubistas — se pierden las mil y una visiones que puedan tenerse de esa montaña si se cambia de punto de vista (...). (...) Copiarla, pues, desde cualquiera de estos puntos observadores, desdeñando los otros, equivale a desperdiciar el noventa y nueve por ciento de las manifestaciones elocuentes que cada cosa encierra.
- De aquí el primer principio cubista: se debe copiar moviéndose en torno del objeto para descubrir todos sus aspectos y conocerlo en su integridad, no en la parcialísima y absurda fachada, que presente á un espectador inmóvil.”; Abril, *op.cit.*, 146.
- 52 Following Ana Martínez Collado’s studies, Fernández Romero looked at the “barely studied early literary production of Gómez de la Serna as the source of a fragmentary yet original philosophical and aesthetic thinking developed in synchrony not only with the first theoretical works of the French cubist painters, in 1910–1911, but also with the phenomenological turn in the philosophy and aesthetics of Ortega himself.”; Romero, *op.cit.*, 583.
- 53 See Pozuelo, *op.cit.*
- 54 See *Nuevo Mundo*, 13 March 1915; S.A., *op.cit.*; Abril, *op.cit.*
- 55 There are two versions of this painting. One belongs to the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, and the other to a private collection. They are both identified as having been painted in 1916, but at least one must be antedated from 1915 since it is reproduced in Manuel Abril’s article “El Cubismo”, *op.cit.*, 146. See also Magidin and Vega, *op.cit.*, 403–404.
- 56 Magidin and Vega, *op.cit.*, 400–402.
- 57 Francés, *op.cit.*, 6.
- 58 Apud Magidin and Vega, *op.cit.*, 402.
- 59 Favela, *op.cit.*, 92.
- 60 Antonio Flores’ “Cuadros sociales” published in Barcelona in 1893 add a “Tea or chocolate” debate, presenting chocolate as a traditional drink that represents Spanish culture against English preference for tea. See Pozuelo, *op.cit.*, 21.
- 61 “By 1915, Rivera had developed what Mexican historian Justino Fernández called “El Cubismo de Anáhuac,” a form of cubism that emphasized Rivera’s national origin by including fake collages of Mexican fabrics and crafts associated with *arte popular*”; Laura Moure Cecchini, “Aztec Cubists between Paris and New York: Diego Rivera, Marius de Zayas, and the Reception of Mexican Antiquities in the 1910s”. *Modernism/modernity*, 28, 2, April 2021, 273.
- 62 *Idem.*
- 63 Favela, *op.cit.*, 98.
- 64 *Idem.*
- 65 Sylvia Navarrete, “Diego Rivera, cubist: chronicle of an interlude”, *Diego Rivera: The Cubist Portraits 1913–1917* (Sylvia Navarrete, Serge Fauchereau, Anna Indych-López, and Joanne Klaar Walker, eds.). Dallas, TX: Meadows Museum, SMU, Phillippe Wilson Publishers, 2009, 66.
- 66 Patricia Leighten, “Embattled Cubism: Picasso, Rivera and World War I”, *Picasso and Rivera: Conversations across time* (Michael Govan and Diana Magaloni, eds.). Los Angeles, CA: LACMA, Del Monico Books/Prestel, 2016, 143.
- 67 Cecchini, *op.cit.*, 277.

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4 Primitivising the mural either side of the Atlantic

Discourse and contingency in Joaquín Torres-García's murals

Begoña Farré Torras

The 'primitive' Italians and the modern mural

Joaquín Torres-García's trip to Italy in 1911 to study the mural cycles of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was not uncommon among artists seeking to give new currency to the traditional practice of mural painting. From the turn of the twentieth century, critical thinking on the mural sought to modernise it by distancing it from academic conventions. The celebrated mural programmes of Trecento and Quattrocento artists, referred to as the primitive Italians, provided an apt source for this purpose. These had been largely executed using the fresco procedure, which had been practiced since antiquity but whose use had declined after the Renaissance to the point where its technical knowledge had become virtually lost. The study trips to Italy were expected to help artists learn how it had been employed in the past to renew its practice in the present.

A key figure in the recuperation of fresco painting and the study of the primitive Italians was the French Paul Baudouin, professor at the École des Beaux Arts, author of the first modern treatise on the subject¹ and founder, with the architect Georges Pradelle, of an association to promote its practice. Convinced that "Giotto and his disciples" had been the protagonists of a "time of magnificent realisations"² Baudouin and Pradelle had planned a research trip to Italy in 1889.³ Though they ultimately had to cancel it due to the former's health problems, by the turn of the century the in situ study of the primitive Italians had become a sort of rite of passage for modern muralists. They were a subject of study for Gerardo Murillo (Dr. Atl) and Roberto Montenegro, pioneering figures of the modern fresco in Mexico, who travelled to Italy around 1906.⁴ Torres-García initiated this research exercise in the Catalan milieu, with a similar journey in 1911, also undertaken in the following years by a number of other local muralists, such as Francesc Galí and Josep Aragay.⁵ From Mexico again, Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros would follow around 1920.⁶

Fresco offered, or was bestowed with, a number of qualities that made it conceptually, formally and socially appealing to these modern practitioners. The fact that the procedure harked back to ancient civilisations – Egyptians, Minoans, Greeks – gave it a sense of prestige and ancestry, allowing its representation as the original, "the highest and most noble" form of mural decoration.⁷ Conceptually, fresco marked a radical departure from the *toile marouflée* technique that had been most often used in the grand mural programmes of the nineteenth century, in which oil canvasses painted in artists' studios were then glued onto the wall.⁸ In fresco murals, instead, the artist worked on-site, applying mineral pigments dissolved only in water directly onto the wall's wet lime-based mortar. As the mortar dried, the pigments became chemically bonded and permanently absorbed into the fabric of the building. This was construed as providing a true blending of painting and architecture, which fitted into modernist currents advocating

the integration of the arts.⁹ From a formal perspective, the speed of execution needed in fresco to apply the pigment before the mortar dried, required the artist to work in largely flat colour fields and simplified forms, without much opportunity for the elaborate details and volumetric effects that could be achieved in oil on a canvas. Just as the primitive Italians had done, the reasoning went, modern muralists should use fresco to convey ideas through simple bidimensional forms, rather than attempting to mimic tridimensional reality. By using fresco, moreover, they would be achieving an integration of painting and architecture that had ostensibly been lacking in nineteenth-century *toile marouflée* programmes.

In addition to these qualities derived from the use of fresco, for modern muralists, the appeal of the primitive Italians also encompassed a social dimension. The medieval to early Renaissance chronology of the Italian works allowed twentieth-century practitioners and theorists to portray the mural in general, and the fresco in particular, as a mode of painting belonging to a purportedly more virtuous time, one still untouched by a number of social ills – from the rise of individualism to the birth of capitalism and colonialism – whose onset was associated with the turn of the sixteenth century, coinciding with the ‘high Renaissance’.¹⁰ In opposition to the commodifiable canvas, created by an individual artist for private collecting and viewing, the mural was thus represented as an art form of artisanal, anonymous, collective production and equally collective reception, with a social purpose beyond the exclusive enjoyment of the elites. A distinction between the socially exemplary mural and the individualistic easel painting therefore became a common trope among mural practitioners and theorists.¹¹ Claiming the attributed virtues of the pre-Renaissance mural for its twentieth-century counterpart in effect imbued the latter with social and ideological values that legitimised its ongoing practice in the modern world.

Across the ideological spectrum, this celebration of the pre-Renaissance fresco as a source for a modern mural practice was often grounded on nationalist considerations. In the case of France, it was directly informed by the late nineteenth-century rediscovery and conservation campaigns of Romanesque frescoes in remote rural churches¹² that were now celebrated as national treasures, distinctly French expressions of a glorified medieval past.¹³ A parallel phenomenon occurred in Catalonia. The rediscovery of Romanesque church frescoes in isolated valleys in the Pyrenees, celebrated in this case as distinctly Catalan heritage, sparked an ambitious cataloguing and conservation programme that involved art historians and theorists, but also practitioners. For documentation purposes, the latter, among them figures of Barcelona’s modern mural scene, were asked to travel to these mountain locations to produce coloured renditions of the medieval frescoes for a series of publications that circulated widely in the Catalan artistic milieu.¹⁴ Mexico, too, had a claim to fresco as a national art form. While the procedure was used in most mural programmes of the colonial period, fresco in fact predated it as it had also been practiced by native American civilisations before the Spanish invasion and, with some variations, continued to be used in vernacular architecture at the time of the Mexican revolution in the 1910s. As such, its use was advocated among modern muralists as a genuine expression of both pre-Hispanic and popular contemporary Mexican culture.¹⁵ In Europe as in Latin America, therefore, the modern mural was primitivised by association with the pre-Renaissance, pre-colonial, fresco, and turned into a remedy to the ills of individualism, capitalism and imperialism of the modern world and its art markets, while reinforcing nationalist narratives on either side of the Atlantic.

Torres-García’s mural discourse and early works

Torres-García’s early writings on the mural, as he was becoming established in Barcelona’s noucentista art scene, convey many of the ideas discussed above. In his understanding, painting

should “return to its origins [...] become primitive,”¹⁶ regain a social function, and contribute to a “common aspiration”.¹⁷ To this end, painting should always be “decorative”.¹⁸ *Decorative* is a key term in Torres-García’s theorisation of art, and one tightly entwined with his understanding of the ‘primitive’. He would use the category throughout his life to refer to painting *applied* to a functional object – be it a wall or a vase – with the purpose of conveying *ideas* through strictly *flat*, symbolic representation. Decorative art should *integrate formally* with the object to which it was applied and it should neither attempt to mimic reality, nor act as a mere embellishment, both of which he deplored.¹⁹ In his view, such decorative art – applied, flat and symbolic – was already perfected in ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome, and could be found in Byzantine mosaics, gothic and early Renaissance painting. The art of all these periods had been part of what he considered a single decorative tradition that had only become interrupted at the end of the fifteenth century with the simultaneous advent of tridimensional, mimetic representation, and the rise of easel painting.²⁰ The decorative tradition had begun resurfacing, always according to Torres-García’s account, with the challenge to mimetic representation brought on by modern art and would now find its fullest expression with the resurgence of the mural.²¹

In line with contemporary thinking on the mural, Torres-García fully advocated the use of fresco, which he considered the only procedure “worthy” of the wall.²² This, in his view, was especially true for the case of Catalonia, on account of this region’s Mediterranean heritage.²³ Following his research trip to Italy in 1911, all the commissions he received in Barcelona, bar one, were executed using this procedure. Whether for public or private buildings, and in accordance with noucentista ideals, these fresco projects were dominated by classical imagery in pastoral scenes evoking an Arcadian world, paired in some cases with depictions of modern industry. Through the use of fresco, Torres-García gave these murals an earthen, muted chromatism, and unpolished finish, which brings to mind the archaeological quality of the ancient frescos and mosaics he was struck by as he visited Rome during his study journey. In combination with the Arcadian subject matter, this use of fresco resulted in a classical-primitivist aesthetic proposal that failed to garner the approval of the more conservative sectors of Noucentisme.²⁴ The controversy caused by his primitivising treatment of Classical imagery in the mural programme he created for the Catalan regional government at the Diputació Palace (1913 to 1917) led to Torres-García’s increasing disillusionment with the Barcelona art scene, which he would ultimately depart in 1920. Before he left the city, Torres-García briefly met David Alfaro Siqueiros, who was temporarily based in Barcelona and collaborated with him in the *Vida Americana* editorial project, where the latter published what would come to be considered his first manifesto on mural painting.²⁵ No further contact is recorded between these two artists. Yet, for reasons that will be addressed further below, two decades after this encounter, Torres-García would write about it, stressing his proximity with Siqueiros at the time.

The mural hiatus that wasn’t: 1920–1937

Torres-García’s departure from Barcelona opened a long hiatus in his mural production. In New York, where he lived between 1920 and 1922, he produced mostly easel paintings as well as continuing a line of wooden toys he had begun a few years earlier. The vibrancy of the city – described enthusiastically in a letter to Salvat-Papasseit and quoted in turn by the latter in *Vida-Americana*²⁶ – gave further stimulus to the pictorial research into fragmented urban views he had initiated in his last years in Barcelona. Yet, while his focus was on portraying the hustle and bustle of New York in increasingly geometrically partitioned compositions, Torres-García also kept on display at his studio several “frescoes”, as well as a maquette of the Diputació project and photographs of what he describes as works from his “classical period”.²⁷ The initial exhilaration produced by the modern metropolis, at any rate, would soon begin to wane.

New York, he wrote, “crushes the artist”; its immensity, relentless movement and deafening noise ultimately became disturbing and challenging.²⁸

By July 1922, two years after arriving in the United States, he was leaving the country to embark on a toy-making venture in Italy. When that failed, he moved again, this time to Villefranche-sur-Mer, in the Côte d’Azur, where he spent another two years before moving to Paris in September 1926.

The works he produced during these sojourns in Italy and Southern France have received relatively little historiographical attention. Studies of his oeuvre tend to skim over this period, treating it as a sort of interlude before his move to Paris, where he would ‘re-join’ the avant-garde and develop the constructive pictorial idiom that would ultimately give him international recognition. Yet, his production of these years, in particular that of Villefranche-sur-Mer, is key to understanding the place that the mural continued to occupy in Torres-García’s artistic concerns, and how closely entwined such a concern remained at the time with a primitivised idea of the Mediterranean.

In an insightful analysis of this period, Pérez-Oramas draws attention to the fact that when New York proved too overwhelming, Torres-García moved not to a European city but “to old rustic Europe”, small tranquil towns in Italy and Southern France – Fiesole, Livorno, Villefranche-sur-Mer – where he was able to reengage with the ‘primitive’.²⁹ It was the arrival at the last of these, on the Côte d’Azur, that by his own account propitiated a desire to resume his mural practice:

Now, with greater conviction than ever, I have gone back to the tradition of the great classical art. I find in me the conditions for monumental art: the use of adequate materials, a profound sense of proportion – an architectural sense, one of structure – an absence of realist sense – I only paint images, not reality – a sense of decoration. I believe that painting should exist only for architecture. The easel painting is always a small thing, isolated, without tradition, individual. I admire above all the anonymous people that made altarpieces and capitals (images) rather than the masters of painting.³⁰

The 1926 excerpt above revisits some of the primitivising tropes already mentioned as having provided legitimacy to the modern mural: exalting it as the only worthy form of painting, in opposition to the easel painting, a signifier of individualism; associating it with the ‘admirable’ anonymous craftsman above the renowned master; claiming for it the purpose of conveying ideas instead of mimicking reality. These were the ‘primitive’ virtues of a renewed mural vocation that Torres-García attributed unequivocally to the fact that, after the frenzy of New York, he was newly “at peace (...) having found the Mediterranean landscape once more”.³¹

A mural vocation, however, required commissions for its fulfilment. In fact, a search for mural commissions may well have been a factor in Torres-García’s decision to move to Villefranche-sur-Mer in the first place; he was encouraged there by his friend the American painter Charles Logasa, who brought to his attention the potential that the many villas being built there at the time offered as a market for murals.³² It was there, indeed, that Torres-García resumed the production of architectural assemblages, resembling frescoed maquettes, that he had initiated in his noucentista years. That these “easel frescoes”, as referred to in his catalogue raisonné, may indeed have served a sort of advertising purpose to obtain commissions, appears to be particularly the case with one of these works, untitled, of which only a photograph has remained³³; rather than reproducing an imaginary classically pedimented construction, as do all the others, this one seems closer to a maquette of what could be an actual vernacular dwelling at this seaside town, potentially showing how his frescoes would work with local architecture.

Mural commissions, alas, were not forthcoming, and Torres-García next public project would have to wait over a decade, after he returned to his native Uruguay. In the meantime, however, the mural remained a concern that manifested itself in other ways in his easel production. When around 1928–1929, already living in Paris, he devised his trademark grid-based constructive compositions, he produced them in oil on canvas using fundamentally two palettes. One of them took the neoplasticist formula of primary colours combined with black and white. The other experimented with washed-down brown, terracotta and ochre hues that bring to mind the earthen chromatism of fresco, and in fact give these compositions a ‘primitive’ archaeological look not unlike that which he had tried to create in his *Diputació* murals.³⁴ In parallel to using this fresco-like palette in primitivist oil-based constructive canvases, he also produced a number of these earthen-toned, easel-sized compositions in actual fresco, on either burlap or canvas, such as *Constructive Fresco with Large Bread* (1929) (Figure 4.1).³⁵ This early production of constructive canvases in both fresco-mimicking oils and in actual fresco suggests that while his enquiries at the time were easel-based, he may also have been exploring the mural potential of the primitivist constructive idiom he would come to theorise as Constructive Universalism.

As he was developing this idiom in 1928, he described it as a solution to years of research, a “synthesis of all [his] work”, strong and constructive, simultaneously “new” and “the most ancient prehistory”.³⁶ He resorted for it to the analogy of a “cathedral” – a “façade” in Pérez Oramas’ interpretation – evoking a built structure upon which he organised an ostensibly universal array of icons. By the early 1930s, following his visits to the Trocadero exhibits, such icons began to include references to the arts of Africa and Oceania, as well as those of pre-Hispanic American civilisations. These now joined a repertoire in which references to the natural (the sun) and the ancient (a classical temple) coexisted with the contemporary (a tram), in an exercise that, in Pérez Oramas’ words, posited modernity as a “compressed time that integrated many different temporalities”.³⁷ It is this condensation of the archaic, the modern and everything in between that characterises Torres-García’s engagement with the ‘primitive’; a form of primitivism that becomes possible from a Western, colonial standpoint, where, as discussed by Antliff and Leighten, an artist “empties its referent of historical contingency and cultural specificity”³⁸ and reduces it to a signifier for an unchanging ‘universal’ truth.³⁹

A construction, a cathedral, a façade... the universal truth pursued by Torres-García was invariably organised within a structure he conceived of as something built. When not resorting

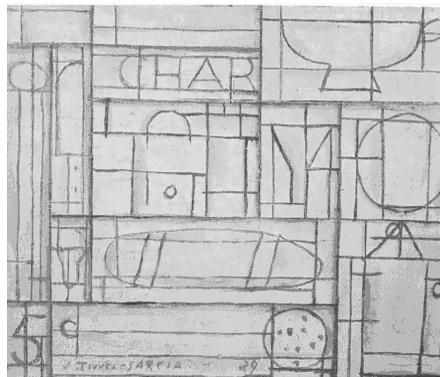


Figure 4.1 Joaquín Torres-García, *Fresque constructif au grand pain*, 1929. Fresco on burlap, 60.5 × 73 cm. London: Private collection. Catalogue Raisonné ref. 1929.60. © Courtesy of the Estate of Joaquín Torres-García.

to more generic descriptors such as ‘structure’ or ‘constructive composition’, he used concrete architectural references for the titles of his orthogonal paintings: church, edifice, train station, and cathedral. The architectural and the pictorial were never far apart in his art; the mural sat at their intersection. From his early career he had claimed that painting should be ‘decorative’, that is, flat, symbolic and applied to a functional object, as it had been in ‘primitive’ times.⁴⁰ At Villefranche-sur-Mer he had gone on to write that painting should exist only for architecture. He now viewed with concern the dissociation of these two practices and their mutual exclusion in the modern world. As evidenced in his article “Reflections on Architecture”,⁴¹ written from Paris for the Barcelona-based publication *Mirador*, by the 1930s he had joined the growing chorus of voices denouncing what they saw as the dehumanisation and standardisation that the modern international movement had brought to architecture. For Torres-García, the modern house created by a rationalist architect lacked a spiritual dimension; reintegrating the crafts and the visual arts with architecture was necessary to restore it. He was no doubt hoping this realisation among architects might result in mural commissions for artists like himself.

The Saint Bois project in Montevideo in the context of Latin American muralism

Following his return to his native Uruguay in 1934, Torres-García would still have to wait a few years to receive the commissions he had been hoping for ever since he completed his latest mural in Barcelona in 1919. His first Uruguayan project arrived in 1937, when he was asked to create a public work for the Rodó Park in Montevideo. For this, Torres-García produced *Cosmic Monument*, a wall made up of orthogonal stone blocks of various sizes, each displaying a motif from his usual repertoire. The motifs here were not painted on the wall but directly incised on it. The overall effect strongly evokes the look of a construction from a long-gone civilisation. *Cosmic Monument* is not a mural painting but rather functions as a built version of Torres-García’s constructive universalism canvasses, and as such provides a further example of the blurred line between a painting and a wall in his oeuvre.⁴²

A few years later, in 1944, Torres-García received a second commission, a mural programme for the state-run Saint Bois tuberculosis hospital, also in Montevideo. The commission came from the establishment’s director, doctor Pablo Purriel, motivated by his belief in the therapeutic potential of art.⁴³ Writing shortly after the project’s completion, Torres-García described what both commissions, *Cosmic Monument* and Saint Bois, had meant to him:

What I always strove for was decorative monumental art, with a general human sense, religiously secular, collective and bordering on the artisanal; art of people and not of class. And I congratulate myself that it has been here, in my homeland, that I have been able to fully realize such a profound aspiration.⁴⁴

This short statement once more touches on a number of points that had long been part of Torres-García’s conceptualisation of the mural, and then adds a twist. Torres-García speaks here of a profound aspiration to create “decorative monumental art”, which is indeed corroborated by his prolific early-career mural practice in Barcelona, as well as by the various expressions of this mural vocation, in the absence of actual commissions, posited in the previous section. He also makes a reference to the collective and the artisanal, attesting to the sustained currency, in his thinking, of the primitivising virtues that had helped legitimise the mural as a modern art form in the early decades of the century. Yet, he now introduces a pointed distinction between “people” and “class”, as recipients/owners/agents of this art.⁴⁵ This constitutes a subtle yet relevant novelty in Torres-García’s discourse on the mural, evident only after he returned to Uruguay, which calls for closer examination.

Constructive Universalism and Mexican muralism

Torres-García had moved back to Uruguay, aged 60, after a 43 year absence, as an established, albeit broke, artist having made his name in Europe. Acclaimed by some as an introducer of the avant-garde in the otherwise markedly academic Uruguayan art milieu, he nevertheless struggled to gain acceptance for the primitivist constructive aesthetics he had developed in Paris in the late 1920s. His attempts to shake up artistic conventions – through initiatives such as the opening of the exhibition venue Estudio 1037 (1934), the Asociación de Arte Constructivo (1935), and its *Círculo y Cuadrado* magazine⁴⁶ (first published in 1936), or the Taller Torres-García (1943) – had met with strong resistance from opposing sectors. The orthogonal compositions of schematic signs that characterised his artistic proposal were dismissed by the conservative establishment as an attempt against basic principles of representation and beauty. For leftist sectors, on the other hand, they were a European import and an example of art at the service of capitalism, disconnected from class struggles.⁴⁷ His work was explicitly described as being “in the antipodes” of the socially-engaged murals of David Alfaro Siqueiros (1896–1974),⁴⁸ whose visit to Uruguay in 1933, a year before Torres-García’s return, had left a strong impression on the country’s more restless sectors.⁴⁹

This comparison of Torres-García’s work with that of Siqueiros is illustrative of the artistic and political context in which the former sought to legitimise his primitivist constructive proposal in the broader Latin American cultural sphere. With its commitment to abstraction and the metaphysical, Constructive Universalism effectively constituted a counter-paradigm to the kind of social critique through narrative figuration that, spearheaded by Mexican muralism, largely defined the Latin American avant-gardes.⁵⁰

That Torres-García kept informed about Mexican muralism, and was willing to enter into a public dialogue with the movement, becomes apparent in three articles, dated 1938, 1940 and 1942, that he had published prior to receiving the Saint Bois commission. The first article reproduces a talk he gave as part of a tribute to Mexico that took place at Montevideo’s Ateneo.⁵¹ As befitted the purpose of the event, his speech was celebratory of that country’s art. It began by applauding the early avant-garde movement *Estridentismo* for its ability to bring together the European and the “indigenous” in an “emancipatory movement of great vitality”.⁵² It then moved on to the country’s muralist movement, “the definitive Mexican art” as embodied in the figures of Rivera, Siqueiros and Orozco.⁵³ While stressing that his own artistic proposal was entirely different from theirs, Torres-García felt compelled, he says, to “speak with enthusiasm” of their art “of the people and for the people” for the strength with which it engaged with social issues, as well as the way these three managed ostensibly to “cut ties with European art in order to model an American art”.⁵⁴

Continuing in this vein, in 1940 Torres-García penned a second article, this time devoted specifically to Siqueiros.⁵⁵ The text revisited many of the topics of the 1938 talk, and even re-used an entire paragraph from it, praising Siqueiros, along with Rivera and Orozco once again, for the way their art sought “the redemption of the proletariat through revolution”, eschewing aesthetic speculation and denouncing the “human pain that labours in the depths of our pseudo-civilization.”⁵⁶ The specific focus on Siqueiros, this time round, allowed Torres-García to draw attention to their early interaction in Barcelona – as discussed earlier in this essay – when around 1919–1920 they collaborated in the *Vida Americana* magazine edited by the Mexican artist. The tone and contents of this 1940 article suggest an attempt by Torres-García to establish a certain common ground with Siqueiros despite their artistic differences, which he plainly acknowledged. In Barcelona, he describes, they were both part of a combative group of artists, gathering around the “revolutionary” poet Joan Salvat-Papasseit to “promote the most advanced ideas.”⁵⁷ After their respective departures from the city, he claims, he followed Siqueiros’ progress

through magazines; their artistic divergence over the years, he stresses, was perhaps less so than one might think. After all, he argued, they were both “on the side of truth”, and their differing temporal focuses – Siqueiros’ on the present, his own on eternity – could “on a certain plane (...) become one”.⁵⁸

The celebratory tone of these two articles (1938 and 1940) with regard to Mexican muralism and its main figures disappears altogether in a third instance where they are mentioned in Torres-García’s discourse, a 1942 conference entitled “Art and Communism”.⁵⁹ This was a rare case of Torres-García overtly addressing politics, as by his own admission he “detest[ed] politics and the political struggle”.⁶⁰ In this case, however, he felt that a reality of social and political unrest compelled everyone to “define oneself”.⁶¹ At this, he argued that he was neither bourgeois – as he was routinely labelled by the left⁶² – nor did he agree with the materialistic basis of modern communism which, in his view, left no room for the metaphysical. He was, instead, an “idealist”, a “free-thinker”, a “mystic”, not belonging to any “dogmatic religion”; he identified rather with a “primitive” form of communism involving communal life and belongings as practiced, in his view, “a few centuries before our era” as well as by “the early Christians”.⁶³

His art, he contended, could therefore not be bourgeois; neither was it proletarian “as the communists want it, and even more, *as it should not be made*.”⁶⁴ Here, pointing his criticism explicitly at Rivera and Siqueiros, he described what he considered “the greatest mistake” of communist artists as believing that art must always be “representation, anecdote, drama, spectacle”. On the contrary, he argued, art should not aim at telling stories but must rather speak for itself. Abstraction, in his view, was in no way incompatible with a communist ideology; addressing the issue of what Leighton has called “a politics of form”,⁶⁵ Torres-García found greater merit in the way such an ideology was conveyed in the “abstract, (...), plastic, non-literary art” of Freundlich, Van Doesburg and Mondrian.⁶⁶ In this regard, he concluded, “the greatest work of art realised by the communist, is that sickle and that hammer traced on any wall, with charcoal or any old brush. Because that symbol is perfectly plastic and written with the heart.”⁶⁷

This succession of articles suggests a growing tension, at least from Torres-García’s perspective, between his primitivist constructive art proposal and the social narrative approach of Mexican muralism. In the 1938 and 1940 articles Torres-García appears to have sought a sort of rapprochement with the latter, or at least show that their respective positions were not “in the antipodes”⁶⁸ of each other, possibly hoping there was room for the amiable co-existence of radically different aesthetics in the Latin American artistic sphere. However, his appeal in those articles to purportedly shared values with Mexican muralism – art of and for the people, social awareness, aesthetic revolution, (purported) emancipation from European canons – gave way, by 1942, to an unusually explicit political piece in which Torres-García seems to feel the need to refute accusations of bourgeois bandied at himself and his art, while pointedly critiquing Mexican muralism for its, in his view, unnecessary use of ‘literary’ figuration to effect social change.

Against this background, the 1944 Saint Bois commission represented for Torres-García, now aged 70, an opportunity to take his primitivist constructive aesthetics to a wider audience, developing it for the first time in a format, the mural, that had for decades now been central both to his own practice and to artistic and social discourse in Latin America.

Saint Bois: project brief, production and reception

Saint Bois would arguably be the most ‘social’ of Torres-García’s mural projects. However numerous, his Barcelona murals would have had relatively limited social reach, designed as they were for highly representational spaces at the seat of municipal or regional power, for two small churches, or for private residences, including his own. At Saint Bois, he was being asked to

contribute to a broader initiative to bring literature, music and art into the therapeutic programme of a public hospital for tuberculosis. With the stated purpose of “giving spiritual contents to State healthcare”,⁶⁹ Doctor Purriel installed a library and a music room, as well as commissioning the murals for different parts of the facilities, from wards and waiting rooms to the hospital’s pharmacy, kitchen and the drivers’ room. The artist conceived the Saint Bois project as a collective one that would provide a practical exercise in Constructive Universalism for his students at the Taller Torres-García, which he had established the year before. Working for free,⁷⁰ the group was to create a total of 35 panels, of which Torres-García reserved seven for himself, including *The Sun* (Figure 4.2)⁷¹ and assigned the remaining ones among 20 students.⁷² For purposes of programme coherence, the students were given the brief to create “locally-themed” compositions, based on the golden ratio and using only primary colours in black-contoured fields.⁷³

The resulting work received mixed reviews. The commissioner, doctor Purriel, was delighted with it, as were the patients at Saint Bois, who spoke of the “joy and colour” that the murals had brought to hospital life.⁷⁴ Disregarding this favourable reception by the project’s main intended audience, the art critical establishment issued scathing reviews; the murals were deemed completely inadequate for the setting of a hospital, their chromatism aggressive, potentially harmful for the patients, their abstractionism the failed result of an excessively cerebral approach to art.⁷⁵

Even former students of the Taller subsequently expressed reservations as to the project’s success with regard to a basic tenet of Torres-García’s theorisation, the integration of art and architecture.⁷⁶ The call for such integration, as discussed before, was grounded on his primitivist understanding that painting should be an applied art with a social purpose, as it had been, in his view, before the rise of the easel painting; when applied to architecture, painting should become one with it, be the “decorative monumental art” to which, as per the quote above, he had always aspired.⁷⁷ Yet, as observed by Guillermo Fernández and Rafael Lorente, several of the panels at Saint Bois appeared to be little more than enlarged versions of constructive universalist canvases painted in the middle of a wall, with no discernible dialogue between them and the surrounding architecture.⁷⁸

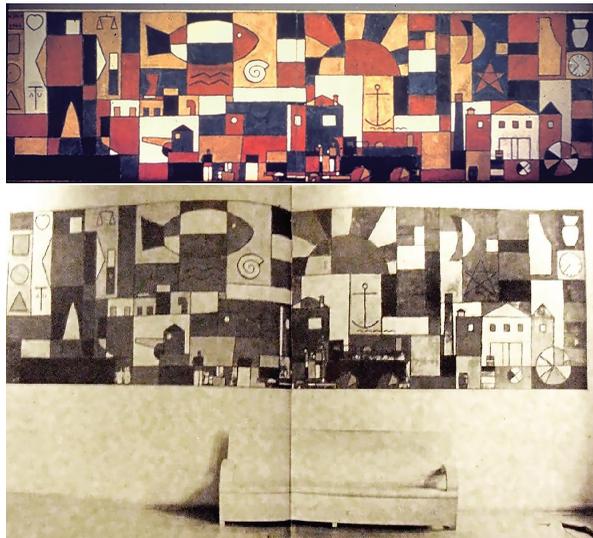


Figure 4.2 Joaquín Torres-García, *El Sol*, 1944. Enamel paint on wall, 195.5 × 662 cm. Mural for the Saint Bois Hospital in Montevideo, transferred to canvas 1972, destroyed 1978. Catalogue Raisonné ref. 1944.26. © Courtesy of the Estate of Joaquín Torres-García. The mural on site, photograph as published in Soiza 2018.

Any appreciation of this issue is today undermined by the scarce surviving evidence of what the precise original context was for each mural.⁷⁹ Torres-García's seven panels were subsequently destroyed and few photographs remain showing them in their original site. The images that exist, however, suggest a degree of spatial and functional integration with the hospital's architecture for at least some of his murals. Such is the case of *The Sun* (Figure 4.2, above), a horizontal composition, raised from floor level, and extending almost the entire width of the available wall space. At around 2 meters in height by over 6.6 meters in width, the panel thus effectively replaced the upper section of the original white wall with a 'wall' of coloured rectangular and square blocks, populated with the usual repertoire of schematic signs, much like a painted version of *Cosmic Monument*. The lower section of the wall, meanwhile, was purposely left blank so that furniture and equipment could be placed against it, thus preserving the functionality of the room. While no on-site images are known to remain of another panel, *The Tram*,⁸⁰ its almost identical dimensions to *The Sun*, suggest it was spatially and functionally integrated in a similar way elsewhere in the facilities.

At any rate, though, and considering the project as a whole, a seemingly timid integration of architecture and painting is a valid critique for an artist who throughout his career had made such a point of distinguishing the (virtuous, collective, primitive) mural from the (individualistic, decadent, post-Renaissance) easel. As recently as 1940 he had once more written on the error of believing that mural painting involved merely transferring "a small painting to the wall, as if by simply enlarging it, it can fulfil the required decorative purposes".⁸¹ The question arises then as to why so many of the panels at Saint Bois, including some by Torres-García himself, seem to be just that, enlarged versions of his canvasses. To a certain extent, an answer might lie in his fundamental understanding of a painting as something 'built'. By the 1940s, his conceptual association between the actions of painting and building was being expressed in literal terms. One must paint, he would describe:

just as a mason builds a wall – and he lays – a brick – then mortar – then another brick – and more mortar – and always with a level and plumb. The same for the painter: pure red – an angle – then blue – a form – white – black – yellow – and always with the sector at hand and the carpenter's square in order to place everything in an orthogonal rhythm.⁸²

Based on this, one might argue that each Constructive Universalist work, whatever its dimensions and materiality, effectively functioned as a 'painted wall' in and of itself; stretching this conceptual argument, it could be posited that, when executed directly on an actual wall, a Constructive Universalist painting integrated with its built support regardless of its size and location. It is worth stressing, at any rate, that existing images do not necessarily show the functional elements – furniture, hospital equipment – that may have conditioned the dimensions and placement of each panel. In this regard, the possibility must be considered that beyond the theoretical aspiration to achieve a formal or conceptual integration of painting with architecture, what may have taken precedence at Saint-Bois were the practical considerations of integrating painting with a working hospital environment.

“Bordering on the artisanal”... to fresco or not to fresco

A further aspect that can be construed as undermining any attempted integration of painting and architecture at Saint Bois was the fact that, contrary to Torres-García's career-long championing of fresco as the 'primitive' means for such integration,⁸³ all the panels at Saint Bois were executed in industrial oil-based enamel paint directly applied onto the existing plaster.⁸⁴ By the

1930s, the question of materials and procedures – and in particular, the key problem of whether to fresco or not to fresco – had become a major point of debate, often ideologically charged, among muralists in Latin America. As already mentioned, in Mexico fresco had been promoted since the early twentieth century as a purportedly authentic Mexican procedure on account of its pre-Hispanic practice by native American cultures. Its continued use over the centuries by indigenous communities, seen as heirs to that pre-colonial legacy, gave this medium further revolutionary legitimacy.⁸⁵ Over time, fresco had become associated with all pre-Hispanic civilisations, and it was enthusiastically adhered to by practitioners throughout Latin America.⁸⁶ Rivera, among them, continued to argue for it on account of its intrinsically architectural nature: “Nothing can take the place of fresco in mural painting, because fresco is not a painted wall, but rather a painting that is a wall”.⁸⁷ Siqueiros’s views on the subject, meanwhile, had taken a radically different direction. His early 1920s murals at Escuela Nacional Preparatoria in Mexico City were produced using fresco, as well as the equally ancient encaustic procedure.⁸⁸ However, the murals he was commissioned to create in Los Angeles in 1932 were to be executed outdoors on concrete walls, as opposed to indoors on adobe or brick walls as had been the case in Mexico. The difficulty of applying fresco to modern concrete, added to Siqueiros’ own forward-looking stance and technological curiosity, led him to try out new mortar and pigment formulations that he and his Bloc of Painters’ crew no longer applied by hand, but projected onto the wall by mechanical means.

Siqueiros would explain this new approach in ideological terms as a necessary revolution in mural painting. Traditional fresco, he argued, had been the “organic” choice when Mexican muralism had been painting on “old architecture” and “colonial buildings”.⁸⁹ Now, however, a truly modern, proletarian, society required new architectural materials, and a new mural procedure to go with it. Traditional fresco had become an anachronism, as pointless as “using a church organ [to produce] psychologically subversive revolutionary music”.⁹⁰ He now refuted all the primitivising traits with which fresco had been imbued by Mexican muralism: its “slow, labour-intensive, artisanal” nature clashed against “the violence of contemporary life”⁹¹; its identification with pre-Hispanic cultures had been but a “demagogical idealisation of the Indian”⁹²; its celebration as part of popular culture – a culture that he now characterised as pleading and subservient – was contrary to the “dialectical, aggressive, threatening and tremendously optimistic voice” of the proletariat.⁹³ Traditional fresco, he sentenced, was “socially dead”, the future belonged to the experimental methods he had initiated with the Los Angeles Bloc of Painters.⁹⁴

As a long-standing advocate of fresco himself, Torres-García was no doubt aware of the place that fresco occupied in the Latin American artistic imaginary and ideological discourse. His 1938 and 1940 articles discussed earlier show that he was familiar with Rivera’s and Siqueiros’ contrary positions with regard to it.⁹⁵ In these articles, Torres-García celebrated Rivera’s adherence to fresco and his early adoption of it as the most adequate procedure for the “severe, rough and sober style” he had been developing in the 1920s for a “truly Mexican art”.⁹⁶ Taking the opportunity to claim his own role in the modern rediscovery of fresco, Torres-García proceeded to clarify that he himself had already been experimenting with it in Barcelona many years before Rivera did so in Mexico. As had been the case in Mexico, the identity dimension associated with the recovery of fresco was equally applicable to his own efforts in the 1910s, when he had endeavoured to modernise the procedure in “similar circumstances [of] Resurgence of the Catalan people”.⁹⁷ Still, and perhaps somewhat unexpectedly, his own keenness for fresco did not prevent him from also seeing merit in Siqueiros’ attempts at producing murals by collective mechanical means: though he found them flawed, it was not so much in principle, he explained, as in the way Siqueiros had gone about it.⁹⁸

That fresco remained part of Torres-García's practice around the time of the Saint Bois commission, as well as a cornerstone of his conception of the mural is evidenced in a number of works. In the previous years, he had resumed the production of constructive frescoes, initiated over a decade earlier in Paris, with two further pieces, *Universal man with two figures and cross* (1942),⁹⁹ and *Pyramidal constructive* (1943) (Figure 4.3). While the first one was produced on burlap, like the Paris works, the second one was painted on a thick slab of mortar, which at 150 cm high does not easily fit into the 'easel fresco' category but rather gives the impression of an actual mural, if at small scale. Fresco was also the procedure of choice for yet another mural commission he received in Montevideo around the same time as the Saint Bois project. It was equally for a hospital, the Rodríguez López Maternity Hospital, for which he created a figurative scene of a mother and child, with a male figure standing nearby, set in a Mediterranean landscape (Figure 4.4). The mural is no mere revisitation of the themes and pictorial language of his early mural production in Barcelona, but in fact reproduces, at real scale, a section of one of the 1910s Diputació frescoes. It is one of the more striking instances of Torres-García's return to previous forms and themes, a practice that characterises his entire body of work.¹⁰⁰

At the time Torres-García received the Saint Bois commission, fresco was therefore clearly present in his practice, and was as valid for an Arcadian figurative composition as for a Constructive Universalist one. Yet, for the Saint Bois project, he opted instead for industrial

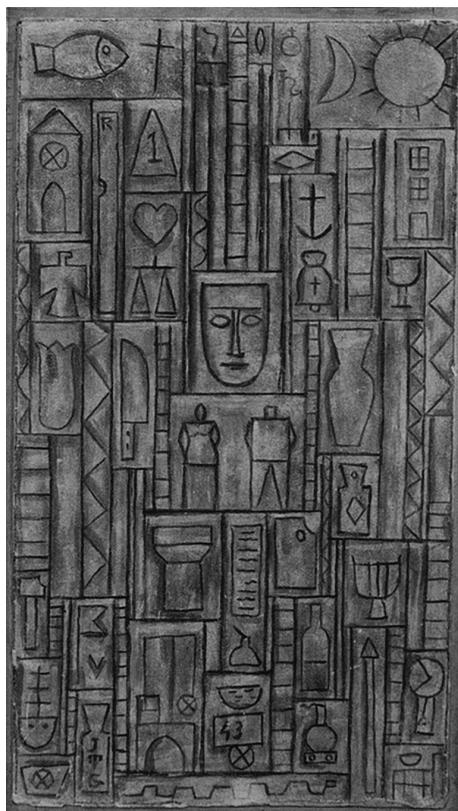


Figure 4.3 Joaquín Torres-García, *Constructivo piramidal*, 1943. Wood-mounted fresco, 152.5 × 85 cm. Barcelona: Private collection. Catalogue Raisonné ref. 1943.11. © Courtesy of the Estate of Joaquín Torres-García.



Figure 4.4 Joaquín Torres-García, *Mural de la Maternidad*, 1944. Fresco on wall, 376 × 214 cm. Montevideo: Sanatorio 3, CASMU. Catalogue Raisonné ref. 1944.39. © Courtesy of the Estate of Joaquín Torres-García.

enamel paint. This raises an issue with regard to his primitivist discourse surrounding the mural, which as quoted above he continued to conceive of as “bordering on the artisanal”, a notion more readily associated with the slow, labour-intensive procedure of fresco than with the application of industrial paint. Given that the Saint Bois hospital was a modernist construction,¹⁰¹ it might be tempting to see in his choice a heeding of Siqueiros’ call to pair modern architecture with modern painting materials. Then again, this argument is invalidated by Torres-García’s choice of fresco, that same year, for the maternity hospital, which happened to be an equally modernist building.

The brief at Saint Bois was to create a mural programme that would contribute to the well-being of patients and staff. Torres-García wished to develop this programme as an exercise in Constructive Universalism, showcasing for the first time in mural form the social potential of its non-narrative, metaphysical, geometrised and primitivist pictorial language. This, he had been exploring since the late 1920s in various palettes: initially using either the primary colours of Neoplasticism, or the earthen tones of fresco, and subsequently adding a third grisaille-like option combining black and white. Of these, the vibrant hues of the neoplasticist palette were evidently deemed the most apt to counter the depressive states often associated with tuberculosis.¹⁰² That would have advised against the use of fresco, a procedure with which bright, saturated, colours are difficult to achieve, with blue being, moreover, notoriously unstable.¹⁰³

At any rate, the Taller students were untrained in the use of fresco; teaching it to them in a relatively short period of time would not have been a viable option. Finally, fresco is a disruptive procedure, involving costly scaffolding and building materials, and generating no small amount of dust, which made it clearly unsuited to the functioning and air quality requirements of a hospital for a respiratory disease. In the face of these considerations, Torres-García's choice must have been straightforward: industrial paint not only guaranteed the desired chromatism, it also ensured the viability and expediency of the whole project.

The Saint Bois project thus tested fundamental tenets of Torres-García's primitivist theorisation on the mural, grounded on the notions of the collective, socially functional and decorative (that is, applied, flat and symbolic painting). On the one hand, it constituted the most clearly collective project of his career, not only involving the patron, Dr. Purriel, and 20 Taller students but also being part of a wider programme that encompassed other arts with a common therapeutic purpose. Saint Bois was also arguably his project with the broadest social reach, designed for the patients and workers of a state-run hospital. In the politically-charged Latin American art scene, it allowed him to showcase the social intervention potential of his primitivist-constructive, abstract-metaphysical aesthetics. On the other hand, however, the practicalities of the commission forced him to suspend some of his most dearly held principles of mural decoration; the formal and material integration of the painted panels with the surrounding architecture was ultimately conditioned by the project's therapeutic brief, the functional requirements of a working hospital and the inexperience of his students in the use of fresco. While providing a long sought-after outlet for his mural vocation, Saint Bois also brought home to Torres-García the extent to which the practical application of primitivist mural discourse was subject to contingency.

Notes

- 1 Paul Baudouin, *La fresque: sa technique, ses applications*. Paris: Librairie centrale des beaux-arts, 1914.
- 2 Idem, 4.
- 3 Marie Monfort, "Paul Baudouin, Georges Pradelle et l'association « la Fresque »", *In Situ. Revue des patrimoines*, 22, 17 October 2013.
- 4 The exact dates of Dr. Atl's sojourn in Italy are unclear. According to Siqueiros' account it would have taken place around 1904–1906. David Alfaro Siqueiros, *Cómo se pinta un mural*. Cuernavaca: Ediciones Taller Siqueiros, 1951, 22.
- 5 Joaquín Torres-García, *Notes sobre art*. Girona: Masó, 1913, 53.
- 6 María José González Madrid, *Vida-Americana: la aventura barcelonesa de David Alfaro Siqueiros*. Valencia: IVAM/L'Eixam, 2000, 8. González points out that the precise dates of this trip have not been established, nor is it clear whether this was a joint journey or each went separately.
- 7 Paul Baudouin, *La fresque...*, op. cit., 4.
- 8 Marie Monfort, "Paul Baudouin...", op. cit.
- 9 As attested to, for example, by the experimental teaching of fresco at the Weimar Bauhaus wall painting workshop, under Kandinsky, as a way to achieve a unity between painting and architecture. Klaus-Jürgen Winkler (ed.), *Bauhaus Alben 3: The Weaving Workshop, The Wall-Painting Workshop, The Glass-Painting Workshop, The Bookbinding Workshop, The Stone-Carving Workshop*. Weimar: Bauhaus-Universität, 2008, 120–149.
- 10 Torres-García, *Notes sobre art*, op. cit.; Siqueiros, *Cómo se pinta un mural*, op. cit.; Fernand Léger, "Mural Painting and Easel Painting", *Functions of Painting* (Edward F. Fry, ed.). New York: Viking Press, 1973, 160–164. Siqueiros actually stretches the chronology of pre-individualistic art to 1600. Siqueiros, *Cómo se pinta un mural*, op. cit., 7.
- 11 Joaquín Torres-García, "Esbós autobiogràfic del pintor Torres-García", *D'ací i d'allà*, February 1926, 439; David Alfaro Siqueiros, "Los vehiculos de la pintura dialéctico-subversiva", 1932, Biblioteca Nacional de Montevideo, Archivo Luis Eduardo Pombo [ICAA]; Sigfried Giedion, "The Need

- for a New Monumentality”, *New Architecture and City Planning* (Paul Zucker, ed.). New York: Philosophical Library, 1944, 557; Fernand Léger, “Mural Painting and Easel Painting”, op. cit.
- 12 Monfort, “Paul Baudouin...”, op. cit.
 - 13 Baudouin, *La Fresque...*, op. cit., 1–15.
 - 14 Josep Pijoan and Josep Puig i Cadafalch, *Les pintures murals catalanes* (Xavier Barral i Altet, ed.). Barcelona: Institut d’Estudis Catalans, 1907; Josep Pijoan, “De com es varen descobrir i publicar les pintures murals catalanes”, *Gaseta de les Arts*, 1, 1, 15 October 1924, 5–6.
 - 15 Josep Minguell Cardenyas, “Jean Charlot y la introducción de la pintura al fresco en el movimiento muralista mexicano”. Unpublished conference at the Jean Charlot Foundation. Honolulu, 2010, https://vault.jeancharlot.org/writings-on-jc/2010_josep-minguell-cardenyas_movimiento-muralista-mexicano.pdf.
 - 16 Torres-García, *Notes sobre art*, op. cit., 46.
 - 17 Torres-García, “La nostra ordinació i el nostre camí”, *Empori*, April 1907; reproduced in Torres-García, *Escrits sobre art* (Francesc Fontbona, ed.). Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1980, 29.
 - 18 Torres-García, *Notes sobre art*, op. cit., 45.
 - 19 Idem, 86–91.
 - 20 Ibidem, 45–46.
 - 21 Ibidem, 51–53.
 - 22 Ibidem, 52–55.
 - 23 Begoña Farré Torras, “The Mediterranean as the Primitive Source for Noucentisme: Joaquín Torres-García’s ‘Classical Primitivism’ – from Arcadian Frescoes to Constructive Universalism”, *Artl@s Bulletin*, 10, 2, Fall 2021, 61–70.
 - 24 Idem, 65–66. The conflation of the classical and the primitive has also been discussed for Fernand Léger by Robert L. Herbert, “Léger, the Renaissance, and ‘Primitivism’”, *From Millet to Léger: Essays in Social Art History*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002, 143–151.
 - 25 Siqueiros, “Tres llamamientos de orientación actual a los pintores y escultores de la nueva generación americana”, *Vida-Americana, Revista norte centro y sud-americana de vanguardia*, May 1921.
 - 26 Joan Salvat-Papasseit, “Dos pintores uruguayos”, *Vida-Americana: Revista norte centro y sud-americana de vanguardia*, 1921.
 - 27 Torres-García, “Esbós autobiogràfic...”, op. cit.
 - 28 Luis Pérez-Oramas, *Joaquín Torres-García: The Arcadian Modern*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2015, 22. Pérez-Oramas quotes Torres-García here from *Impresiones de Nueva York* an unpublished 1921 account of his stay in this city, reproduced in Juan Fló, *J. Torres-García: New York*. Montevideo: Fundación Torres-García; Casa Editorial HUM, 2007, 75.
 - 29 Pérez-Oramas, *Joaquín Torres-García...*, op. cit., 24.
 - 30 Torres-García, “Esbós autobiogràfic...”, op. cit.
 - 31 Idem, 439.
 - 32 Cecilia de Torres et al., “The Catalogue”, *Joaquín Torres-García: Catalogue Raisonné*, 24 June 2022, no. 1925.19, <http://torresgarcia.com/catalogue/>.
 - 33 Catalogue Raisonné ref. 1925.19.
 - 34 Farré Torras, “The Mediterranean...”, op. cit., 66.
 - 35 Catalogue raisonné refs. 1928.225 *Constructivism*; 1929.57 *Composition*; 1929.60 *Constructive Fresco with Large Bread*; 1929.70 *Street*.
 - 36 Letter from Joaquín Torres García to Guillermo de Torre, 8 November 1931, Buenos Aires, Mario Gradowczyk archive, as quoted in Pérez-Oramas, *Joaquín Torres-García...*, op. cit., 29.
 - 37 Idem, 30.
 - 38 Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton, “Primitivism”, *Critical Terms for Art History* (Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff, eds.). Chicago, IL and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996, 170.
 - 39 On Torres-García’s problematic use and theorisation of pre-Hispanic referents in Constructive Universalism, see Aarnoud Rommens, *The Art of Joaquín Torres-García: Constructive Universalism and the Inversion of Abstraction*. New York: Routledge, 2017, particularly 106–118.
 - 40 See note 18.
 - 41 Torres-García, “Reflexions sobre arquitectura”, *Mirador, setmanari de literatura, art i política*, 27 August 1931. Reproduced in Torres-García, *Escrits sobre art*, op. cit., 231–234.
 - 42 An analysis of *Cosmic Monument* in juxtaposition with the aesthetics and politics of Mexican muralism, can be found in Gianmarco Visconti, “Universal Constructivism and Politics: Torres-García in Conversation with Siqueiros”, *Constellations*, 5, 1, 2013, 67–84.

- 43 María Laura Bulanti, *El Taller Torres-García y los murales del Hospital Saint Bois: testimonios para su historia*. Montevideo: Librería Linardi y Risso, 2008, 17.
- 44 Torres-García, “Significado del Monumento Cómico del Parque Rodó y de los murales de la Colonia Saint Bois”, *Marcha*, 15 September 1944, n.p.
- 45 In Spanish “arte de pueblo y no de clase”. The use of the preposition *de* (of), as opposed to *para* (for) broadens the role of “people” beyond that of mere recipients of his art, to encompass potentially also that of owners and/or agents.
- 46 Conceived as a continuation of the *Cercle et carré* association and magazine founded by Torres-García with Michel Seuphor in Paris in 1929.
- 47 See the series of articles penned by Norberto Berdía shortly after Torres-García’s arrival in Uruguay: Norberto Berdía, “En la sociedad burguesa ganan los banqueros y pierden los artistas: el caso del Pintor Torres García”, *Movimiento*, May 1934; “El arte de Torres García”, *Movimiento*, June 1934; “Contestando a Torres García”, *Movimiento*, October 1934. [ICAA]
- 48 Berdía, “El arte de Torres García”, op. cit.
- 49 Anonymous, “Se encuentra en montevideo un artista excepcional: David Alfaro Siqueiros”, *El Ideal*, 16 February 1933. [ICAA]
- 50 Rommens, *The Art of Joaquín Torres-García...*, op. cit., 31.
- 51 The talk was subsequently published. Torres-García, “El arte mejicano”, *AIAPE*, October 1938, 6–7. [ICAA]
- 52 *Idem*, 6.
- 53 *Ibidem*, 6.
- 54 *Ibidem*, 6.
- 55 Torres-García, “El Arte de David Alfaro Siqueiros”, *AIAPE*, December 1940, 11. [ICAA]
- 56 *Idem*, 11.
- 57 *Ibidem*, 11.
- 58 *Ibidem*, 11.
- 59 Subsequently published in Joaquín Torres-García, “Lección 138 - Arte y comunismo”, *Universalismo Constructivo*. Buenos Aires: Poseidón, 1944, 931–935.
- 60 *Idem*, 932.
- 61 *Ibidem*, 932.
- 62 See the Berdía articles mentioned in note 47.
- 63 Torres-García, “Lección 138 - Arte y comunismo”, op. cit., 931–932.
- 64 *Idem*, 933. Italics as in the original.
- 65 Patricia Leighten, *The Liberation of Painting: Modernism and Anarchism in Avant-Guerre Paris*. Chicago, IL and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2013, 177.
- 66 Torres-García, “Lección 138 - Arte y comunismo”, op. cit., 935.
- 67 *Idem*, 935.
- 68 See note 48.
- 69 Torres-García et al., *La decoración mural del pabellón Martirene de la Colonia Saint Bois*. Montevideo: Asociación de Arte Constructivo, 1944; as quoted in Bulanti, *El Taller Torres-García...*, op. cit., 20.
- 70 Torres-García, “El Problema de la decoración mural: Contestando al señor Herrera Mac Lean”, *Marcha*, 15 October 1944.
- 71 Having been removed in 1972 for conservation purposes, these were subsequently destroyed by a fire at the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro in 1978. Catalogue Raisonné refs.: 1944.26 *The Sun*; 1944.27 *Pax in Lucem*; 1944.28 *The Fish*; 1944.29 *Form*; 1944.30 *The Tram*; 1944.31 *White Locomotive*; 1944.12 *Pachamama*.
- 72 All 35 panels are reproduced in Bulanti, *El Taller Torres-García...*, op. cit. The Taller students that took part in the project were Augusto and Horacio Torres (Torres-García’s sons), Julio Alpuy, Gonzalo Fonseca, Daniel de los Santos, Julián San Vicente, Teresa Olascuaga, Manuel Pailós, Sergio de Castro, Alceu Ribeiro, Luis A. Gentieu, María Celia Rovira, Juan Pardo, Andrés Moscovich, Héctor Ragni, María Elena García Brunel, Josefina Canel, Esther Barrios de Martín, Daymán Antúnez and Elsa Andrada.
- 73 Interview with Maria Celia Rovira (2006) transcribed in Bulanti, *El Taller Torres-García...*, op. cit., 71.
- 74 Interview with Maria Celia Rovira (2006), transcribed in *idem*, 72.
- 75 For a detailed overview of the controversy surrounding the murals, see *ibidem*, 22–26.
- 76 *Ibidem*, 101, 110.
- 77 See note 44.
- 78 *Ibidem*, 101, 110.

- 79 None of the available images consulted for this essay appear to show the murals at the time of their completion in 1944. Fernández and Lorente, the two former students of the Taller who, in 2006, voiced their reservations as to the project's success in his regard, were not part of the Saint Bois crew, having only joined the Taller years after its completion.
- 80 Catalogue Raisonné reference 1944.30.
- 81 Torres-García, "Lección 119 - Nuestro problema de decoración mural", *Universalismo Constructivo*, op. cit., 785.
- 82 Torres-García, *La regla abstracta*. Rosario, Argentina: Ellena, 1967, n.p. Originally written in 1946.
- 83 Guido Castillo, "Torres-García, fresquista", *Mundo Uruguayo*, February 1944.
- 84 Bulanti, *El Taller Torres-García...*, op. cit., 21.
- 85 See note 15.
- 86 Pedro Nel Gómez, "La pintura al fresco en América", *Sábado: Semanario para todos, al servicio de la cultura y la democracia en América*, 14 May 1949. [ICAA]
- 87 Diego Rivera, "Arquitectura y pintura mural", *Textos de arte*. Mexico D. F.: UNAM IIE, 1996, 197. Originally published in *The Architectural Forum*, January 1934. [ICAA]
- 88 Guillermina Guadarrama Peña, *La ruta de Siqueiros: Etapas en su obra mural*. Mexico D. F.: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura, 2010.
- 89 Siqueiros, *Cómo se pinta un mural*, op. cit., 12.
- 90 Siqueiros, "Los vehículos...", op. cit.
- 91 Idem.
- 92 David Alfaro Siqueiros, "Rivera's Counter-Revolutionary Road", *New Masses (New York)*, 29 May 1934. [ICAA]
- 93 Siqueiros, "Los vehículos...", op. cit.
- 94 Idem.
- 95 Rivera's and Siqueiros' differences over fresco were only one aspect of a broader artistic, political and personal controversy between them over the 1930s. See Maricela González Cruz Manjarrez, *La polémica Siqueiros-Rivera: planteamientos estético-políticos 1934-1935*. México, D.F.: Museo Dolores Olmedo Patiño, 1996.
- 96 Torres-García, "El arte mejicano", op. cit.
- 97 Idem.
- 98 Torres-García, "El arte de David Alfaro Siqueiros", op. cit., 11.
- 99 Catalogue Raisonné ref. 1942.28.
- 100 Pérez-Oramas, *Joaquín Torres-García...*, op. cit., 25.
- 101 A 1942 project by architects Carlos Surraco and Sara Morialdo. Bulanti, *El Taller Torres-García...*, op. cit., 19.
- 102 Of the seven panels created by Torres-García for this mural programme, five follow the brief to use only primary colours with black contours, while a further two were created in the grisaille palette. The rationale behind this chromatic departure from the programme brief is not known. These two black and white panels, moreover, appear to have been a later addition, as at least one of them is dated November 1944, that is several months after the completion of the original project.
- 103 Josep Minguell Cardenyes. *Pintura mural al fresco*. Lleida: Edicions de la Universitat de Lleida, 2014, 172.

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5 Benjamin Péret's remarks on Afro-Brazilian religions. Primitivist longings, ethnocentric critiques, surrealist ethnographies

Arthur Valle

This chapter discusses the series of 13 articles entitled *Candomblé e Makumba* (Candomblé and Macumba), published by the French surrealist poet Benjamin Péret (Rezé, 1899 – Paris, 1959) between November 1930 and January 1931 in the newspaper *Diário da Noite*, published in the city of São Paulo, Brazil.¹ These articles are based on experiences that Péret had not only while visiting some places of worship in the city of Rio de Janeiro, but also on his readings on Afro-Brazilian religions and on the contributions of the African diaspora to the formation of Brazil.

The expression “Afro-Brazilian religions” that I use here refers to a set of religious practices of African origin in which the cult of deities, ancestors and other spiritual entities occupies a pivotal position.² These religions were introduced in Brazil by enslaved Africans who mostly came from regions in Central Africa (corresponding to countries such as present-day Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo) and West Africa (countries such as Benin, Ghana and Nigeria). In Brazil, African religions hybridised with Iberian Catholicism, Allan Kardec's Spiritism, religions of Brazilian indigenous peoples, and magical practices of different provenances.

When Péret published his articles, the social status of Afro-Brazilian religions was very ambivalent. On the one hand, their practices were guaranteed by the Constitution of the Brazilian Republic promulgated in 1891, which was decidedly secular. On the other hand, during the first decades of the Republic, these religions were severely repressed by the Brazilian State, particularly by the police apparatus. In most cases, their liturgical practices were interpreted as fraud and/or faith healing, and framed by the criminal legislation then in force, the Brazilian Penal Code enacted in 1890 and which lasted until the early 1940s.

In Péret's articles, the reception of Afro-Brazilian religions is also characterised by ambivalence, and by unresolved tensions between aesthetic appreciation and political analysis. No doubt, his articles must be praised for being one of the very first examples of positive evaluation of Afro-Brazilian sacred aesthetics: enchanted, Péret recognised a “primitive and savage poetry” in aspects of Afro-Brazilian liturgies.³ However, this very praise hints at his primitivist and ethnocentric biases. Moreover, Péret's conclusions are particularly problematic, as they stress what he saw as Afro-Brazilian religions' shortcomings: taking on a Freudian and Marxist point of view, the French poet considered these religions mentally unhealthy for their devotees and as “opium of the people”.

In this text, I propose to embrace the ambivalence of *Candomblé e Makumba*. I argue that it is precisely its unresolved tensions that make the series noteworthy. I first outline the main aspects of the series' publication and then focus on passages where Péret's primitivist interests are most evident. Next, I problematise his conclusions about the shortcomings of Afro-Brazilian religions and attempt to bring one of his articles closer to the concept of “surrealist ethnography” as conceptualised by James Clifford (1981), and Anja Schwanhäußer and Stefan Wellgraf

(2019). Finally, I briefly propose a solution to the aporia I perceive in *Candomblé e Makumba*, while stressing the value of the series for the contemporary debates on Afro-Brazilian religions.

Candomblé e Makumba

Together with André Breton, Paul Éluard and Louis Aragon, Benjamin Péret is considered one of the founders of surrealism in France.⁴ He lived in Brazil for two periods: from 1929 to 1931, and from 1955 to 1956. Péret arrived for the first time in Rio in February 1929, accompanied by his wife, the singer and musician Elsie Houston. Travelling between São Paulo and Rio, he remained in Brazil until December 1931, when he was deported due to his political militancy in the Brazilian Trotskyist movement (Figure 5.1).⁵

When Péret first arrived in Brazil, his research interests were centred on the cultures of indigenous peoples.⁶ As his initial projects could not be carried out as planned, he turned to a more accessible “exotic” subject: the Afro-Brazilian religious communities in Rio’s highly urbanised context. His choice may have been influenced by some Brazilian modern artists such as Mário de Andrade and Tarsila do Amaral, who were interested in African descent cultures since the mid-1920s.⁷ More likely, though, it had to do with his own wife, who had already been researching Afro-Brazilian cultures.⁸ In 1928, for example, Houston had been invited to



Figure 5.1 Portrait of Benjamin Péret published in the Rio de Janeiro press soon after his first arrival in Brazil. Source: *Fon-Fon!: Semanario Alegre, Politico, Critico e Esfusiante*, March 2, 1929, p. 38. <http://memoria.bn.br/DocReader/259063/68141>.

the *Ier Congrès International des Arts Populaires* held in Prague and published a text in its proceedings in which pivotal elements of Péret's articles were already addressed.⁹ Moreover, Péret's main interlocutors in *Candomblé e Makumba* were musicians, and it is likely that he met them through Houston's social networks.

The title of Péret's articles suggests that he interpreted "candomblé" and "makumba" as two distinct religious denominations. As he states:

Several devotees affirmed to me that *candomblé* is the purest expression of the African religion. *Makumba* would be the natural child, so to speak, of the former denomination, of indigenous beliefs, and of the progressive simplification of the rite in the 'white' milieu where it is perpetuated.¹⁰

It is worth noting, however, that, in the Brazilian press of the 1920s and 1930s, "makumba" – more commonly spelled as "macumba" – and "candomblé" were terms used almost synonymously, generally in a pejorative way, to refer to any Afro-Brazilian religious denomination.

According to M. Elizabeth Ginway,¹¹ Péret pursued his field research in Rio during the second half of 1930. Unfortunately, we do not know where his original manuscripts are, nor exactly who translated them into Portuguese. The 13 articles of *Candomblé e Makumba* are clearly divided into two distinct parts. The first nine articles, very ethnographic in nature, present descriptions of rites and interview excerpts. In contrast, the four final articles take the form of a much more detached and scholarly informed analysis.¹² In these final articles, Péret quotes diverse authors: scholars of Afro-Brazilian religions such as Nina Rodrigues and Manoel Querino; historians such as Braz do Amaral, Eduardo de Costa Britto and Rocha Pombo; the psychiatrist Osório César; the Afro-Cubanist Fernando Ortiz; William B. Seabrook, who researched the voodoo of Haiti; Edouard Foa, who wrote about the kingdom of Dahomey; and even authors such as Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx and Paul Lafargue, who, although mainly unconcerned with the geography affected by the African diaspora, are fundamental to Péret's final remarks.

In his articles, Péret refers to four Afro-Brazilian places of worship – which are commonly called *terreiros* in Brazil. The first one was run by a priest named Pai Quintino (literally Father Quintino) and was in Quintino Bocaiúva, a neighbourhood in Rio de Janeiro's North Zone. However, Father Quintino had died a few months earlier and Péret was not allowed to see the rites performed there. He had better luck at the second place he visited, located in the Laranjeiras neighbourhood, and run by a priest whom Péret referred to as "tio F..." (literally "Uncle F..."). His complete name was Faustino Pedro da Conceição, and he was an outstanding Brazilian musician who played with the famous Pixinguinha¹³ – notably, it is precisely while playing percussion instruments that he is shown in photos published in *Candomblé e Makumba* (Figure 5.2). Péret stated that the rites he saw in the *terreiro* ruled by "Uncle F..." followed the "law of Nago". In Brazil, since the nineteenth century, "Nago" was the term used to designate the Yoruba-speaking people, which implies that the cults led by "Uncle F..." had their main origins in West Africa.

The third place of worship visited by Péret was run by a priestess he designated as "mãe M..." (literally "Mother M..."). It was in Madureira, a neighbourhood in Rio's North Zone, and, according to Péret, it followed the "law of Angola" – i.e. the rites performed there had Central African origins. Finally, the fourth place of worship visited by Péret was the home of one of his friends, a musician to whom he referred simply as "P...". The house of "P..." was located near Penha, another neighbourhood in Rio's North Zone.

The mapping of Afro-Brazilian places of worship outlined in *Candomblé e Makumba* confirms a tendency also verified when we consult other press sources.¹⁴ Except for the *terreiro* of "Uncle F...", the places visited by Péret were in the suburbs of Rio (Figure 5.3). The location of most of these places of worship points to Afro-Brazilian religious subaltern socioeconomic



Figure 5.2 “Uncle F...” playing percussion instruments in two photos published in the third article of *Candomblé e Makumba*. Author’s photograph.



Figure 5.3 Approximate location of Afro-Brazilian places of worship visited by Benjamin Péret in 1930. Map produced by the author, with JupyterLab 1.2.6 and Folium 0.11.0. <http://www.dezenovevinte.net/asab/bperet.html>.

conditions in a city whose urban growth in the early twentieth century was largely based on deliberate social segregation.¹⁵ Moreover, the fact that Péret mostly refers to the religious leaders only by the initials of their names indicates a concern to preserve their identities, at a time when police repression against Afro-Brazilian religions was intense.

Primitivist longings

The aforementioned definition of Afro-Brazilian religions as repositories of a “primitive and savage poetry” is proposed by Péret at the very beginning of *Candomblé e Makumba*, and it is the main guiding thread of the series’ first nine articles. In this section, I would like to draw attention to two aspects in which Péret’s primitivist interests are clearly manifested: (a) his evaluations and predilections regarding the different rites he attended; and (b) the aspects of Afro-Brazilian sacred aesthetics that he deemed worthy of a more detailed description.

From Péret’s point of view, Afro-Brazilian religions in Rio de Janeiro did not constitute a homogeneous religious field. A clear indication of this would be the differences he noticed between what he termed “law of Nago”, with its origins in West Africa, and “law of Angola”, with its Central African origins. Significantly, Péret not only noted the differences but also expressed a clear predilection for the first “law” over the second. As pointed out by Emerson Giumbelli,¹⁶ it is “impossible not to recognise here the discussion about the ‘Nago purity’, a paradigm according to which belonging to the Nago nation or rite would imply greater fidelity to African origins”. Since at least the end of the nineteenth century, the “Nago purity” was indeed a recurrent paradigm in ethnographies of Afro-Brazilian religions.¹⁷ Nina Rodrigues, one of the first scholars on the subject, stated that, for example, the mythology of groups from Central Africa, such as the Bantu peoples, was far inferior to that of groups from West Africa, such as the Nago/Yoruba people.¹⁸

Following this paradigm, Péret reiterates both the alleged African purity of the Nago cult and its cultural superiority. This is clear when we analyse how he treats the priests who represent each of the “laws” in his articles. On the one hand, we have “Uncle F...”, the Nago religious leader: Péret does not conceal his sympathy for him, who is defined as a mystic and a poet. On the other hand, we have “Mother M...”, the priestess who officiated in a *terreiro* consecrated to the “law of Angola”: Péret devotes little attention to her, who is seen as an uninteresting character. While “Uncle F...” may be considered the “hero” of *Candomblé e Makumba*, featured in several articles of the series, “Mother M...” is briefly mentioned in only two, and has none of her talks transcribed. Notwithstanding, her presence is fundamental, by contrast, to highlight the qualities that Péret saw in “Uncle F...” and in the rituals led by him.

One of the passages that best expresses this unequal valuation also introduces that second aspect of *Candomblé e Makumba* where we can get a glimpse of Péret’s primitivist interests. It has to do with the aesthetic aspects of Afro-Brazilian liturgies that he chose to highlight. The first one is dance, which, in Afro-Brazilian religions, is usually related to trances and the incorporation of spiritual entities by the devotees. In the sixth article of his series, Péret thus compares the ritual dances in the *terreiro* of “Mother M...” with the ones he had previously seen in the *terreiro* of “Uncle F...”:

None of these hypnotic dances gave rise to those wild and majestic scenes I witnessed in the *terreiro* of ‘Uncle F...’. They gave the impression of being a pale reflection of those scenes, an effaced photograph, keeping only the main outlines of the images. ‘Civilisation’ had passed by [the *terreiro* of ‘Mother M...’]!¹⁹

In this quote, I would like to stress the distinction between “wild” and “civilised”. It structures other passages of Péret’s articles, for example, when he praises Afro-Brazilian sacred dances in

contrast with European secular ones. In *Candomblé e Makumba*'s third article, Péret describes a woman's dance seen in the *terreiro* of "Uncle F..." as follows:

What a dance! Religious and erotic at the same time... Her whole body was moving. She looked like a mouse, a snake, and a flame shaken by the wind.

How many poor women spend years cramming in dance courses to become stars in ballet and never manage to present a dance as pure as that one. It was perhaps the only truly beautiful dance I have ever seen in my life.²⁰

This passage is worth commenting on, because behind its apparently sincere praise, several stereotypes are revealed. For Péret, the dance is "religious" but also "erotic" – an interpretation that would sound inappropriate from the perspective of the devotees. The dancer is dehumanised, compared with animals (mouse and snake) and elemental forces of nature (a flame shaken by the wind). For Péret, her dance is "pure" and contrasts with the results of the long and supposedly sterile training of European dancers. My impression is that Péret completely ignored that every *terreiro* is also a "space of formation in art, based on African values and principles".²¹ In opposition to Péret's appraisal, I would affirm that it is only possible to understand Afro-Brazilian ritual dances such as those referred to in *Candomblé e Makumba* if we recognise their intrinsic sophistication. They are the product of a laborious artistic formation, and their interpretation as an expression of something spontaneous and/or "natural" is an oversimplification.

The second aesthetic aspect of Afro-Brazilian religions highlighted by Péret has to do with ritual sacrifices. Péret saw them in the *terreiro* of "Uncle F..." and in the house of his friend "P...". The sacrifices' descriptions made by Péret have much in common, constituting a kind of narrative leitmotif that contributes to the coherence of the first nine articles of his series. For example, the sacrifices always involve the beheading of birds, whose blood drips from their necks into *alguidares* (liturgical bowls) on the ground. Let us look at an example.

In the third article of *Candomblé e Makumba*, Péret describes a ceremony in the *terreiro* of "Uncle F...", at the core of which was the sacrifice of several birds:

Then began the preparations for the sacrifice. The *alguidares* containing a dark paste where twelve eggs were standing, and from which a large quantity of palm oil was dripping, stood to the right of 'Uncle F...'. On the left, in a glass with water, was a dagger.

Crouched down, holding the head of a chicken, 'Uncle F...' covered its eyes with two leaves from an unknown plant, and cut its neck. With one single blow, the chicken's head was almost completely separated from its body. [...]

The chicken's blood dripped into the *alguidar*. 'Uncle F...' plucked the finest feathers from its neck and wings, adding them to the offering to the deities. [...]

All the birds had the same fate, and when the slaughter was over, the eggs in the *alguidares* disappeared under the blood and feathers of the birds.²²

Sacrifices such as this and ritual dances were probably highlighted by Péret mostly because they were the aesthetic elements of Afro-Brazilian religion that best met his primitivist longings. Obviously, this selection was also intertwined with his affiliation with surrealism. Faced with Afro-Brazilian trances of spirit incorporation, Péret would probably recall the experiments performed by the surrealists in the 1920s, involving hypnotic sleep, mediumistic trance, and hypnagogic supernormal states.²³ For their part, the sacrifices always resulted in offerings to the deities – in Brazil, usually called "despachos" (literally dispatches to the deities) – composed of

heterogeneous elements: dark paste, palm oil, eggs, blood, feathers, money... Péret may have recognised in them *assemblages*, works of art made from disparate elements, often everyday objects, and a procedure that became the basis for many surrealist objects.²⁴ Finally, we can assume that, for Péret, both the dances and the sacrifices evoked something of that “convulsive beauty” extolled by Breton a few years earlier in his novel *Nadja*, published in 1928.

Ethnocentric critiques

Passages from *Candomblé e Makumba*, such as the ones presented in the previous section, usually end up reinforcing stereotypes regarding Afro-Brazilian religions. Since such stereotypes are still widespread today, it is necessary to read Péret’s first nine articles with extreme caution. The same can be said about the final section of the series, where Péret strives to synthesise his general ideas about the potentialities of Afro-Brazilian religions.

Péret presents his conclusions in *Candomblé e Makumba*’s final four articles. They compose a single text divided into four parts, which is subtitled “The Origins of the Beliefs of Black Brazilians”. Here, I would like to reflect critically on two topics that are central in the series’ final section: (a) the effects of Afro-Brazilian religions on the mental health of their devotees; and (b) the political character – whether revolutionary or not – of these religions.

Regarding the first topic, Péret quotes the ideas of his friend Osório César, a psychiatrist who participated in modern artistic circles of São Paulo. According to Péret, in his book *Misticismo e loucura* (Mysticism and madness) – not yet published in the early 1930s²⁵ – Cesar proposed “the rigorous application of the Penal Code to spiritualists and *makumbeiros*, whose beliefs he considers to be a major factor in the development of psychoses and neuroses”.²⁶ Although claiming to agree with almost all of César’s conclusions, Péret disagrees with him regarding this repressive proposal. As he states:

[I disagree] because it is a weak line of action, one that maintains untouched the main cause of neuroses and psychoses: the evolved religions and especially, here [in Brazil], Catholicism. [...] Moreover, I disagree, with any police repression, because it is evident that, in this case, it is counterproductive. Sigmund Freud observes that ‘one could almost say that every neurosis is a deformed religion’.²⁷ From this one could conclude that every religion is a neurosis in a latent state. But the neurosis is individual, while religion is a collective neurosis, a product of the present times, and, therefore, cannot be the object of any repression, whatever the religion, otherwise we would be acting illogically.²⁸

To some extent, this passage shows that the reference to César’s repressive proposal is mainly a pretext for the expression of Péret’s notorious anti-Catholicism. More problematic, however, is that Péret does not allow space to think about the prophylactic function of religions, in general, and of Afro-Brazilian religions, in particular. In a letter to Elsie Houston, Péret already classified the dances he saw in the *terreiro* of “Mother M...” as “crises of hysteria”.²⁹ Although Péret does not elaborate on this “diagnosis”, I assume that he interpreted the Afro-Brazilian ecstatic dances as physical symptoms of psychoneurosis that for Freud, for example, was caused by unconscious emotional conflicts.³⁰ The use of the term “hysteria” also seems to point to Péret’s gender prejudices and latent sexism, which could be thought of as the sources of his contempt for “Mother M...”.

Identifying religion with neurosis and ritual dances with hysteria, Péret’s statements such as the ones quoted above tacitly align with a social hygiene discourse that interpreted Afro-Brazilian religions and their healing practices as causes of mental illness. Appealing to the

authority of science, this discourse was clearly expressed in Rio de Janeiro's press³¹ and in official documents at least since the 1920s.³²

In the final article of *Candomblé e Makumba*, Péret develops his critique of religious institutions, this time turning to their political implications. Catholicism is again his main target, but it should be noted that Afro-Brazilian religions are not explicitly excluded from his attacks. To support his positions, Péret presents a long quotation from Marx's *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*,³³ where the famous definition of religion as the "opium of the people" appears. Péret's assessment of the political potential of Afro-Brazilian religions stems from this and is not positive.

At first, he recognises that, in the early 1930s, Afro-Brazilian religions still harboured the spark of the "revolutionary spirit" that was manifested in slave rebellions during Brazilian colonial and imperial periods. In this sense, he states that in "African religions [...] one must see an elementary form of protest against the oppression that society imposes on its most miserable class".³⁴ However, in Péret's point of view, Afro-Brazilian religions were an insufficient solution regarding socio-political issues and should be overcome. He then prophesied: "As the Blacks become aware of their oppressed situation, this form of revolt will disappear, it will be transformed in conscious revolt".³⁵

Péret's conclusions lay bare the ambivalence of *Candomblé e Makumba*. On the one hand, he recognises the aesthetic power of Afro-Brazilian religions – especially when he deals with the "law of Nago"; on the other hand, he ends up denying any therapeutic or emancipatory potential of these same religions. Considered as a whole, the series presents an aporia:

The praise of the primitive is accompanied by the denunciation of its limitation, as if past and future were crudely dissociated, as if America was just another scenario for the clash of forces that Marx and Freud conceived looking at Europe.³⁶

In my final remarks, I will return to this aporia.

Surrealist ethnographies

Despite the above considerations, I believe that *Candomblé e Makumba* contains valuable elements. As I mentioned earlier, Péret's articles are pioneering in positively considering aspects of the aesthetics of Afro-Brazilian religions. In addition, they present much information that can help us better understand how these religions operated in the early 1930s. Péret registers what he saw and heard in the *terreiros* as an ethnographer would do, although he does so in a not entirely systematic way. Unavoidably, his ethnographic gesture is permeated by his sensibility as a European poet strongly linked to surrealism.

Considering this, the concept of "surrealist ethnography" proposed by James Clifford in an essay from 1981, and more recently championed by authors such as Anja Schwanhäuffer and Stefan Wellgraf, may be a useful tool to deepen our understanding of *Candomblé e Makumba*. "Surrealist ethnography" is connected to a research perspective shared by ethnographers and artists in Paris during the 1920s and 1930s, which focused on the marvellous and the poetic of everyday life. It was characterised by the practitioners' fascination with the exotic, but also by a playful view of their own cultures; by the abandonment of the distinction between "high" and "low" cultures; and operated with collage and montage techniques, whereby disparate elements of reality were whimsically juxtaposed.³⁷ Stating that surrealist procedures are always present in ethnographic works, Clifford conceives the practice of "surrealist ethnography" as follows:

The surrealist moment in ethnography is that moment in which the possibility of comparison exists in unmediated tension with sheer incongruity. This moment is repeatedly produced,

and smoothed over, in the process of ethnographic comprehension. But to see this activity in terms of collage is to hold the surrealist moment in view [...]. Collage brings to the work (here the ethnographic text) elements that continually proclaim their foreignness to the context of presentation. These elements – like a newspaper clip or a feather – are marked as real, as collected not invented by the artist-writer. The procedures of (a) cutting out and (b) assemblage are, of course, basic to any semiotic message; here they *are* the message. The cuts and sutures of the research process are left visible; there is no smoothing over or blending of the work's raw 'data' into a homogeneous representation. To write ethnographies on the model of collage would be to avoid the portrayal of cultures as organic wholes, or as unified, realistic worlds subject to a continuous explanatory discourse.³⁸

With the exception, perhaps, of *L'Afrique fantôme* (1954) – the idiosyncratic field diary written by Michel Leiris while participating in the Dakar-Djibouti ethnographic expedition – Clifford points out that there have been no pure examples of “surrealist ethnography”. Certainly, *Candomblé e Makumba* is not a pure example of the genre either. As we saw, in his conclusions, Péret utters an “explanatory discourse” on Afro-Brazilian religions and on what he saw as their shortcomings. However, in the series' first nine articles, which have a very strong ethnographic character, there are a few passages where his writing comes close to what Clifford proposes in the quote above.

In this sense, the description of the ceremony that Péret attended at the house of his musician friend “P...” seems particularly worthy of discussion.³⁹ The relevance of this article seems to have been stressed by Péret himself, since it is located in the exact centre of his series, being the seventh of the 13 articles. It is suggestively entitled “Mané Kurú’, ‘Pereké’, Allan Kardec e Co.”, juxtaposing names of Afro-Brazilian spiritual entities with that of the founder of a European religion and anticipating the collage of disparate elements that make up the text.

Péret defined the ceremony in the house of “P...” as a “half-spiritist, half-makumbaist séance”, emphasising the culturally hybrid character of what he saw. The ceremony aimed at ridding a girl of a spell. Reading the article, we find out that the “spirits” that disturbed her were under the orders of Eshu, the “trickster” orisha of the Yoruba people, who in Brazil gained a 1,000 new faces.⁴⁰ To persuade Eshu to leave the girl in peace, “P...” and his wife appealed to their own spiritual protectors. In life, they belonged to diverse ethnic groups: for instance, “Mané Kurú” and “Pereké”, cited in the article's title, were the spirits of deceased Amerindians. But there were also Africans and their descendants, whites, and “mestizos”. A sacrifice was performed, *cachaça*⁴¹ was drunk, cigars were smoked. “P...”, in deep trance, expressed himself in several languages: Portuguese, “African” and even French. At the end, “P...” and his wife drew a series of *pontos riscados* (marked points)⁴² on the floor of their house (Figure 5.4), which were outlined with gunpowder and then lit. Péret photographed these diagrams, which were carefully reproduced as a linear drawing in *Diário da Noite*. The image breaks the continuity of the text, erupting like an uncanny mark of the “real” that Péret does not fully explain.

Pontos riscados are ritual diagrams that mediate between drawing and writing. They may have many functions, notably those of invoking or identifying spiritual entities. They are composed of a vast repertoire of graphic elements, combined in a specific syntactic logic. Usually, a given *ponto* is linked to a specific spiritual entity through the incorporation of iconographic elements associated with the latter. In the case of the *pontos* collected by Péret, for example, the arrows are related to Amerindian spiritual entities, usually called *caboclos* (or “cabôcos”, as Péret spells it). The diagrams published in *Candomblé e Makumba* are among the oldest records of this remarkable form of sacred expression, and an excellent example of the documentary value of Péret's articles.

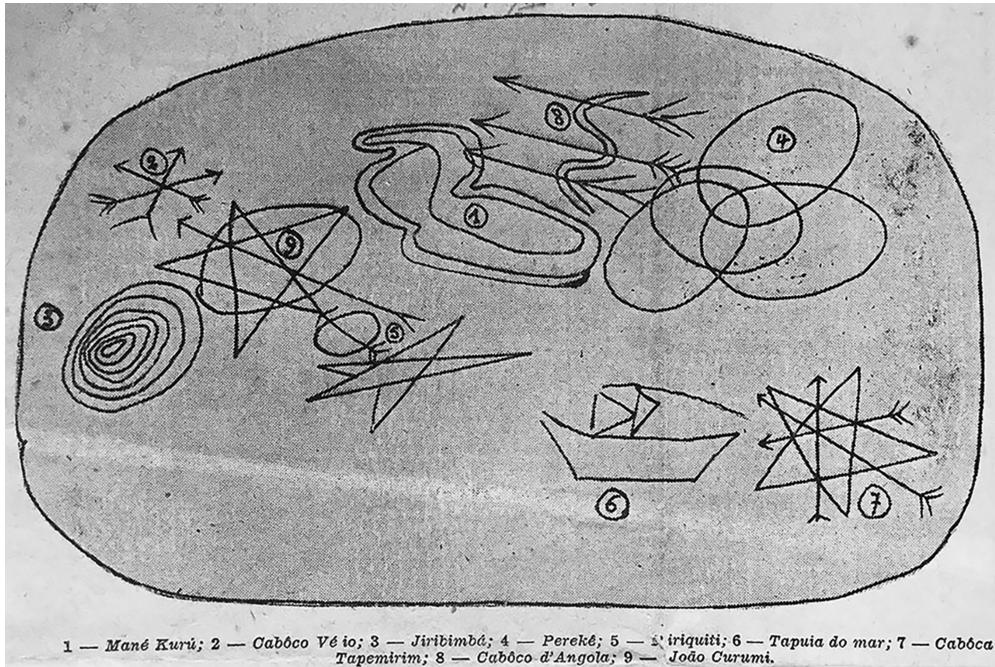


Figure 5.4 *Pontos riscados* (marked points) collected by Péret in the house of “P...”. The caption indicates the spiritual entity identified by each *ponto*. 1 – Mané Kurú; 2 – Cabôco Véio; 3 – Jiribimbá; 4 – Perekê; 5 – Quiriquiti; 6 – Tapuia do Mar; 7 – Cabôca Tapemirim; 8 – Cabôco d’Angola; 9 – João Curumi. Author’s photograph.

Apparently bewildered by everything he witnessed in the house of “P...” – but probably also out of respect for him – Péret suspended his evaluative judgments. In the seventh article of *Candomblé e Makumba*, we find no traces of his obsession with “purity”, nor of his distinctions between more or less “primitive” liturgies. I believe it was the very juxtaposition of disparate religious elements that led him to take this more neutral stance: from a European man’s point of view, the ceremony probably seemed to be “pure incongruity”, as it amalgamated religious traditions of African origin, Catholicism and Kardec’s Spiritualism. It must have resonated deeply in Péret’s surrealist heart, and the result was an entire article in which the “surrealist ethnography” that permeates *Candomblé e Makumba* can be glimpsed.

Final remarks

In conclusion, I would like to return to the aporia that structures *Candomblé e Makumba*. Its resolution demands that we simultaneously overcome the aestheticism that underlies modernist primitivism and recognise the therapeutic and political powers of Afro-Brazilian religions. In this sense, it is worth remembering that several authors⁴³ have been proposing valuations of Afro-Brazilian religions opposed to those of Péret and interpreting them as spaces for physical and psychological healing, as well as for decolonial practices. Something similar can be seen in the field of Brazilian visual arts at least since the mid-twentieth century, where Afro-Brazilian artists such as Abdias do Nascimento, Maria Auxiliadora and Ayrson Heráclito appropriated elements from Afro-Brazilian religions to affirm their curative and politically challenging powers.

In dealing with the constitutive ambivalence of *Candomblé e Makumba*, it would therefore be necessary to confront the series of articles with a more informed view of the religions that serve as its subject matter. In this way, Péret's primitivist and ethnocentric biases become evident, but his valuable contributions may also be better perceived. If we consider its ambivalence, *Candomblé e Makumba* may still be useful to reflect on Afro-Brazilian religions and the misunderstandings that still accompany their reception today.

Notes

- 1 I consulted the originals of *Candomblé e Makumba* kept in the Archives of Mário de Andrade – Institute of Brazilian Studies/University of São Paulo. They were commented on and filed in the form of newspaper clippings by Andrade. In some cases, however, the exact date of publication was not indicated by him.
- 2 Nei Lopes, *Enciclopédia brasileira da diáspora africana [recurso eletrônico]*. São Paulo: Selo Negro, 2011; Luis Nicolau Parés, “Religiosidades”, *Dicionário da escravidão e liberdade. 50 textos críticos* (Lília Moritz Schwarcz and Flávio dos Santos Gomes, eds.). São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2018, 377–383.
- 3 Benjamin Péret, “Candomblé e Makumba”, *Diário da Noite*, 25 November 1930.
- 4 Claude Courtot, *Introduction à la lecture de Benjamin Péret*. Paris: Le Terrain Vague, 1965; John Herbert Matthews, *Benjamin Péret*. Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1975; Maria Leonor Lourenço de Abreu, *Benjamin Péret et le Brésil*. PhD diss., Paris: Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2012.
- 5 M. Elizabeth Ginway, “Surrealist Benjamin Péret and Brazilian Modernism”, *Hispania*, 75, 3, 1992, 546–547.
- 6 Jean Puyade, “Benjamin Péret: um surrealista no Brasil (1929–1931)”, *Conexão Letras*, 1, 1, 2005, 5–6.
- 7 Rafael Cardoso, *Modernity in Black and White. Art and Image, Race and Identity in Brazil, 1890–1945*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021, 172–208.
- 8 Gregório de Villanova, “Elsie Houston e a cultura afro-brasileira”, *Elsie Houston – A Feminilidade do Canto* (Emanoel Araujo, ed.). São Paulo: Negras Memórias; Atração Fonográfica; Grupo Takano, 2003.
- 9 Elsie Houston, “La musique, la danse et les cérémonies populaires du Brésil”, *Art populaire: travaux artistiques et scientifiques du 1er Congrès international des arts populaires (Prague, 1928)*, v. 2. Paris: Éditions Duchartre, 1931.
- 10 Benjamin Péret, “Candomblé e Makumba”, *Diário da Noite*, 25 November 1930.
- 11 Elizabeth Ginway, op. cit., 547.
- 12 Emerson Giumbelli, “Macumba surrealista: observações de Benjamin Péret em terreiros cariocas nos anos 1930”, *Estudos Históricos*, 28, 55, 2015, 94.
- 13 See, for example, the following press articles on Faustino: “Um protesto de Tio Faustino contra o uso indevido de seus ‘omelês’” *A Noite*, 14 January 1933; “Ouvindo os ‘Bachareis’ do Samba – Faustino da Conceição faz um aviso aos seus colegas por causa do ‘Afouchê’, do ‘Agougô’ e do ‘Omêlê’”. *Diário Carioca*, 15 January 1933.
- 14 Arthur Valle, “Mapeando o sagrado: arte sacra e locais de culto afrobrasileiros em notícias sobre repressão policial no Rio de Janeiro, 1890–1941”, *Revista de História da Arte e Arqueologia (Online)*, 1, 2, 2020, 5–29.
- 15 Maurício de Almeida Abreu, *A evolução urbana do Rio de Janeiro*. Rio de Janeiro: IPP, 2013, 43–53.
- 16 Emerson Giumbelli, op. cit., 99.
- 17 Beatriz Góis Dantas, *Vovô nagô e papai branco: usos e abusos da África no Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: Graal, 2012.
- 18 Nina Rodrigues, “O Animismo Fetichista dos Negros Bahianos”, *Revista Brasileira*, VII, 1986, 354.
- 19 Benjamin Péret, “Candomblé e Makumba. Uma festa a Xangô na ‘Lei de Angola’”, *Diário da Noite*, 16 December 1930.
- 20 Benjamin Péret, “Candomblé e Makumba. Um jantar de santo”, *Diário da Noite*, November 1930 [date and month of publication unknown].
- 21 Roberto Conduru, “Formações transatlânticas — Mestre Didi, Martiniano do Bonfim e a arte da África no Brasil desde os oitocentos”, *19&20*, 16, 1, 2021, § 32.
- 22 Benjamin Péret, “Candomblé e Makumba. Um jantar de santo”, *Diário da Noite*, November 1930 [date and month of publication unknown].

- 23 Maria Leonor Lourenço de Abreu, op. cit., 270.
- 24 Ian Chilvers and John Glaves-Smith, *A Dictionary of Modern and Contemporary Art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, 137–138.
- 25 César's book was not published until the late 1930s. See Osório César, *Misticismo e loucura: contribuição para o estudo das loucuras religiosas no Brasil*. São Paulo: Oficinas Gráficas do Serviço de Assistência a Psicopatas, 1939.
- 26 Benjamin Péret, "Candomblé e Makumba. As origens das crenças dos negros brasileiros [fim]", *Diário da Noite*, 30 January 1931.
- 27 Péret quotes a French translation of Freud's Totem und Tabu: Einige Übereinstimmungen im Seelenlebender Wilden und der Neurotiker, published in 1928.
- 28 Benjamin Péret, "Candomblé e Makumba. As origens das crenças dos negros brasileiros [fim]", *Diário da Noite*, 30 January 1931.
- 29 Benjamin Péret, *Amor sublime. Ensaio e poesia*. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1985.
- 30 Sigmund Freud, *Obras completas, volume 2: estudos sobre a histeria (1893–1895) em coautoria com Josef Breuer*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2016.
- 31 See, for example: "As alucinações do 'candomblé'", *A Noite*, 24 January 1923.
- 32 Relatório apresentado ao Presidente da República dos Estados Unidos do Brasil pelo Ministro da Justiça e Negócios Interiores Dr. Augusto de Vianna do Castello em 1928. Rio de Janeiro: Imprensa Nacional, 1930, 180.
- 33 Péret quotes an undated French translation of Marx's *Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie*.
- 34 Benjamin Péret, "Candomblé e Makumba. As origens das crenças dos negros brasileiros [fim]", *Diário da Noite*, 30 January 1931.
- 35 Idem.
- 36 Emerson Giumbelli, op. cit., 100.
- 37 Anja Schwanhäuber and Stefan Wellgraf, "From Ethnographic Surrealism to Surrealist Ethnographies", *Hubert Fichte: Love and Ethnology*, 2019.
- 38 James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 23, 4, 1981, 563–564.
- 39 Benjamin Péret, "Candomblé e Makumba. 'Mané Kurú', 'Pereké', Allan Kardec e Cia", *Diário da Noite*, 24 December 1930.
- 40 Vagner Gonçalves da Silva, "Brazil's Eshu: At the Crossroads of the Black Atlantic", *Eshu: The Divine Trickster* (George Chemeche, ed.). New York: Antique Collectors' Club, 2013, 34–51.
- 41 *Cachaça* is a distilled spirit made from fermented sugarcane juice. The drink is consumed in some Afro-Brazilian rites, especially those involving the participation of Eshu.
- 42 This translation was proposed by Robert Farris Thompson in *Flash of the Spirit. African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*. New York: Vintage Book. Kindle edition, 1984.
- 43 Muniz Sodré, *Pensar naçô*. Petrópolis, RJ: Vozes, 2017; Luiz Antonio Simas and Luiz Rufino, *Fogo no mato: A ciência encantada das macumbas*. Rio de Janeiro: Mórula Editorial, 2019; Luiz Rufino, *Vence-demanda: educação e descolonização*. Rio de Janeiro: Mórula Editorial, 2021.

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Part II

Patterns and paradoxes



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6 *Antropofagia*, primitivism and anti-primitivism

Rafael Cardoso

North Atlantic discussions of primitivism often take for granted that the concept operates in a single direction: outwards from Western Europe and North America towards the Southern Hemisphere.¹ The primitivist gaze is considered a projection of the colonizing self, simultaneously appropriating and subordinating the colonized other. That view of primitivism as a strictly ethnographic project, part and parcel of the larger colonial enterprise, has rightly been contested.² Such a binary understanding not only ignores the longer history of the idea but also obscures what Samuel Spinner has called “the primitivisms that flowered in the shadows of Europe’s empires”.³ The primitivism of the Celtic revival, Russian Neo-primitivism, Jewish primitivism, the so-called Black primitivism of the *Négritude* movement and the Harlem Renaissance: to differing degrees, these phenomena sought emancipation from hegemonic modernity by reversing the direction of the primitivist gaze towards the self.⁴

The preceding list of “eccentric primitivisms” can be expanded to include an example from Latin America: the avant-gardist anthropophagic movement (henceforth, *Antropofagia*) in 1920s Brazil.⁵ Latin American societies frequently blur the lines that divide elite from popular, colonizer from colonized, Western from non-Western, and such ambiguities and tensions are present in *Antropofagia*. Although the movement explicitly affirmed its opposition to European culture – and, indeed, employed the term “colonial mentality” in 1929 – its rhetorical strategies failed to gain a foothold outside the Europeanized elites it criticized and from which it drew its membership.⁶ The point of the present discussion is not to dismiss *Antropofagia*’s anti-colonialist credentials, but rather to situate its anti-primitivism as a means of working through the relationship between primitivism and coloniality.

Antropofagia needs to be contextualized within the broader dimension of Brazilian society in the 1920s. The First World War was a turning point in Latin American perceptions of the presumed cultural superiority of Europe. With Europeans engaged in mutual slaughter, the question was openly asked: who were the real barbarians? The war swelled a wave of nationalist self-affirmation in Brazil, surging with the creation of the National Defence League in 1916, championed by poet Olavo Bilac, and cresting around the centennial of independence from Portugal in 1922. The task of affirming a new national conscience was explicitly taken up in 1916 by the *Revista do Brasil*, an influential cultural magazine in São Paulo that shaped the outlook of the young artists and intellectuals who burst onto the scene with the Modern Art Week, in 1922.⁷

Beneath the shining surface of nationalism lay a powerful undercurrent of anxiety about identity. At a time when the notion of *brasilidade* was in its infancy, ideas of Brazilian culture remained far from unified.⁸ Huge waves of immigration from Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, between the 1890s and 1910s, altered demographics and provoked apprehensions that the nation was losing its ethnic cohesion. In parallel, the struggles of Afro-descendant peoples to claim their rightful place within a society in which slavery was still a living memory cannot be dissociated

from the discussion at hand. Tensions around nativism and nationality, race and ethnicity, traditionalism and radicalism, charged debates around ‘the primitive’ with explosive force.

***Antropofagia* as anti-primitivism**

Over the past decades, the “*Manifesto antropófago*” (anthropophagic manifesto) of 1928 has gained increased prominence in English-language discussions of post-coloniality and decolonization.⁹ The movement must not be reduced to Oswald de Andrade’s manifesto, however. *Antropofagia* was the work of a talented and diverse group, including poets Antônio de Alcântara Machado, Raul Bopp, and Patricia Galvão (better known as Pagu); critics Oswaldo Costa and Geraldo Ferraz; painter Tarsila do Amaral, married to Oswald at the time and credited by some as the movement’s true leader. It found its most complete expression in the *Revista de Antropofagia*, published in two distinct phases between May 1928 and August 1929, firstly as a small magazine and subsequently as a page in the newspaper *Diário de São Paulo*.¹⁰

The topic of primitivism was addressed head-on in the *Revista de Antropofagia* in April 1929, in an article titled “Ethnological manipulations”. It begins: “The primitivist question is still timely. More than ever. It will only cease to be so when it is replaced by the anthropophagic question.”¹¹ The anonymous author (possibly Oswald de Andrade) vented anger at Wilhelm Schmidt, ethnologist and professor at the University of Vienna, for purportedly classifying Brazil among the pygmy nations and considering it devoid of art and music. The text challenges the authority of other eminent ethnologists, among whom Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, James Frazer and Fritz Gräbner, dismissing their “insurance company mentality” as redolent of notions of cultural superiority, identified as the great “Western fault”.¹² The article is important because it makes two points clear: first, the members of the movement were aware of European ethnological debates around the primitive and considered them relevant and second, they set *Antropofagia* apart from primitivism, as something distinct from and opposed to it.

To make sense of this anti-primitivist stance, it is vital to bear in mind the distinction they made between the idea of the primitive, which the movement rejected, and of the savage, which it advocated as the path to overcoming a decadent Western civilization. “Only the savage will save us,” Oswaldo Costa proclaimed in the *Revista de Antropofagia*, taking pains to point out that the movement was nonetheless opposed to the “Romantic indianism” of the nineteenth century.¹³ The following month, the author writing under the pseudonym Poronominare declared: “The natural man we want can easily be white, wear a tuxedo and ride in an airplane. He can just as well be black or even an indian.”¹⁴ Anthropophagic notions of the savage were grounded not in race or ethnicity, culture or religion, but instead in the drives of the Freudian unconscious. The condition of ‘natural man’, to which the movement aspired, was to be achieved through a process of shedding civilizational values, labelled ‘the anthropophagic descent’. The latter term did not imply a step down in the ethnographic hierarchy between civilized and primitive, but rather a plunge into the wild reaches of the inner being, encompassing a wholesale rejection of civilization and its discontents.

The wilful separation of *savage* from *primitive* and of both from race and ethnicity not only diverges from North Atlantic conceptions of cultural primitivism but also stands apart from wider debates in Brazil. Heloisa Toller Gomes has drawn attention to the relative absence of race and Blackness from the anthropophagic manifesto.¹⁵ Over its 50-odd axiomatic statements – covering everything from carnival to matriarchy, communism and the French Revolution, Freud and Goethe, missionaries and magic – there is not a single reference to African heritage or the legacy of slavery. That is nothing short of astonishing at a time when primitivism was declared unanimous in the Brazilian press and so-called Negro culture was at the height of fashion, as shall be seen.

Blackness as cultural trope

The *Revista de Antropofagia* engaged slightly more than the manifesto with issues of race, but considerably less than other contemporary sources in the 1920s.¹⁶ Within the oeuvres of both Oswald de Andrade and Tarsila do Amaral, the power couple behind the movement, *Antropofagia* marks a step away from concerns with ethnicity and identity. The anthropophagic manifesto's predecessor was the "*Manifesto de poesia Pau-Brasil*" (manifesto of brazilwood poetry), authored by Oswald in 1924. The name *Pau-Brasil* was likewise used by Tarsila to identify works produced between 1924 and 1928. Unlike its successor, the earlier manifesto contains strategic nods to Afro-Brazilian heritage, as well as an affirmation of carnival as "barbarian and ours" that jibes with the discourses of chronological primitivism elsewhere.¹⁷

It was within the context of *Pau-Brasil* that Tarsila painted *Morro da Favela* (1924), one of several pictures resulting from a trip to Rio de Janeiro, accompanied by Oswald, at a time when she was resident in Paris. The opening lines of the brazilwood manifesto are very nearly a description of the painting: "Poetry exists in facts. The saffron and ochre shanties on the green slopes of the Favela, under the Cabralian blue, are aesthetic facts."¹⁸ The manifesto railed against the affectation of elite culture and the artificialness of academies and propounded a return to pure sense, alongside the espousal of linguistic synthesis, technological dynamism, and native values. These claims against bourgeois art and literature were advanced on the "Arts and Letters" page of one of the leading middle-class newspapers of the capital, *Correio da Manhã*. The irony of that fact appears to have been lost on author and readers alike, as was the even weightier contradiction of an upper-class artist, a member of São Paulo's coffee-planting rural gentry, choosing to represent the favela as a colourful, naïf idyll, peopled by little faceless Black figures.

Founded in the 1890s, Morro da Favela was the original settlement from which subsequent favelas – the squatter occupations that mushroomed in twentieth-century Rio and spread subsequently throughout Brazil – derived their name. In the 1920s, it had a reputation as a place of crime and danger and tended to be viewed critically as a social problem.¹⁹ Upon cursory inspection, Tarsila's upbeat depiction may seem either flippant or clueless, possibly both. However, the turn towards contrived ingenuousness it exemplifies was intentional. The brazilwood manifesto called for art to achieve a "state of innocence" and "native originality" and ordained: "Substitute visual and naturalist perspective with another order of perspective: sentimental, intellectual, ironic, naïve."²⁰ Tarsila's disingenuous representation must therefore be understood as purposeful and programmatic.

A cartoon by illustrator Belmonte (Figure 6.1), appearing in the popular weekly magazine *Careta*, in February 1923, provides an insight into the tensions surrounding how favelas were perceived. The four costumed figures in the background, on the right, amid lanterns and streamers, set the scene vaguely at a carnival ball. In front of them, legs elegantly crossed, a fashionable young woman chats with a smiling older man in evening dress. She says: "Ah! My ideal is to go to Paris and live in that atmosphere of vice, among the Apaches, and to be loved by one of those brutes...". Her gaze is directed to the left side of the image where a rough-looking man, wearing a red scarf and checked cap, unshaven, cigarette cocked perilously in his mouth, dances a *valse chaloupée* with a woman who dangles from his left arm while he grips her by the hair with his other hand. The reference is to the Parisian subculture of gangs called Apaches, which thrived during the first 15 years of the twentieth century and retained its valence in the American imagination of Paris well into the 1930s.²¹

Upon hearing her remark, the gentleman replies: "But there's no need to travel so far... We here have the Morro da Favela." For the middle-class readers of *Careta*, the joke is that the young woman's fantasy of dangerous underworld romance only works with Parisian ruffians. It would never cross her mind to be loved by one of the *malandros*, or hoodlums, available



Figure 6.1 Belmonte, *Careta*, 10 February 1923. © Hemeroteca Digital Brasileira/BN Digital/Fundação Biblioteca Nacional - FBN Brasil.



Figure 6.2 Tarsila do Amaral, *A Negra*, 1923. Oil on canvas, 100 × 82 cm. Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo. Photograph by Romulo Fialdini. © Heirs of Tarsila do Amaral.

locally in Rio. To make deeper sense of the humour, it is imperative to understand the link between favelas and Blackness in the Brazilian social imaginary. Though favela settlements were never ethnically homogeneous, the racist stereotype linking them to Afro-Brazilian people had become firmly entrenched in verbal and visual discourses by around 1920. Favelas were viewed as a cyst of Africanness on the social body, markers of barbarity and primitiveness within Brazil, a blight holding back the modernizing aspirations of the nation.²²

Neither Oswald nor Tarsila were strangers to the topic of primitivism and its relations to race. Before the *Pau-Brasil* phase, both artists engaged openly with the Parisian vogue for *négrophilie*. Over the second half of 1923, influenced by her friendship with Blaise Cendrars – then riding the success of his *Anthologie nègre* (1921) – Tarsila painted *A negra* (the negress)

(Figure 6.2), likely intended as an artistic dialogue with Constantin Brancusi's sculpture *La négresse blanche* (1923).²³ A few months earlier, in May 1923, Oswald delivered a lecture at the Sorbonne on the literary and artistic scene in Brazil, in which he enigmatically posited "black blood" as an antidote to "South American loquacity" in the following terms:

The negro is a realist element. That has been seen again lately in the decorative industries of Dakar, in African statuary, highlighted by Picasso, Derain, André Lhote and other celebrated artists of Paris, in the Anthology, so complete, of Blaise Cendrars.²⁴

The text goes on to categorize Machado de Assis – Brazil's greatest writer, deceased in 1908 – as white of skin but balanced out by *le sang nègre*. Less than one year after making these statements, Oswald hit upon the idea of *Pau-Brasil*.

Performing primitivism

The name *Pau-Brasil*, or brazilwood, was deliberately chosen to denote a cultural product for export, as opposed to the regime of importing high culture from Europe. As the first commodity extracted from colonial Brazil, from which the country derived its name, brazilwood was a metaphor for the movement's aim to export native values. In an article published three months before the 1924 manifesto, Oswald explained programmatically why it was important to take advantage of what he termed Brazil's "chaos", by which he meant its mishmash of imported European culture with local popular culture, rehashing the latter to produce artworks adapted to the exoticizing gaze from abroad. The article recounts a visit to the home of Darius Milhaud, in Paris, when Oswald encountered on the composer's wall, right next to a Picasso and a Delacroix, two landscapes painted by an unknown popular artist from Bahia, named Jacaré. These were the Brazilian works that rated attention in Europe, Oswald pointed out, not the productions of erudite artists.²⁵

The author's choice of the term *chaos* to characterize Brazil is revealing. The text does not define it precisely but links the country's chaotic nature to absurdity, childish silliness, and deformities of taste – standard tropes of how 'primitive' peoples were perceived in Europe. For Oswald, Brazilian culture is topsy-turvy, upside-down, the opposite of what to expect. His gaze coincides with that of Milhaud, whose aesthetic judgment he openly admires. He takes the French composer's appreciation of Brazilian popular art as proof of its worth but, at the same time, implicitly presumes it to be an inversion of aesthetic values. Oswald does not claim to appreciate the landscapes by Jacaré as works of art but only admires them because they hung next to Picasso and Delacroix. Following Milhaud's lead, he appropriates them as exemplars of something exotic and primal.

In the overheated nationalist climate of 1923, Oswald's public espousal of the art produced by an untutored artist from Bahia would have been read by a Brazilian audience as nativist. If it can also be understood as colonialist, it is nonetheless a species of self-colonization. From today's vantage point, the self-affirmative aspect is clouded by the fact that Oswald – a wealthy, White intellectual from São Paulo – was engaged in the appropriation of cultures to which he had little legitimate claim. Bahia is a long way from São Paulo, and the obscure Jacaré was likely to belong to a very different social class. In Oswald's own milieu, however, it might be taken as something novel and exciting. To look at the subaltern populations of Brazil and recognize them as a source of pride was indeed not usual. After centuries of slavery and decades of racist pseudo-science, public opinion tended overwhelmingly towards the opposite pole of regarding Afro-Brazilian roots as a blight and an embarrassment.

The brazilwood manifesto's appeal to barbarism and chaos as native values, suitable for export to Europe, did not sit comfortably with prevailing critical opinion. At the time, Oswald's

major rival was the more established writer Graça Aranha, who delivered the keynote address at the Modern Art Week of 1922 and was widely viewed by the press as the leader of the modern movement. He had preceded Oswald by laying claim to the so-called “barbarous elements” of Brazilian culture in 1921, in his essay *Estética da vida*, perhaps the first explicit statement of aesthetic primitivism in Brazil.²⁶ However, his conception was distinct from Oswald’s. In a much-publicized speech of June 1924, which paved the way for his subsequent resignation from the Brazilian Academy of Letters, Graça Aranha inveighed against what he called “false primitivism” among younger artists.²⁷ Though the speech named no names, Oswald quickly laid claim to being the target of that critique and launched a fierce attack in a newspaper article that decried the older author as ingenuous and chaotic.²⁸ Ironically enough, those were the very qualities he had advocated a few months earlier on behalf of the idea of *Pau-Brasil*.

The conflict around primitivism continued to fester in cultural debates over the following years. In June and July 1926, the conservative newspaper *O Paiz* published a series of articles interviewing young literary figures about their opinions on what it termed “the present movement of aesthetic renewal”. The first interviewee, Afonso Arinos de Mello Franco, who would later gain fame in politics, condemned Oswald’s position in no uncertain terms:

Sr. Oswald de Andrade thinks Brazil will be discovered if we embark upon the path of primitivism. It is the useless idea of a ‘return to lost innocence’, as Graça Aranha put it. And, moreover, Sr. Andrade did not manage to achieve exactly what he wanted since, being ironic and literary himself, in the end he did no more than produce literature. And of the worst kind: the literature of contrariness.²⁹



Figure 6.3 Alfredo Storni, “Futurism has no future”, *Careta*, 5 June 1926. © Hemeroteca Digital Brasileira/BN Digital/Fundação Biblioteca Nacional - FBN Brasil.

The major apprehension was that by playing into European modernist stereotypes of primitiveness, the brazilwood manifesto was effectively subordinating its followers to cultural colonialism all over again. Writer and journalist Peregrino Junior voiced this concern in a column of May 1926 in *Careta* magazine, arguing that to embrace this “absurd primitivism” was to become ever more dependent on the whims of Jean Cocteau, Blaise Cendrars, and F.T. Marinetti.³⁰ The critique struck at the heart of the contradiction between the nativism professed by the *paulista* modernists and their relationship of patronage to modernist circles in Paris.

The mainstream press in Rio was suspicious of attempts by European modernists to exercise intellectual authority in Brazil. In June 1926, the cover of *Careta* (Figure 6.3) showed Marinetti running away from Brazil with his suitcases full of boos and jeers, pelted with colourful projectiles and taunted by an onlooking macaw. Graça Aranha asks him when he will return, and Marinetti replies: “*nem de graça, Aranha*” (a pun on the writer’s name, effectively meaning ‘not for all the money in the world’). Hostility against Marinetti became entrenched after a highly publicized tour he undertook of Morro da Favela, accompanied by a troupe of journalists. His ethnographic curiosity about a part of the city that most elite Brazilians were anxious to hide variously provoked fits of hilarity, bewilderment, and anger, as well as an outpouring of racist cartoons and commentary.³¹

Jazz and *negrismo*

Literary disputes over primitivism mask a deeper anxiety in Brazilian society about Blackness and Negrophilia. In 1926, the same year of Marinetti’s visit to the Favela, efforts to erect a monument to the figure of *mãe preta* (a prevalent term for Black wet nurses who nurtured White children) were hotly debated in the press.³² 1926 also witnessed the premiere of the first Black theatrical revue in Brazil, the *Companhia Negra de Revistas*. It was promoted by singer João Cândido Ferreira, who styled himself De Chocolat, alongside scenographer Jaime Silva, and directly inspired by the Parisian craze around Josephine Baker. The troupe was a success, staging a string of hit revues in Rio and São Paulo over its brief existence.³³ In December 1926, in a note on similar efforts in Europe, *Careta* magazine declared that “‘*negrismo*’ is the great fashion of the moment”, and concluded: “But we, who have here De Chocolat and his tribe, should not be envious of Paris and London... Negro for negro, we have them here too – and among the best.”³⁴

Reactions to the *Companhia Negra de Revistas* ranged from frenzied enthusiasm to racist outrage, with most commentators falling somewhere in the middle ground between perplexity and derision. A cartoon by illustrator Belmonte (Figure 6.4), published in *Careta* in October 1926, provides a glimpse into the tensions caused by the increased visibility of Black bodies on the stage. The bald Juca Pato, a recurring character, sits cross-legged in the foreground of the image, staring out at the reader with a wide-eyed grin, and asks: “Well, didn’t you gentlemen say you wanted a genuinely Brazilian theatre?”. On the left are caricatures of two black dancers, stereotypically wild and dynamic. On the right, an elegant white couple, the man sporting a top hat, white gloves, monocle and cane; the woman skimpily clad in the dress of a nightclub dancer, with her hair bobbed in the modern fashion. In stark contrast to the Black performers, they represent the elite theatrical crowd. Their faces express a mix of dismay and disappointment, and their stiff upright bodies, spatially compressed, are no match for the expansiveness in the other half of the image. The humorous barb about genuine Brazilian theatre is a reference to longstanding demands for greater colloquialism in theatrical texts. Juca Pato’s mischievous irony denounces the risks of nativism slipping into primitivism.

The use of the term *negrismo* in the discussion around De Chocolat is worth exploring. In the 1926 text in *Careta*, it appears between quotation marks, flagging it as a neologism. Meaning literally ‘negroism’, the word has no English-language equivalent, and the concept is often rendered as Negrophilia.³⁵ Yet, there is a difference of inflection in *negrismo*, as an -ism, that



Figure 6.4 Belmonte, “Things are looking black!”, *Careta*, 2 October 1926. © Hemeroteca Digital Brasileira/BN Digital/Fundação Biblioteca Nacional - FBN Brasil.

approximates it to primitivism – a proposition, rather than a fad. It recurs in a column of January 1928, by Peregrino Junior:

The moment is of primitivism. Unanimous primitivism. In literature, in music, in painting. And, in consequence, came the negro fashion. The negro, in Brazil as in America and throughout Europe, is all the rage. Thence comes a new aesthetic: *negrismo*. The delightful stylization of the negro arts. The literature, dance, and music of the negroes are today the great modern fascination of the cultivated peoples of Europe and America. This aesthetic current was perhaps born with the jazz band.³⁶

Freed of quotation marks, the term encapsulates the increased slippage between Blackness, primitivism, and modernity in the worldview of the writer and his readers.

Brazilian usage of the appellation *jazz band* (in English) dates from the 1910s, but it attained a new level of significance after the octet Oito Batutas’s six-month excursion to Paris in 1922.³⁷ The cover of the weekly satirical magazine *O Malho*, of 8 December 1923, illustrated by J. Carlos (Figure 6.5), shows Cardoso, the magazine’s mascot, seated at a desk, where he receives a delegation of grotesquely caricatured Black men, led by Uncle Sam. Under the news item that a Chicago newspaper has encouraged Black Americans to emigrate to Brazil, Cardoso explains to Uncle Sam that Brazil is indeed an ideal country, but he is unsure whether they possess a theatrical venue large enough to accommodate such an enormous jazz band.³⁸ Another cover, of 11 October 1924 (Figure 6.6), purports to show Columbus arriving in the New World and encountering a group of Amerindian natives, who play music and dance frenetically. Caricatured like stage-set Indians from a Hollywood western, complete with a North American tepee, they are described in the caption as the first jazz band. Columbus turns to Cardoso and asks him to request a fox trot.

The racist concurrence between jazz and modernism, Blackness and savagery was expressed synthetically in images, but it was also made painstakingly explicit in writing.³⁹ An anonymous commentator in *Fon Fon* magazine fumed in 1926:

Art is something secondary to the contemporary journalist and those who read him. Literature, then, elicits nothing from him. Why report on a book when the horrendous feats



Figure 6.5 J. Carlos, “A casa da mãe Joanna” [Don’t make yourselves at home], *O Malho*, 8 December 1923. © Hemeroteca Digital Brasileira/BN Digital/Fundação Biblioteca Nacional - FBN Brasil.



Figure 6.6 “The first jazz band”, *O Malho*, 11 October 1924. © Hemeroteca Digital Brasileira/Fundação Biblioteca Nacional.

of a thick-lipped negro from the Favela attract more, much more, attention from a modern public spoiled by jazz, automobile horns and futurism?⁴⁰

In the 1928 article extolling primitivism, cited previously, Peregrino Junior traces the origins of the vogue for “*negrismo*” to “the advent of modern American dances [...] more in consonance with the barbarous rhythms of ‘jazz’”. The author sketches their evolution through the cakewalk, fox trot, Charleston, and black bottom, interspersed with anecdotal snippets that align the origin of each step with animals, “redskins” and “authentically negroid” elements.⁴¹

The espousal of primitivism was a source of unease for many. An editorial of October 1928 in the newspaper *O Paiz*, defending traditionalist writer Coelho Netto against criticisms directed at him by younger authors identified with modernism, describes the attackers as “grotesque barbarians” and “fanatics of primitivism”.⁴² Two years earlier, the leader of a crusade to raze the favelas in Rio decried “the habit some of our intellectuals have acquired of glorifying the favelas” as “an unfathomable perversion of taste”.⁴³ The phenomenon was by no means limited to artists and intellectuals. Circa 1922–1928, *negrismo* as a cultural force became inescapable on the stage, in the press, and as a matter of fashionable opinion. According to modernist writer Prudente de Moraes Neto, Tarsila do Amaral was among the many spectators who attended a performance of the *Companhia Negra de Revistas* in 1926.⁴⁴

Leaving primitivism behind

It is against the backdrop of such debates and images that the efforts of Tarsila and Oswald to engage with issues of race, between 1923 and 1929, demand to be assessed. There can be little doubt that Tarsila was responding to the prompts of the Parisian fashion for *négrophilie* when she painted the iconic image of *A negra*. However tainted the work may appear from today’s vantage point – given its exoticizing fantasies of Blackness and cultural appropriation of the subaltern – it should also be understood as an attempt by an aspiring young woman artist from Latin America to position herself within the currents of advanced modernism. It figured in her solo exhibition at the Galerie Percier, in 1926, as proof of her affiliation to the post-cubist lineage of her tutors Fernand Léger and André Lhote.⁴⁵

Revealingly, when Tarsila returned to Brazil in 1929 and staged her first solo exhibition in Rio, *A negra* was not among the paintings she chose to display.⁴⁶ The paintings she did show were largely products of her *Pau-Brasil* phase, incorporating pictorial strategies that can be broadly categorized as naïf and folkloric – that is, deliberately emulating the simplicity of untutored artists. Though some of them depict Black figures, including *Morro da Favela*, their relationship to the hot-button topics of primitivism and race remained ambiguous. Even a few years earlier that was not the case. Burgeoning newspaper tycoon Assis Chateaubriand, a great champion of the *paulista* modernists, penned a glowing assessment of Tarsila in 1925, in which he stressed her connection to “*a arte negra*” in the following terms:

I observe in the art of Tarsila do Amaral that elevated dose of independence, of mental emancipation, otherwise peculiar to the tendencies of modern art, which is brimming in this respect with affinities to the Bantu peoples.

Just as, in Western music, there is currently an intoxicating regression to Africa (the jazz band and the fox trot, with their savage rhythms prove it), it is not outlandish to view in the methods of modern art, full of violent transpositions, the terrible sculptural freedoms that the art of the black continent allows itself with respect to the human model. [...] human form poses, for the black artists, a different plastic problem, which they solve with an emancipated spirit, with the same inventive power distinguishing the champions of futurism, cubism and modernism in the West today.⁴⁷

Despite the author's convoluted reasoning, a more pointed equivalence between the perceived vitality of modernism and so-called primitive art could hardly be made.

Assis Chateaubriand's article was duly reprinted in the catalogue of Tarsila's exhibition in Rio, alongside other critical texts by Antônio Ferro, Mário de Andrade, Tasso da Silveira, as well as poems by Blaise Cendrars and Oswald de Andrade. To an informed reader of 1929, however, the newspaper magnate's discussion of "Negro art" might have seemed a little dated. After the much-publicized events of the preceding few years, perceptions had moved beyond Chateaubriand's aggressively racist descriptions of Tarsila's compositions: for example, "two little *cafuzos*, with an idiotic air" and "a bunch of deplorable *jecas*".⁴⁸ Although the eugenicist assumptions undergirding such terms persisted in Brazilian society well into the 1930s (and beyond), modernist sensibilities were moving in the opposite direction, as evidenced in an upsurge of works depicting Afro-descendant subjects and themes in a more positive light: Di Cavalcanti's carnival and samba-themed paintings of 1924–1931; several works of Lasar Segall's so-called Brazilian phase, between 1924 and 1930; Mário de Andrade's *Macunaíma* (1928); Raul Bopp's *Urucungo* (1932); Cecilia Meireles's *Batuque, samba e macumba* (1934); among others.

Oswald and Tarsila, on the contrary, were focusing less on race in the late 1920s. A recent work included in the Rio exhibition was the painting *Antropofagia* (1929), her great statement on the movement and its aims. It is often compared to *A negra* because of the recurrence of similar visual motifs in both – notably, the dangling breast and the banana leaf. The two compositions are dissimilar, however, in key respects. One is the more conventional rendering of the relationship between figures and ground in the later painting. The other is the absence of any indicator of ethnic identity.⁴⁹ Diverging from the naïf compositions of the artist's *Pau-Brasil* phase, *Antropofagia* flirts with the distortion of shapes and forms but judiciously avoids other pictorial devices that might align the work to surrealism. This ambivalence is in line with the anthropophagic movement's pretension to being a successor to surrealism, rather than an offshoot of it.

The crucial question is why *Antropofagia* opted to move away from race and primitivism, precisely when these topics were gaining increased traction in Brazil. For Tarsila and Oswald, at least – if not for other members of the movement (namely, Raul Bopp) – interest in Negrophilia peaked around 1923–1925. The shift away from the ethnographic and towards the psychoanalytical is interesting mainly on account of its timing. The two fields of knowledge are certainly not opposed, and the common ground between them was extensively explored by the surrealist movement. Repeated assertions in the anthropophagic manifesto and the *Revista de Antropofagia* make clear that the movement wanted to be seen as both independent of surrealism and combative of European influences. To position themselves against ethnography advanced these aims. To some extent, then, *Antropofagia*'s anti-primitivist turn can be understood as an affirmation of intellectual autonomy from Parisian surrealist circles.

On the more mundane level of how *Antropofagia* was perceived locally, the timing of the shift away from primitivism is also cogent. The widespread popularity of *negrismo*, over the latter half of the 1920s, meant that Negrophilia soon became old hat for avant-garde artists and intellectuals. Though Tarsila and Oswald were by no means averse to publicity, their aim was to be perceived as dictating cultural fashion, not following it. The press was much more interested in Josephine Baker's arrival in Rio, in June 1929, than in Tarsila's exhibition, which opened in late July. The celebrated *la Baker* might have upstaged the painter's big moment, had she not graciously agreed to join the couple as a guest at their farm in rural São Paulo.⁵⁰

Though *Antropofagia* was championed by influential editor Alvaro Moreyra, other critics and journalists in the nation's capital treated the movement with mirth and even derision, as the antics of *paulista* millionaires.⁵¹ The risk of confusing its ambitious intellectual programme with a passing fad was real enough. In 1932, Peregrino Junior took the unusual step of republishing his 1928 text on "unanimous primitivism", with slight modifications. Instead of *negrismo*, the

new aesthetic he had propounded earlier, the revised version of the text referenced, in plural: “the new aesthetics: *negrismo* and *antropofagismo*”.⁵² Although the movement was defunct by that date, the fact that it was recalled in conjunction with the fashion for Negrophilia is telling – particularly, considering *Antropofagia*’s lack of engagement with issues of race.

Primitivist anti-primitivism?

Despite its failings, the legacy of *Antropofagia* has proven to be more radical than what it achieved in the 1920s. The movement’s discursive strategies are much more interesting than the straightforward anti-colonial rhetoric for which it is celebrated today. *Antropofagia*’s great trick was to incorporate the exoticizing gaze of European primitivism and subsequently devolve it upon Europe in the guise of anti-primitivism. By carefully positioning themselves as savage and modern at one and the same time, they managed to subvert the hierarchies that allowed Europeans to dictate to Latin America its presumed cultural inferiority. That is no small achievement. Who knows what might have been, had the Wall Street crash of 1929 not burst the bubble of Oswald’s and Tarsila’s grand ambitions?

The anthropophagic manifesto’s axiom “only what is not mine interests me” points towards a novel perspective: that of radical alterity as a means of engaging difference.⁵³ The popular culture Oswald sought to absorb in the guise of “barbarism” was not his culture; therefore, it was interesting. The European influences he navigated so well, including primitivism, were rejected as colonialist manipulations. In one sense, the manifest anti-primitivism of *Antropofagia* is a deflection of the primitivist gaze – more a reversal of viewpoint than a shift in the rules of perspective. It is equivalent to cultural primitivism in its appropriation of the subaltern other; at the same time, it is against cultural primitivism in its denial of authenticity, purity, and the primacy of origins. In June 1929, the *Revista de Antropofagia* stated that the movement refused to renounce any of the material advances on the planet, “such as caviar, the record player, asphyxiating gas and metaphysics”.⁵⁴ A less romanticized outlook on the link between progress and civilization is hardly imaginable.

It is the movement’s unresolved conflicts that make it a truly compelling source for thinking about cultural colonialism and modes of resistance. More than just a rhetorical strategy, *Antropofagia*’s contrariness is its essence. Rather than turning the primitivist gaze upon the self, as was the case with other ‘eccentric primitivisms’, it chose to disavow authenticity altogether. There is no civilized self at hand to colonize a primitive other or to revive a primitive past. Both have been devoured and digested in the anthropophagic descent into a new savage state. The heads of the figures in the painting *Antropofagia* are tiny and faceless. They do not think, so much as vegetate. Their intertwined limbs suggest carnal embrace but in an eerily static overlap of bodies. They are two, presumably male and female, yet the same. Of course, the implied equivalence between genders, the racelessness of the figures and the erasure of ethnicity, all take for granted the unevenness of social relationships surrounding the work and its makers, as well as the larger historical context into which it was received.

To champion the movement’s anti-primitivism as straightforward anti-colonialism is to refuse to acknowledge what its members described as the “rudeness of *Antropofagia*”.⁵⁵ Their calculated aggressiveness reflects directly on how the anthropophagists positioned themselves between colonizing Europeans and colonized Brazilians, punching up and down at both audiences. In May 1929, the *Revista de Antropofagia* apologized to its readers for having confused the word “national” with the word “colonial” in its previous issue – a Freudian slip on an epic scale. The note, however, was couched in less than apologetic terms: “This clarification is for readers who, perchance, are not intelligent.”⁵⁶ Contrariness and its contradictions.

Notes

- 1 See, among others, Philippe Dagen, *Primitivismes, une invention moderne*. Paris: Gallimard, 2019, 10–16; Susan Hiller (ed.), *The Myth of Primitivism: Perspectives on Art*. London: Routledge, 1991, 1–3.
- 2 See Ruth B. Phillips, “Aesthetic Primitivism Revisited: The Global Diaspora of ‘primitive art’ and the Rise of Indigenous Modernisms”, *Journal of Art Historiography*, 12, 2015, 5–10; Patricia Leighton, “The White Peril and *l’art nègre*: Picasso, Primitivism, and Anticolonialism”, *The Art Bulletin*, 72, 4, 1990, 621–622.
- 3 Samuel J. Spinner, *Jewish Primitivism*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2021, 1–12. On the roots of European primitivism, see Frances S. Connelly, *The Sleep of Reason: Primitivism in Modern European Art and Aesthetics*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995, 1–34.
- 4 See Claire Gheerardyn and Delphine Rumeau (eds.), “Les primitivismes russes”, *Slavica Occitania*, 53, 2021; Maria McGarrity and Claire A. Culleton (eds.), *Irish Modernism and the Global Primitive*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009; Sieglinde Lemke, *Primitivist Modernism: Black Culture and the Origins of Transatlantic Modernism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. For conceptions of primitivism as dialectical principle, see Ben Etherington, *Literary Primitivism*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017, xi–xvii; Nicola Gess (ed.), *Literarischer Primitivismus*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013, 1–10.
- 5 The term “eccentric primitivisms”, developed by Václav Paris, was the subject of a recent symposium at the Johns Hopkins University, on 4–5 March 2022, convened by Samuel J. Spinner and Ben Etherington.
- 6 Oswaldo Costa, “De antropofagia”, *Revista de Antropofagia*, II, 9. Published in *Diário de S.Paulo*, 15 May 1929, 10; Japy-Mirim, “De antropofagia”, *Revista de Antropofagia*, II, 2. Published in *Diário de S.Paulo*, 24 March 1929, 6. *Antropofagia* gained greater currency in the 1960s through its appropriation and reinvention by the *Tropicália* movement. See João Cezar de Castro Rocha and Jorge Ruffinelli (eds.), *Antropofagia hoje?: Oswald de Andrade em cena*. São Paulo: É Realizações, 2011; Carlos Basualdo (ed.), *Tropicália: A Revolution in Brazilian Culture*. São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2005; Christopher Dunn, *Brutality Garden: Tropicália and the Emergence of a Brazilian Counterculture*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001.
- 7 Cesar Alberto Ranquetat Júnior, “A campanha cívica de Olavo Bilac e a criação da Liga da Defesa Nacional”, *Publicatio UEPG*, 19, 1, 2011, 9–17; Tania Regina de Luca, *A Revista do Brasil: um diagnóstico para a (N)ação*. São Paulo: Ed. Unesp, 1999, 35–55.
- 8 See Marshall C. Eakin, *Becoming Brazilians: Race and National Identity in Twentieth-century Brazil*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017; Jeffrey Lesser, *Immigration, Ethnicity and National Identity in Brazil, 1808 to the Present*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- 9 See Luis Felipe Garcia, “Only Anthropophagy unites us – Oswald de Andrade’s decolonial project”, *Cultural Studies Review*, 34, 2020, 122–142; Kalinka Costa Söderlund, “Antropofagia: An Early Arrière-garde Manifestation in 1920s Brazil”, *RIHA Journal*, 132, 2016; Carlos A. Jáuregui, “Oswaldo Costa, Antropofagia, and the Cannibal Critique of Modernity”, *Culture & History Digital Journal*, 4, 2, 2015, 1–17; Gazi Islam, “Can the Subaltern Eat?: Anthropophagic Culture as a Brazilian Lens on Post-colonial Theory”, *Organization*, 19, 2012, 159–180; Antonio Luciano de Andrade Tosta, “Modern and Postcolonial?: Oswald de Andrade’s Antropofagia and the Politics of Labeling”, *Romance Notes*, 51, 2011, 217–226; Luis Madureira, *Cannibal Modernities: Poscoloniality and the Avant-garde in Caribbean and Brazilian Literature*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005, chapter 1.
- 10 A facsimile edition was published in the 1970s: *Revista de Antropofagia*. São Paulo: Cia. Lithographica Ypiranga, 1976. The standard sources on the movement are Maria Eugênia Boaventura, *A vanguarda antropofágica*. São Paulo: Ática, 1985; Raul Bopp, *Vida e morte da Antropofagia*. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1977; Benedito Nunes, “Antropofagia ao alcance de todos”, introduction to Oswald de Andrade, *Do Pau-Brasil à Antropofagia e às Utopias (Obras completas-6)*. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1972, xi–liii. A third phase of the magazine, edited by Clovis de Gusmão and lasting until late 1929, was recently rediscovered; see Jason Tércio, *Em busca da alma brasileira: biografia de Mário de Andrade*. Rio de Janeiro: Estação Brasil, 2019, 305–306.
- 11 Ponominare, “Manipulações etnológicas”, *Revista de Antropofagia*, II, 6. Published in *Diário de S.Paulo*, 24 April 1929, 10.
- 12 Idem.
- 13 Costa, “De antropofagia”, op. cit., 10. For a discussion of the savage/primitive distinction in *Antropofagia*, see Rafael Cardoso, *Modernity in Black and White: Art and Image, Race and Identity in Brazil, 1890–1945*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021, 183–195.
- 14 Ponominare, “Uma adesão que não nos interessa”, *Revista de Antropofagia*, II, 10. Published in *Diário de S.Paulo*, 12 June 1929, 10.

- 15 Heloisa Toller Gomes, “A questão racial na gestação da antropofagia oswaldiana”, *Nuevo Texto Critico*, 12, 1999, 249–259.
- 16 See Rafael Cardoso, *Modernity in Black and White*, op. cit., 195–208.
- 17 Oswald de Andrade, “Manifesto da poesia Pau Brasil”, *Correio da Manhã*, 18 March 1924, 5. The distinction between cultural primitivism and chronological primitivism dates back to Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997 [1935].
- 18 Andrade, “Manifesto da poesia Pau Brasil”, op. cit., 5.
- 19 See Cardoso, *Modernity in Black and White*, op. cit., chapter 1.
- 20 Andrade, “Manifesto da poesia Pau Brasil”, op. cit., 5.
- 21 See Philippe Nieto, “Les Apaches parisiens dans le temps et l’espace”, *Appartenances et pratiques des réseaux*, 50, 2017; Jann Pasler, “A Sociology of the Apaches: ‘Sacred Battalion’ for Pelléas”, *Berlioz and Debussy: Sources, Contexts and Legacies* (Barbara L. Kelly and Kerry Murphy, eds.). London: Routledge, 2007; Michelle Perrot, “Dans le Paris de la Belle Époque, les ‘Apaches’, premières bandes de jeunes”, *La Lettre de l’enfance et de l’adolescence*, 67, 2007, 71–78.
- 22 See Cardoso, *Modernity in Black and White*, op. cit., 46–65.
- 23 See Cardoso, “White Skins, Black Masks: *Antropofagia* and the Reversal of Primitivism”, *Das verirrte Kunstwerk: Bedeutung, Funktion und Manipulation von “Bilderfahrzeugen” in der Diaspora* (Uwe Fleckner and Elena Tolstichin, eds.). Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019, 131–154.
- 24 Andrade, “L’effort intellectuel du Brésil contemporain”, *Revue de l’Amérique Latine*, II, 5, 1923, 200.
- 25 Andrade, “Vantagens do cahos brasileiro”, *Correio da Manhã*, 12 December 1923, 1.
- 26 Abilio Guerra, *O primitivismo em Mário de Andrade, Oswald de Andrade e Raul Bopp: origem e conformação no universo intelectual brasileiro*. São Paulo: Romano Guerra, 2010, 110.
- 27 Graça Aranha, “Futurismo versus passadismo”, *O Paiz*, 20 June 1924, 4.
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- 29 Afonso Arinos de Mello Franco interviewed in “O que pensam e sentem os homens moços do Brasil”, *O Paiz*, 18 June 1926, 1–2.
- 30 Peregrino Junior, “Um sorriso para todas”, *Careta*, 1 May 1926, 24.
- 31 See Cardoso, *Modernity in Black and White*, op. cit., 57–62; Romulo Costa Mattos, “Heavenly Heights, or Reign of the Dangerous Classes?: F.T. Marinetti’s Visit to the Morro da Favela, 1926”, *International Yearbook of Futurism Studies* (Marina Aguirre, Rosa Sarabia, Renée M. Silverman, and Ricardo Vasconcelos, eds.) 7, 2017, 288–306.
- 32 See Kimberley Cleveland, *Black Women Slaves who Nourished a Nation: Artistic Renderings of Black Wet Nurses of Brazil*. Amherst: Cambria Press, 2019; Barbara Weinstein, *The Color of Modernity: São Paulo and the Making of Race and Nation in Brazil*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015, 289–293; Paulina L. Alberto, *Terms of Inclusion: Black Intellectuals in Twentieth-century Brazil*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011, 69–74.
- 33 Petrônio Domingues, “Tudo preto: A invenção do teatro negro no Brasil”, *Luso-Brazilian Review*, 46, 2, 2009, 113–128; Orlando de Barros, *Corações De Chocolate: a história da Companhia Negra de Revistas (1926–27)*. Rio de Janeiro: Livre Expressão, 2005, chapters 2 and 3.
- 34 Unidentified author, “Actualidades”, *Careta*, 11 December 1926, 23.
- 35 See Petrine Archer-Straw, *Negrophilia: Avant-garde Paris and Black Culture in the 1920s*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2000, 22–49; Bernard Gendron, “Fetishes and Motorcars: Negrophilia in French Modernism”, *Cultural Studies*, 4, 2, 1990, 141–155.
- 36 Peregrino Junior, “Um sorriso para todas”, *Careta*, 7 January 1928, 34.
- 37 See Mark A. Hertzman, *Making Samba: A New History of Race and Music in Brazil*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2013, 107–108; Micol Seigel, *Uneven Encounters: Making Race and Nation in Brazil and the United States*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2009, 99–101; Rafael José de Menezes Bastos, “Les Batutas, 1922: une anthropologie de la nuit parisienne”, *Vibrant*, 4, 2007, 28–55.
- 38 See Teresa Meade and Gregory Alonso Pirió, “In Search of the Afro-American Eldorado: Attempts by North American Blacks to Enter Brazil in the 1920s”, *Luso-Brazilian Review*, 25, 1, 1988, 85–110.
- 39 The same phenomenon is present in the USA. See Lemke, *Primitivist Modernism*, op. cit., 62–74.
- 40 “Commentarios da semana”, *Fon Fon*, 16 January 1926, 3.
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- 44 Barros, *Corações De Chocolate*, op. cit., 97; Domingues, “Tudo preto”, op. cit., 118.

- 45 See Michele Greet, *Transatlantic Encounters: Latin American Artists in Paris between the Wars*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018, 122–130.
- 46 See Cardoso, “White Skins, Black Masks”, op. cit., 134–138; Renata Gomes Cardoso, “A Negra de Tarsila do Amaral. Criação, recepção e circulação”, *VIS (Revista do Programa de Pós-graduação em Artes da UnB)*, 15, 2016, 90–110.
- 47 Assis Chateaubriand, “Como São Paulo está cultivando a arte moderna”, *O Jornal*, 30 May 1925, 1–2.
- 48 Idem. *Cafuzo* is a racial category used to refer to a mixture of Amerindian and African ancestry. *Jeca*, a term for a hick or bumpkin, was widely popularized in the 1910s due to the success of the character Jeca Tatu, created by writer Monteiro Lobato, to whom Chateaubriand refers.
- 49 See Cardoso, “White skins, black masks”, op. cit., 149–150.
- 50 Jason Borge, “The Portable Jazz Age: Josephine Baker’s Tour of South American Cities (1929)”, *Urban Latin America: Images, Words, Flows and the Built Environment* (Bianca Freire-Medeiros and Julia O’Donnell, eds.). London: Routledge, 2018, 135; Petrônio Domingues, “A ‘Vênus negra’: Josephine Baker e a Modernidade Afro-atlântica”, *Estudos Históricos*, 23, 45, 2010, 104.
- 51 Medeiros e Albuquerque, “Notas literárias. Revista de Antropofagia (S. Paulo)”, *Jornal do Commercio*, 27 May 1928, 3; Bezerra de Freitas, “Antropofagia”, *Para Todos*, 27 July 1929. On Alvaro Moreyra’s support of the movement, see Cardoso, *Modernity in Black and White*, op. cit., 176–181, 190–194.
- 52 Peregrino Junior, “Block-notes. Descobrimentos...”, *Careta*, 21 May 1932, 30.
- 53 See Edgar Rosa Vieira Filho, “Só me interessa o que não é meu: a busca antropofágica da alteridade”, *Fronteiras*, 22, 2019, 73–89; Frederico Coelho, “Só me interessa o que não é meu”, *Periferia*, 3/1, 2011.
- 54 Poronominare, “Uma adesão que não nos interessa”, op. cit., 10.
- 55 Cabo Machado, “Os três sargentos”, *Revista de Antropofagia*, II, 5. Published in *Diário de S.Paulo*, 14 April 1929, 6.
- 56 Unidentified author, “Erro grave”, *Revista de Antropofagia*, II, 8. Published in *Diário de S.Paulo*, 8 May 1929, 12.

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7 Troping the “primitive” in Portuguese narratives of modernity and colonialism

Mariana Pinto dos Santos

Introduction – the “Demoiselle d’Avignon” trope

In 1967, the Portuguese painter António Areal did a series of six large format paintings, titled *O Fantasma de Avignon* [The Ghost of Avignon], that tell a visual story in sequence, as if in a comic strip, using a graphic colour-field pop vocabulary (Figures 7.1–7.6). From a red cube, with its front face black as if in the shadow, a square pops out, a sort of bidimensional drawer with a white frame, with two diagonal white stripes crossing from one corner of the square to the opposite, intersecting each other. In the first painting of the series, one of the stripes is partially black, and in the next one, it becomes increasingly black, and so forth. The progressive blackness of the stripes indicates the correct sequence of the paintings, the last one with a black X marking the spot. From the two-dimensional drawer, a head pops out only to hide again. It is the head of a “Demoiselle d’Avignon” from the 1907 Picasso painting, which, according to the canonical narrative, marks the inauguration of Cubism alongside the inauguration of African-inspired primitivism. The chosen Demoiselle head is the most iconic one from the painting, belonging to the female figure squatting on the left, represented on her back but facing the beholder while resting her head on the top of her hand, showing an impossible and deliberately disturbing contortion of the neck. Her head is a combination of African masks,¹ with uneven eyes, a dislocated small opening that stands for a mouth, and a striped nose in profile – the stripes being a synthetic technique to depict shade or darker skin. António Areal skips the original stripes and paints the nose black.

In a very concise and humorous way, Areal’s series displays a history of art that links Cubism to Abstractionism and both with primitivism. It is a canonical evolutionist history of art, but told with irony. A possible interpretation could be that the pop-up Demoiselle’s head has in fact turned *Pop* when painted as a *prop* that holds together the modernist narrative of abstract art – shown as a prelude for something more autonomous and evolved. On the other hand, abstract art, supposedly apolitical,² must obliterate the colonial context implicated in the visual revolution that primitivism offered to modern art. The Picassian mask emerges to remind us of the footprint of modern art, which is all but apolitical, but it hides right back again, crossed over by abstraction. This can also be read as a comment on the opposition between civilisation and primitive, or civilisation and barbarism, showing that the “more civilized” art of the twentieth century stands on the shoulders of its earlier experiments that piqued interest and prompted a market for an enormous amount of works by anonymous makers, often looted or acquired in inequitable situations, and that were considered “primitive”.

The narrative of the progress of Western modern art goes hand in hand with the narrative of the progress of civilisation. Indeed, art has often been seen as a sign of civilisation.

In 1930, in *Civilisation and its Discontents*, Sigmund Freud wrote “No feature seems to us to characterise civilisation better than the appreciation and cultivation of the higher mental

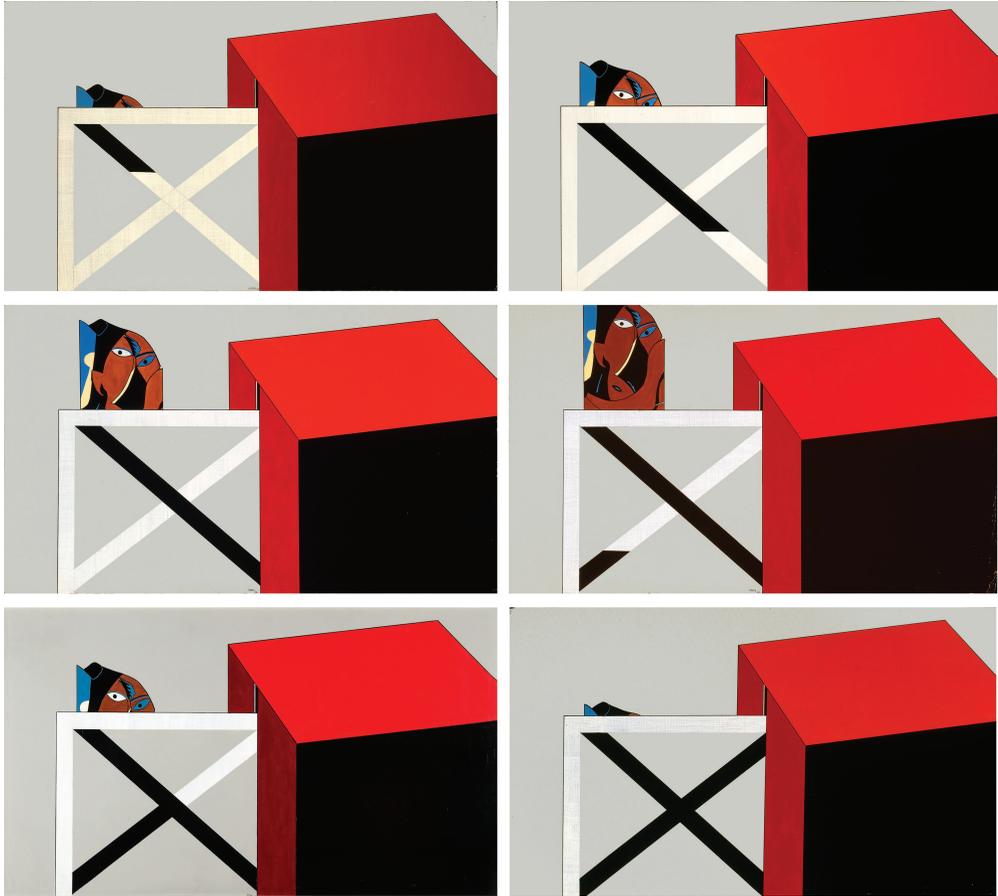


Figure 7.1–7.6 António Areal, *O fantasma de Avignon* I-VI, 1967. Enamel paint over platex, 170 x 100 cm (each). Inv. 79P833; 79P645; 79P646; 79P834; 79P644. Photographs by Mário Oliveira. Inv. 79P835. Photograph by Paulo Costa. CAM-Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon. © Heirs António Areal.

activities, of intellectual, scientific and artistic achievements, and the leading role accorded to ideas in human life.”³ Freud links the discontents of civilisation, despite its benefits, to the restrictions it levies on the libido, aggressiveness, and happiness in general. It also implies the feeling of self-guilt. The reasons for the discontent of civilisation go back, Freud argues, to the

voyages of discovery [that] brought us into contact with primitive peoples and tribes. Owing to inadequate observation and the misinterpretation of their manners and customs, they appeared to the Europeans to lead a simple, happy life, involving few needs, which was beyond the reach of their culturally superior visitors.⁴

Pursuing ideas he had explored in *Totem and Taboo* (1913), Freud indicates that something of the past, the primitive, or the child, is “retained” in the unconscious. Neurosis (as well as intoxication) often activates it as a refusal of civilisation, or as a way of dealing with the suffering it causes. Therefore, he adds, neurosis is a way of responding to the basic need to avoid

pain and to fulfil a pleasure impulse that experience and the “reality principle”⁵ tend to correct, but that nevertheless lays in the human subconscious. It amounts to what Freud identifies as “an oceanic feeling”, a sense “of being indissolubly bound up with and belonging to the whole of the world outside oneself”,⁶ which links back to the sense of attachment between the infant and their mother, and therefore implicates both child and woman as carriers of that primitive realm where there is no self.⁷ As Marianna Torgovnick writes, “the mature ego is identified with the imperial city-state, which will colonise primitives quite literally and colonise (in the figurative sense) many feelings, including of free sexuality and oneness”.⁸ Civilisation is a mature ego; it is masculine, and it must control the “oceanic” or primitive – conquering the sense of self is to obtain rationality over the irrational, order over chaos.

In a nutshell, Freud presents all of the ‘primitive’ tropes: childhood, women, indigenous populations of “discovered” territories, the use of drugs or alcohol, sex and mental disease. They all relate to a primitive realm that acts as a counterpoint to an uneasiness with civilisation, which nevertheless is necessary to provide order, balance and control.

The primitive inspires attraction and repulsion; it is a threat and an object of desire. Hal Foster mentions that desire encompasses the will to master it and to surrender to it, to become primitive is to dominate the primitive, a promise of “subjective release as well as artistic innovation: it is a *regressive* realm that might be put to *transgressive* use”⁹ – an “exorcism”, a “weapon against spirits”, as Picasso famously said of his *Demoiselles d’Avignon* painting,¹⁰ using the primitive against the primitive, as an apotropaic fetish (from the Portuguese “feitiço”) to scare away male fragility and reinforce male authority.

In António Areal’s series, the underlying threat of the primitive in its sexual, irrational, female analogies, in its regressive and transgressive realm, is part and parcel of, as well as mastered by, the civilised abstractionism.

The above-mentioned tropes, according to Torgovnick, form “the basic grammar and vocabulary of [...] primitivist discourse, a discourse fundamental to the West sense of self and the Other”.¹¹ Tropes are not only recurring figures of speech that become clichés, but they also act both as visual ideas and rhetoric devices to signify something: a fragmented feminine body on a Picasso canvas can stand for ‘primitive’, as much as the image of a person from a colonised territory, or the artefacts shown in the early twentieth century ethnographic museums, or folk art at a rural market, or brothels and uncompromised sex, or bodies of prostitutes distorted by syphilis.¹² At the same time the tropes share affinities and analogies by relating to a common concept. For instance, the altered states of conscience described in Baudelaire’s *Les Paradis Artificiels* (1860) can relate to Gauguin’s depicted experience in Tahiti, as expressions of the “oceanic feeling” (to use Freud’s terminology), connecting the idea of paradise with drugs, sex, women, colonisation, as much as with anti-academic/anti-naturalistic formal experiments in the visual arts. Furthermore, primitivism in its various tropes was an attack on the morals and politics of the dominant bourgeoisie, yet, as Patricia Lighten argues, there is a “failure of the politics” of modernism¹³; T.J. Clark similarly stated: the primitivist tropes (he calls them “sets of representations” instead) “contested bourgeois hegemony, but that hegemony was more powerful, because it was more differentiated, than anything modernism [could] come up with”.¹⁴

Lighten points out that these tropes had a malleability of meaning for different audiences, either positive or negative, while at the same time sharing common prejudices that were structurally embedded in white European privilege that came with colonialism.¹⁵ They were “operating in and against this world”,¹⁶ and the regression they implied was seen as both a desired return to a lost authenticity or, in contrast, as a degeneration.

All these tropes, either taken as positive or as negative, oppose the civilised to the uncivilised.

Primitivism in Portugal – the “belatedness” syndrome

The core ‘primitive’ trope in Portuguese narratives of the twentieth century is arguably folk art, discussed by both anthropologists and art historians, although not always acknowledged as an instance of “primitivism”.¹⁷

In an article about “Center and Periphery: Anthropological Theory and National Identity in Portuguese Ethnography”,¹⁸ the Portuguese anthropologist João Leal refers to two anthropological traditions in Western culture: *Völkerkunde* (the study of the others) and *Volkskunde* (the study of one’s own people and culture), which another anthropologist, Tomas Gerlhom, also calls “cosmopolitan anthropology” versus “local ethnology”. The first was developed in European empires, such as the British and the French and the second in countries with “nation-building” characteristics, that is, with recent autonomy or independence, or fragile borders. João Leal concludes it was the second, *Volkskunde*, or “local ethnography”, that prevailed in Portugal, despite it too being an empire and despite its borders being the most stable in Europe for centuries. Leal points to several reasons for this, which I can sum up as symptoms of what I have called the *belatedness* syndrome,¹⁹ expressed by several generations of intellectuals with some foreign experience (“*estrangeirados*”): that is, the complex of being late, as a periphery, in relation to European centres, which supposedly kept the right time – the time for modernity and progress.²⁰ The dominant ethnography would become official ethnography from the 1930s on, with ethnographic surveys feeding nationalist rhetoric about the “essence” of the country, and contributing to the “invention of tradition” that constructed the national image of the dictatorship running from 1926 to 1974.²¹ In parallel, and from within oppositional intellectual circles, there rose an interest in ethnography through the study of regional architecture, folk art and artists, and musical traditions.²²

João Leal also states that

the first signs of a consistent socio-anthropological interest in non-European cultures and societies only developed in the late 1950s, when the anthropologist Jorge Dias (1907–1973) – the most important Portuguese anthropologist of the twentieth century – conducted (together with his wife Margot Dias [1908–2001]) a thorough study of the Makonde of northern Mozambique.²³

Dias’s was, Leal writes, the first study about an African ethnic group undertaken in Portugal.

Notwithstanding, since the late nineteenth century, expeditions under scientific and ethnographic pretexts were being conducted in African territories by the Portuguese. With the scramble for Africa involving other European countries in the 1870s, the scientific argument, alongside the “civilising mission” argument, both also raised by Britain, France and Belgium,²⁴ emerged to justify expansionist orientations. The scientific argument gave rise to the Portuguese Geographical Society (1875), which would organise scientific expeditions between Angola and Mozambique “in the interest of science and civilisation”,²⁵ collecting ethnographic and artistic objects, animal specimens, botanical and mineral samples and publishing a regular bulletin, which trusted it a crucial role in colonial politics before and during the Portuguese dictatorship.²⁶

Since the 1940s, studies about African masks, sculptures, rituals and image production were published by the anthropologist José Redinha (1905–1983).²⁷ He was a white man working for the Portuguese government and had a profound knowledge of different tribes, rites, and several local languages of the colonised territories, mainly in and around Angola. His work could be understood as *Völkerkunde* in a colonial context. José Redinha was also the director of the

Dundo Museum, in the province of Northern Lunda, Angola, between 1942 and 1959.²⁸ The Dundo Museum promoted four expeditions between 1936 and 1946 that ended up gathering 5,500 objects for its collection,²⁹ maybe with the collaboration of the leaders of local communities (sobas), but nevertheless, under a colonial rule that certainly implied abusive appropriation of these objects. According to the anthropologist Patrícia Ferraz de Matos, in spite of his theoretical and methodological limitations, “the work developed by Redinha contributed to the beginning of the discussion of African art in the context of Portuguese colonial domination”, because he “was the first to suggest the existence of an African art and an aesthetic in the plastic expression of the *tchokwe*”.³⁰ From 1956 on, the art historian Marie-Louise Bastin from the Tervuren Museum (the colonial museum in Belgium, the first European museum of the kind, founded in 1898 by King Leopold II) was invited to study the collection of the Dundo Museum and her work also contributed to the recognition of *tchokwe* art.³¹ Therefore, the ethnography related to the Portuguese colonial project was implicated in the modernist discourse of primitivism, and although there was no proper Ethnology Museum until 1965 (opening only in 1976), the Dundo Museum and later the Museum of Angola (besides the Geographical Society in Lisbon), were overseas equivalents of colonial and ethnographic museums, the “Museums of Other People”.³² They emulated what was happening on European territory, namely in the countries with colonial possessions, by creating a European temporalisation and spatialisation within the colonised territory itself, and by placing in the museum everyday objects still used by people. There were also several cases of objects made specifically for the museum by crafters.³³ Therefore, musealisation implied a primitivisation *in loco*, by performing otherisation, and placing what belonged in the present in an undefined, allochronic³⁴ past. At the same time, the classification of those objects as art was informed by their impact on European art and on European museums.

In 2001, Alfredo Margarido (1928–2010) – who besides being a writer, teacher and painter close to the Portuguese surrealists, and an active left-wing resistant under the dictatorship, had also worked in the ex-colonies of São Tomé e Príncipe and Angola – wrote that there had never been a real “aesthetic” absorption of African art by Portuguese artists in the twentieth century. Adding up to the narrative of *belatedness*, he considered that unlike other European empires Portugal did not have a colonial museum.³⁵ Margarido refers to the lack of valorisation of African art by the Portuguese, going back to the sixteenth century, when the missionaries started to systematically destroy native religious figures while promoting Christian faith, and associates it with the dehumanisation that slavery brought in, which implied disregarding the cultures and beliefs of enslaved people. The author associates the ability of European art to absorb exotic art for its own aesthetic benefit, to the end of slavery in the United States and Europe in the eighteenth century. His argument furthermore states that while European artists were then able to understand the aesthetic qualities of African objects, the Portuguese artists were unable to do the same. The exception being the masks painted by Amadeo de Souza-Cardoso (1887–1918), but which would be the result of his Parisian immersion. The art historian José-Augusto França (1922–2021), also refers very briefly to the presence of African masks in Cardoso’s work, attributing it to a general influence of the Cubist vocabulary, a sort of *Zeitgeist* that the Portuguese artist had absorbed, without further elaboration.³⁶ Margarido finally ascribes the lack of primitivism in Portugal to a weak modernism, in which artists, in contrast with their French counterparts, were unable to understand the importance of African art, while also associating it with the persistent racism and xenophobia in Portuguese colonialism and “a difficulty of abandoning the past”.³⁷

Although Alfredo Margarido’s essay thoroughly maps out information about African art in Portugal for the first time, it lacks a comparative and structural analysis of the colonial and

imperial European context, which was all but freed from forced labour, exploitation and racism throughout the twentieth century. He sticks to the master narrative that idealises French modernism and determines the periphery’s belatedness against it, belatedness being the consequence of an alleged lack of capacity – because only a full European civilisation can recognise the aesthetic perks of the *primitive* by creating *primitivism*. While composing this argument, the author inscribes himself in a long lineage of Portuguese intellectual thought that goes back to the nineteenth century and that deplores the supposed lack of Portuguese civilisation (that is, its primitivity) in comparison to other European countries. What must be borne in mind is that this evolution was due to the successful consolidation of their empires, while the Portuguese empire lost influence and territorial area. Hence, this intellectual current looked up to Europe as a model of civilisation, but, from the early twentieth century on, that civilisation model encompassed primitiveness that was once a negative trope associated with Portugal itself.³⁸ Consequently, a complicated shift had to be performed to change the primitive to a positive trope, implicating a detachment from the association to backwardness.

Moreover, Margarido’s statements only recognise “primitivism” as the aesthetic/formal absorption of African art, failing to consider the tropes of primitivism. Ultimately, he reckons that “primitivism” only happens when a formal absorption of African aesthetics can be identified. Finally, it is from the evolutionist and civilisational paradigm that Margarido denounces the lack of a proper colonial museum to preserve African art objects during Portuguese colonial times – but would a museum in the metropole with looted artefacts be a sign of civilisation?

Today colonial museums of Europe are facing the pressure of the restitution debates and the questioning of the way their collections were constituted.³⁹ Dan Hicks associates *chronopolitics* with the anthropology museum. More than the “denial of coevalness” that Johannes Fabian diagnosed, the anthropology or ethnography museum undertakes a process of dispossession and dehumanisation that encompasses the violence of having memorialised what has been ruined by European colonisation for European consumption.⁴⁰ There is a “techno-brutality” in the anthropology museum that forces a chronology of existence, that establishes the ancient as an act of civilisation.

If primitivism is studied in formalist terms, several works with “primitivist” aesthetics can be found in twentieth-century Portuguese art (not only via African inspiration, but also folk art appropriation, or the art of children or the insane, or the depiction of exoticised and eroticised women, etc.). But the concept should be studied, as mentioned earlier, by looking at the way it was used and how its value changed (from a negative connotation to a positive one; or from one meaning to another – since it was first historically associated with early modern painting referring to national art history of a given nation, and only after with the African other). Ultimately, it can be analysed by identifying a “primitivist” imaginary, that is, certain uses of the past implicated in artistic practices or art historical narratives, even if the artists or authors themselves do not mention it.

Not only can “primitivism” be identified in Portuguese art practices and narratives, but it can also be found in the realm of ethnography and colonial narratives, especially after the shift brought on by the Colonial Act of 1930, which established the colonies as part of the national territory and proclaimed the centralisation of the colonial administration, while affirming the “civilising mission” of Portugal. It also instituted the status of the indigenous as opposed to the civilised, supposedly granting more rights to the African peoples, but in fact allowing forced labour and establishing a racial hierarchy based on the degree of “lack of civilisation”.⁴¹ Consequently, the imperial Portuguese project was, from the 1930s on, trying out a new relation with African “otherness”, promoting it as part of the nation. And primitivism played a part in that promotion.

The colonial trope – Diogo de Macedo’s theory of the Benin bronzes

Way before José Redinha acknowledged African sculptures and masks as art, the modernist artist Diogo de Macedo (1889–1959) had already extensively written on the subject.

Macedo, who later became director of the National Museum of Contemporary Art (1944–1959), authored a series of articles promoting African art which, following the Colonial Act of 1930, he designated Portuguese art (not African). These articles started in 1934 and were published mainly in the magazine *O Mundo Português* (1934–1947). This title, *The Portuguese World*, came with the description “magazine of culture and propaganda of the colonial arts and culture”, which clearly indicates a shift in the value of African culture, from “primitive barbaric” to “primitive modern”. The magazine was published in the same year that a big Colonial Exhibition took place in Porto.

Portugal had organised a considerable number of colonial exhibitions since the second half of the nineteenth century, mainly displaying the economic products and raw materials that came from the colonies (such as coffee and sugar) and a few artefacts, and participated in the colonial sections of international exhibitions since the 1855 Paris exhibition.⁴² These exhibitions were instruments to legitimise colonialism, as they were a showcase to portray Portugal as a “respectable colonising power, with an economically useful empire if well managed”.⁴³ With the dictatorship and its consolidation in 1933, when a new constitution established the Estado Novo (New State) and António de Oliveira Salazar as the dictator, these exhibitions also promoted the regime’s politics, which had colonialism as one of its cornerstones.

The Colonial Exhibition in Porto replicated features of other colonial shows, such as the 1931 Paris Exhibition, namely with an exhibition of African people removed from their countries and displayed in fake villages. The art historian Filipa Lowndes Vicente has identified a key goal of this exhibition and the role the display of naked female bodies played in it, as well as the role of photography in the reproduction and circulation of images of those bodies: to promote lands overseas, attracting white settlers who could obtain administrative training, streamlining the intentions of a more effective governance of (mainly) African territories, and to consolidate a long-desired effective occupation of the territory, a condition required by the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885 (which divided African territories by European powers, ones coveting the others’). In short, to make the empire an object of exotic and erotic desire for recruiting settlers.⁴⁴

The Colonial Exhibition had extensive press coverage in a concerted action of dissemination and propaganda.⁴⁵ A luxurious album was published, illustrated by the painter Eduardo Malta (1900–1967), who would follow Diogo de Macedo in running the National Museum of Contemporary Art in 1959 and was one of the artists closest to the regime. The illustrations made for the album comprise the “races” that could be found in the Portuguese Empire. A “Book of the Exhibition” also appeared after its closure, spreading its success, including the history of Portugal’s participation in other colonial and international exhibitions and a synopsis of its costs, foreign reception, number of visitors, and so on. I will return to this publication further on.

Diogo de Macedo published the volume *Arte Indígena Portuguesa* in 1934,⁴⁶ closely related to the Porto Colonial Exhibition, with a foreword by Luís de Montalvor (former collaborator of Fernando Pessoa’s avant-garde literary magazine *Orpheu* in 1915), who stated that Macedo’s study of primitive art was a great service to the “propaganda” of “Portuguese indigenous art, as good as that of other colonies”.⁴⁷ The book cover was designed by the artist Almada Negreiros, comprising two stylised modernist African statuettes facing each other. Continuing the promotion of African art, Macedo defended and praised African and Oceanian art, showing photographic reproductions of various objects from the Geographical Society of Lisbon and private collections, especially his own.⁴⁸ Diogo de Macedo writings echo Robert Goldwater’s

1938 book *Primitivism in Modern Painting* (republished in 1966 under the title *Primitivism in Modern Art*), in which “primitivism” is presented as designating an “attitude” towards the other; Goldwater also underlined the positive connotation of the term and defended that modern art had taken a path into an inner search for the primordial expression that led it to “discover” the affinity with the primitive.⁴⁹ This evolution of the meaning of the term was later understood by William Rubin (in the famous 1984 MoMA exhibition about affinities between the ‘modern’ and the ‘primitive’), as an “evolution of taste”.⁵⁰ The affinities for Macedo were even closer, because, as a sculptor himself, he considered this form of art the most “individual and independent”, that is the most autonomous. Evoking the myth of the origin of sculpture by the potter Dibutades (which is also the myth of the origin of painting), Macedo writes that “sculpture is the most tangible art, more objective and linked to physical contact, and therefore the most direct transposition from spirit to matter”.⁵¹ By affirming African art as mainly sculptural, the author established an affinity between his modernist practice (and modernist theory of art’s autonomy) and the so-called primitive art. He reinforced this statement by referring to Fauvist and Cubist artists and their learning from the simplicity of the primitive (Matisse, Vlaminck, Picasso, Dérain, Lhote, Modigliani, Zadkine and Lipchitz).

For Macedo, African art could get closer to “civilized art, which, the simpler and more synthetic the more poetic it becomes – and this simplicity is more difficult to accomplish”.⁵² Quoting Carl Einstein, he says that African arts deserve to be seen as universal arts and that only the twentieth century was endowed with the capacity of the “virgin sensation – without the sin of foreign influences – that is, where scholarship has not yet infiltrated the restriction of the historical or superfluous tastes for the developed techniques”.⁵³ The exact Carl Einstein quote is the following: “L’art africain possède des qualités plastiques, ornementales [sic] et picturales justifiant por lui un rang auprès des arts universels”.

In short, only the twentieth century was able to feel “primitively”, levelling up with African art. Carl Einstein’s *Negerplastik* (1915), which was clearly read by Macedo, praised African and Oceanian Art for their formal language. Only modernity could separate its formal qualities from the context and endow it with aesthetic autonomy. The modern gaze was the only one capable of seeing this as art and of depriving it from its time and space.⁵⁴

Diogo de Macedo furthermore states that, since it preceded the arrival of the Portuguese, the art from the colonies should be called pre-Portuguese, in analogy to pre-Colombian art. Macedo strives to maintain the characteristics of the art of the different African communities uncontaminated and defends the creation of an Ethnography Museum. But while approaching Benin sculpture, he writes that it benefitted from the orientalisising influence introduced by the Portuguese, namely in the work of iron and bronze, and that it allowed Benin Bronzes to reach a higher quality. This is the core focus of this book: Benin had better art because “the Portuguese sailors” brought them the bronze from India. Its exceptionality was due to a previous contact with the Portuguese. Proving his argument, Macedo presents an ivory sculpture belonging to a foreign collection, in which he believes Afonso de Albuquerque and Vasco da Gama (sixteenth-century national “heros” of the so-called “Portuguese Discoveries”) are represented, with a caravel and an unequivocally “Manueline” (Portuguese sixteenth century) rigging.

Dan Hicks’ study clearly argues that the mastering of bronze and other metals in Benin is, in fact, prior to the arrival of the Portuguese.⁵⁵ Hicks also states that the idea of a “northern / European influence” on the Benin sculptures was put forward by ethnographers such as Pitt-Rivers in 1900, and in 1909, Leo Frobenius was willing to believe that pre-colonial cities such as Benin and Ife were the Lost Atlantis.⁵⁶ So, the idea of a European influence on Benin sculpture that explained their exceptional quality (and value) was far from new.

Diogo de Macedo returns to this subject at length in a 1944 text, with the title “A national problem in the art of Benin”. In this text, he clearly writes that the art of Benin is exceptional because it expresses a “civilised” vision, for it is

worked in durable materials (bronze, iron, brass, ivory) and with inlaid precious metals, presumably enameled and gilded in certain points; what is certain is that these sculptures are only African in the black types they reproduce, the religious or priestly symbols and, presumably, the rudimentary deficiencies of the execution, however always much superior to any other of the so-called black art.⁵⁷

In short, Macedo writes that their aesthetics are Asian, their technology is European, and all their exceptional character is due to the Portuguese.

As Adam Kuper underlines, the Benin Bronzes were in fact mostly cast from brass or carved from ivory. Benin corresponds to the prestigious kingdom of Edo, now southwestern Nigeria. Kuper asserts that “Benin” is

the Portuguese version of a vernacular term, *itsekiri Ubinu*, meaning royal capital; the Europeans began to call Edo ‘Benin’ and the term was applied more widely to the region bordering a bay on the Gulf of Guinea in West Africa, which became known as the Bight of Benin.⁵⁸

The Portuguese arrived in the late fifteenth century in what was a prosperous kingdom. Although included in the narrative of “discoveries”, it was in fact a sophisticated kingdom by the time Europeans arrived. The Portuguese established there a commercial outpost for trade, a *feitoria*, factory in English, like many others on the African coast.⁵⁹ Throughout the centuries it had commercial relations with other countries and was one of the spots for the trade of enslaved people. In 1885 the British Foreign Office established a protectorate in the Niger Delta, in the aftermath of the Berlin conference and the division of Africa. In 1897 there was a brutal British raid resulting in the destruction of the Benin city and the pillage of thousands of objects, many of them now in the British Museum; others bought by other European colonial museums.⁶⁰

By claiming the exceptionality of Benin’s art, Diogo de Macedo was claiming the Portuguese heritage in that territory and, ultimately, claiming the “true” Portuguese nationality of Benin through ‘primitive’ art – primitivism being a matter dear to all the actors of culture and art of modernity and a sign of cosmopolitanism. Diogo de Macedo colonises Benin’s historical time, since the Portuguese influence over the territory had long been lost. He therefore bridges the fifteenth century with modernity: the imperial and colonial narrative of the “discoveries” is linked with modernist primitivism.

At the same time, Diogo de Macedo is contributing to the discourses on positive miscegenation and “good Portuguese colonialism”. Although this was a later thesis prompted by the work of Gilberto Freyre,⁶¹ it was also ingrained before in other authors such as Diogo de Macedo as a counter-discourse to racial and segregation theories and to the negative meaning usually given to “primitive”. As far as the Benin sculptures are concerned, he sees the “good” miscegenation of Eastern, European and African arts, which gives rise to a greater art from the African continent thanks to the Portuguese. Macedo is inscribing a nationalist and colonial sub-narrative in the “preference for the primitive” that is part and parcel of modernity’s narratives. In that way, he combines cosmopolitan anthropology, or *Völkerkunde*, with local ethnography, or *Völkskunde*, insofar as he sees the self in the other – that is, he values the suggested Portuguese characteristics of the primitive art from Benin and manages to conciliate nationalism and cosmopolitanism.

I return now to the book published to promote the Colonial Exhibition of 1934, titled *O Livro da Exposição – 1ª Exposição Colonial Portuguesa*, which served as an extensive instrument of

colonial propaganda and at the same time of the recently instituted Estado Novo. The book includes an unsigned text titled “Etnografia e artes indígenas” [Ethnography and indigenous arts], in which excerpts of Diogo de Macedo’s *Arte Indígena Portuguesa* are largely replicated. This fact remained unnoticed until now, but the text is, in fact, a summary of what Macedo published before, including Carl Einstein’s quotations, establishing affinities between modernism and primitivism. It consequently links Macedo directly to the colonial exhibition of 1934 and the colonial trope of primitivism. The ‘primitive’ in art objects was seen as a manifestation of modernity to be associated with the colonial enterprise that was presenting the colonies as desirable places for very much needed potential colonisers being targeted in the country’s northern rural areas.

“Good” primitivism and “bad” primitivism

As Torgovnick writes, Hal Foster “roasted” the 1984 MoMA exhibition in a 1985 essay,⁶² “but with the apparent subgoal of elevating surrealist art, part of the tradition in which he saw himself and certain fellow members of the New Left”.⁶³ Hal Foster ended his text by saying that it is necessary that other narratives, the narratives produced by the other, non-white, women, tribal, minorities, replace the narcissistic Western narrative, that is, they should have the right to speak and to their own agency. But the final aim of his text was to underline that there is a “good” primitivism in which, however, we very much notice that those voices remain silent. Foster finds “good” primitivism in what he considers “transgressive surrealism”, such as the one practiced by Georges Bataille (1897–1962). Based on the famous text by James Clifford, “On Ethnographic Surrealism” (1981),⁶⁴ Foster highlights the *bricoleur* character shown in the magazine *Documents* (1929–1930) in which Picasso, Matisse and others were shown alongside African and Oceanian sculptures, or with images of butchers and Boiffard’s big toes, or frames from Hollywood films and commodity advertising. As James Clifford wrote, *Documents* was a strange museum that shuffled the cultural order and showed only the juxtaposition or collage or montage of documents in a perverse collection.⁶⁵ *Documents* was founded by dissidents of André Breton’s surrealism: Georges Bataille, Michel Leiris, Carl Einstein, among others, and also included collaborations by Marcel Griaule, Paul Rivet and Georges-Henri Rivière (responsible for the reconfiguration of the Trocadéro Museum in two, the Museum of Decorative Arts and the Musée de l’Homme). Their tutelary figure was Marcel Mauss. The operation of *ethnographic bricolage* should imply the disruption of hierarchies, the display of heterogeneities, the subversion of apparent reality. The *bricolage* would “deconstruct ‘affinities’ between the modern and the tribal, or modernist ‘universality’, and such constructs as a fixed primitive ‘essence’ or a stable western ‘identity’”.⁶⁶

In her text from the MoMA exhibition catalogue, Rosalind Krauss also associated Giacometti with transgressive primitivism, and with Bataille’s disruptive surrealism. Krauss speaks of a “soft” version of primitivism, that is, a primitivism reduced to the valorisation of form that saw the primitive as a formal and aesthetic solution to the impasses of modern art, as opposed to a “hard” primitivism, destructive of civilisation, formless.⁶⁷ This approach paved the way for a whole history of twentieth-century art from the perspective of Bataille’s concept of *formless* — against the dominant, formalist-oriented narrative of modernity — a history of art that she went on to co-author with Yve-Alain Bois in an exhibition at Pompidou in 1996 and its influential catalogue.⁶⁸

However, it must be noticed that the transgressive “hard” primitivism that these authors find in *Documents* or in Giacometti’s art continued to radiate from Paris. Moreover, the primary source for ethnographic surrealist bricolage was the collection of the Trocadéro Museum. The protagonists of this primitivism were still performing *Volkskunde* and promoting the constitution of museums with looted or acquired objects in an irregular or unfair way — as is well

known, Marcel Griaule directed the Dakar-Djibouti mission, in which Georges-Henri Rivière and Michel Leiris participated, and that constituted the collection of the Musée de l'Homme, now in the Quai Branly.

Both Diogo de Macedo's 1934 book *A Arte Indígena Portuguesa* and the 1944 essay "Um problema nacional na arte de Benim" were thoroughly commented from a theoretical perspective by the literature scholar Pedro Serra in an important text from 2006, "Uses of the African 'Primitive' on the *Orpheu* Scene. An incorporation of Fernando Pessoa". He contextualises them in the nationalist logic of affirmation of a Portuguese Colonial Empire and of the Portuguese "civilising mission" and considers that Diogo de Macedo's primitivism is marked by the "imperial delusion determined by a racial discourse", and also by the ethnocentric fascination with the exotic that moves away from the political and aesthetically significant tendency of *strong* modernist primitivist appropriations, which should be considered, by contrast, interesting.⁶⁹ Therefore, Pedro Serra also distinguishes good primitivism from bad primitivism, or a "soft" primitivism and a "strong" or "hard" primitivism. "Hard" primitivism, as acknowledged by Serra, "is related to, in the modernity discourse and in the culture of modernism, the problem of Origin, either historical, cultural or associated with individual conscious".⁷⁰ Since he considers the indigenous art as Portuguese, Macedo's primitivism is not concerned with the Origin problem as "strong" primitivism would be. For Serra, he lacks "the prospective pulsion of the modernist primitivism" and his "'primitive' is not that Other with political and aesthetic significance of the *strong* modernist primitivist appropriations". There is a "racist determination" in Macedo, while the "good" primitivism "articulates a critique of civilisation, mediated by a rebelled aesthetics that presents itself as mixed-race".⁷¹

Serra does not exactly oppose a merely formal primitivism to a transgressive formless one, as Hal Foster or Rosalind Krauss do. Rather, he recovers the argument on the lack of a formal aesthetic vocabulary of primitivism in Portuguese modernism,⁷² while actually associating "strong" primitivism with that formal absorption. The "soft" primitivism of Krauss and Foster becomes "strong" in the light of Serra's analysis. He further considers that a "weak" primitivism is a colonial-informed primitivism.

This shift is of the utmost interest because, on the one hand, it seeks to analyse the concept of primitivism in the specific context of a peripheral European colonial dictatorship. On the other hand, the syndrome of *belatedness* towards a European model irradiating from the centre continues to manifest itself. Serra considers the Portuguese modernists who 'failed' to formally absorb primitivism as being delayed. As a result, a desired aesthetic crossbreeding was never achieved. That is, Serra's assumption rests on the affinity between the modern and the "primitive" which had been at the centre of the MoMA exhibition "roasted" by Hal Foster as "soft" primitivism.

The question is that soft/weak and hard/strong primitivism share exactly the same colonial trope of primitivism, and this hierarchisation and judgement is not useful in a critical analysis of the concept. Instead, the prevailing tropes of primitivism can be acknowledged as working differently, and in a more complex way, in the southern European periphery, precisely because it is through them that primitivism manifests itself, in a transaction between formal aesthetics and colonial politics, between negative and positive connotations (which can both encompass racism), between nationalism and cosmopolitanism, between resistance and compliance.

Primitivism and anti-colonialism

In March and April 1946, an exhibition was held during the Black Art Week at the Escola Superior Colonial (Colonial School), which was associated with the Lisbon Geographical Society and was where administrative staff for the government of the colonies trained. The exhibition

was organised by Ernesto de Sousa (1921–1988), then a young neo-realist art cinema critic, who opposed the dictatorship and promoted cultural events that were hotspots of resistance and a pretext for the gathering of oppositional forces.⁷³ He had the collaboration of Diogo de Macedo, then director of the National Museum of Contemporary Art, who lent objects from his collection of African art. The aim was to compare “primitive” art and modern art – the first exhibition of this nature to be held in Portugal. Sculptures from Angola, Guinea and Mozambique, originals by Amadeo de Souza-Cardoso, Modigliani and Almada Negreiros, and reproductions by Picasso and Matisse were exhibited. A card by Macedo in Ernesto de Sousa’s archive clearly indicates the number of objects he lent:

Here are twenty sculptures of black people. They all have a label, by which you can organise your catalogue. Those from Mozambique can form a nucleus; those from Angola, another group; and those from Guinea a third group. Except for the large one, of the nalus, which will deserve a plinth, they can all be kept on the shelves I mentioned. I ask you to take great care not to misplace them or confuse them with others you may borrow. Regards from Diogo de Macedo.⁷⁴

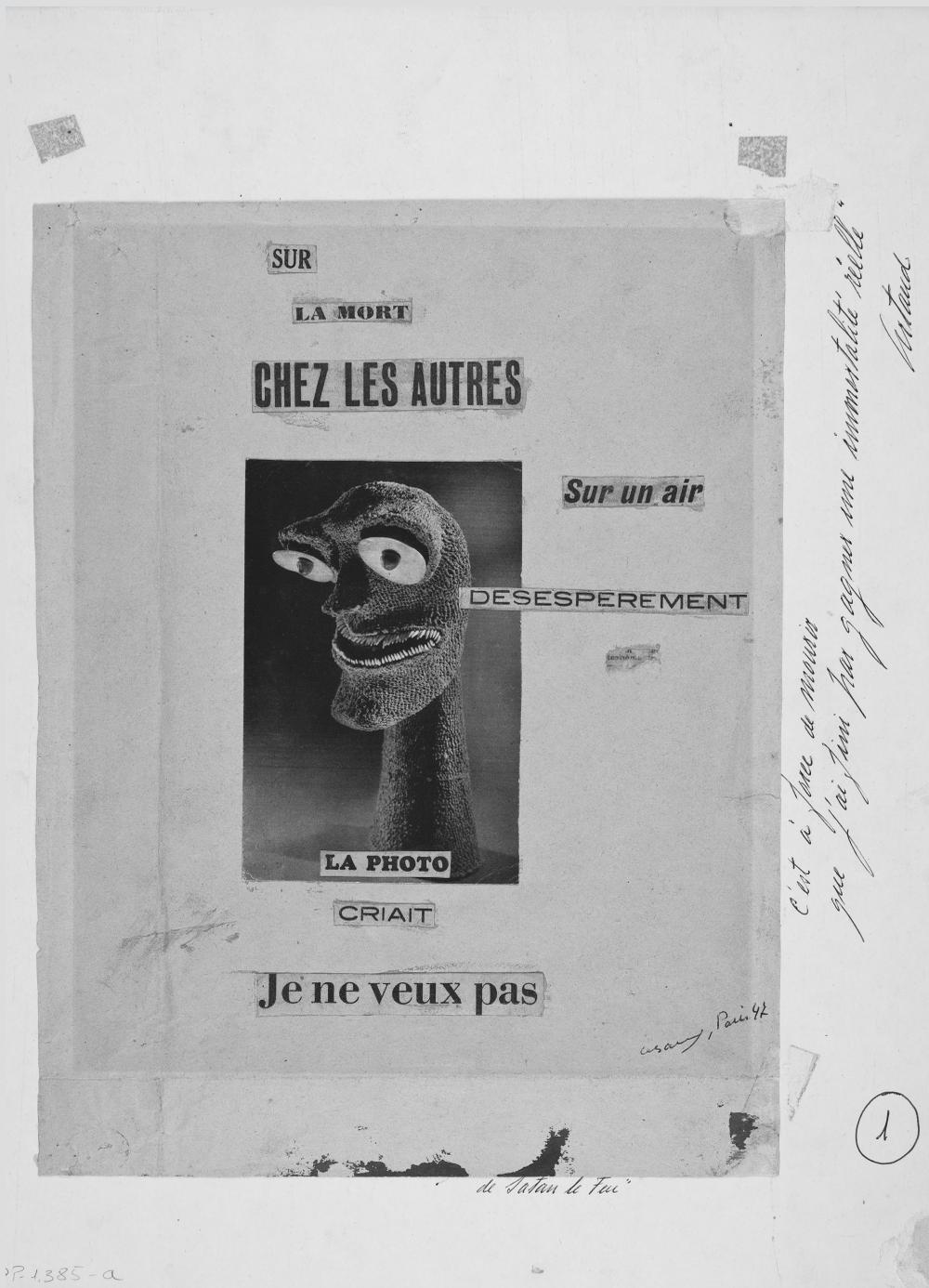
The programme of the Black Art Week announced a lecture by Diogo de Macedo on the opening day and another lecture by Ernesto de Sousa on “Black sculpture and the Paris school”. In this conference, Ernesto de Sousa tackled the “affinities” between the primitive and the modern, and the “abstract” tendency of primitive art. In his manuscript, it is clear that he consulted and paraphrased excerpts of Macedo’s 1934 book, even quoting the exact same sentence (and with the same misspelling) by Carl Einstein: “L’art africain possède des qualités plastiques, ornementales [sic] et picturales justifiant por lui un rang auprès des arts universels”. However, he twists the colonial framework of Macedo’s text to relate primitivism and neo-realism by stating that African objects could empower a collective experience that could provide the critical tools to combat oppression. Ernesto places “black art” on the same level as the art of the Mexican muralists or that of Cândido Portinari, who were major references for the politically engaged art pursued by the neo-realists.⁷⁵ Furthermore, he ends the conference (which escaped censorship) with strong criticism of colonialism, denouncing the centuries-long exploitation carried out by “pseudo-civilised rulers” and their racism.⁷⁶ He recognised that “art reflects the problems of colonization”.⁷⁷ Speaking at the Colonial School, he was talking directly to those who were going to be dislocated to work in the colonies’ administration, and he was using primitivism as a cultural instrument of anti-colonial propaganda.

In the following year, the young surrealist poet and painter Mário Cesariny (1923–2006), poet and painter, travelled to Paris, most certainly to see the international surrealist exhibition promoted by André Breton, with the patronage of Marcel Duchamp. Cesariny famously said that “Africa was the last surrealist continent”, as if stating that to be a surrealist one would have to be metaphorically in Africa. He further stated:

Africa enjoys the rare privilege of having produced neither Cartesianism nor any of the systems of thought and action based on universes of categories. Africa knows a myth that we ignore. – We think it lies dormant in the past and is perhaps making up the future.⁷⁸

On the one hand, he exoticises Africa as much as his next fellow surrealist, but on the other, he steps outside the narrative of allochronism and of mythical origin, projecting Africa in the future.

It was in 1947 that Cesariny made a significant collage (Figure 7.7) with the image of a head from the collection of the Musée de l’Homme,⁷⁹ which he visited, as a surrealist would have



DP1385-a

Figure 7.7 Mário Cesariny, *Poème*, 1947. Collage on paper, 21 × 27.5 cm. Inv. DP1385/a. Photograph by Paulo Costa. CAM-Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon. © Fundação Cupertino de Miranda.

done in Paris in 1947. The head is originally from Hawaii, brought over by James Cook (the first European “discoverer” of Hawaii, or at least the first claiming the discovery, since the islands were certainly known on the Spanish routes) in the late eighteenth century. The head is made of wood, mother-of-pearl shells, dog teeth and once had feathers and hair. It represents a god of war, possibly Kukailimoku. This information was most probably not available to Cesariny, but the surrealists established a difference between African and Oceanian art, seeing in the later general shamanic powers capable of disturbing the unconscious.

This collage seems to perform the gesture of giving voice to this image so that it can refuse primitivist appropriation, or the refusal of colonial violence and forced civilisation. Nevertheless, primitivist appropriation is a *sine qua non* for that performative activation. The photo screamed “je ne veux pas”, but for Cesariny to make it scream, it must be silent from the outset – it has been collected and photographed, and its original story is gone. On the side there is a quotation from Artaud: “C’est à force de mourir que j’ai finis par gagner une immortalité réelle” [It’s by sheer dint of dying that I’ve ended up gaining real immortality]. Dan Hicks’s *chronopolitics* mentioned before can be evoked: there is a deliberate consciousness that the statue must be silent, dispossessed of its history, to gain immortality in a Western surrealist collage. Cesariny’s glued newspaper words and Artaud’s handwritten quotation turn the head into a ventriloquist’s dummy that makes her denounce the relationship between art and colonialism.

The discussion of primitivism seen from the periphery of Europe, I have argued, amounts to a reckoning with the idea of the Other as a tool to forge the identity of the self – either national, artistic, European or cosmopolitan. Going back to António Areal’s series, the *poping* demoiselle may also be seen as that process, from other to self and back again, a recurrent self-othering that goes along with the narrative of modernity. This split identity⁸⁰ is intrinsic to the ascertainment of uneven processes of modernisation, and of the failure of universal categories, which nevertheless persist as cornerstones of the discourses on civilisation. It is not only related to racism but also to xenophobia and distancing centre/periphery dichotomies which have produced what Piotr Piotrowski called the “close other”.⁸¹ As counter-narrative to the belatedness syndrome, concepts like “primitive”/“primitivism” should be seen working in the *longue durée* – they do not relate exclusively to the formal aesthetics of art objects, or even to an artistic attitude, but to a process of construction of difference and identification, implicating the relationship with the history of the term and with its historical (and psychoanalytical) charge. They are an indefinitely unfinished process present in museums, collections, cultural policies, mass culture and transnational artistic practices of the present.

On the other hand, this split identity is itself a product of modern categories that perform what Denise Ferreira da Silva calls *engulfment*, that is a “‘partial negation’, the productive violent act of naming, the symbolic appropriation that produces modern subjects, inaugurating a relationship precisely because, in the regimen of representation interiority governs, it institutes unsublatable and irreducible subjects”.⁸² According to the Brazilian philosopher, the racial and cultural differences could only be represented within a context of subalternisation, that is, the condition for representation is subalternisation.⁸³ Subaltern is a precondition for the Other – of which Cesariny is also well aware. In other words, the mere concept of difference, of otherness, has historically produced an unequal relation. The modern post-Enlightenment subject (*Homo Modernus*, as Denise Ferreira da Silva names it) emerges from that contrast with otherness which is *engulfed* in universalist categories.

The modern universal, transparent, categories entail an *engulfment* of the Other, of the subaltern. Maybe that can also be seen, speculatively, in António Areal’s paintings, the *engulfment*

of cultural and racial difference, the absorption of otherness as constitutive of the modern narrative. Recognising the “strategy of engulfment” as constitutive of the *Homo Modernus* mines the divisions of good/strong primitivism and weak/soft primitivism, and puts into perspective the belatedness syndrome. Therefore, the supposed universal categories implied in a diagnosis of historical belatedness are exposed as constructs which narrow, flatten and uniformise the concepts of culture, civilisation or art.

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Notes

- 1 Patricia Leighton writes that Picasso never painted from a specific mask or sculpture, but rather “synthesized aspects of a variety of masks and statues, all from various parts of the French Empire; it was the idea of Africa that Picasso sought”. Patricia Leighton, *The Liberation of Painting. Modernism and Anarchism in Avant-Garde Paris*. Chicago, IL and London: University of Chicago Press, 2013, 60, 77.
- 2 Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, *Naissance de l’Art Contemporain – 1945–1970. Une histoire mondiale*. Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2021 (in particular, Chapter 1, “Les choix de la reconstruction” and Chapter 3, “Le triomphe international de l’abstraction Parisienne”).
- 3 Sigmund Freud, *Civilisation and Its Discontents* (1930) (David McLintock, trans.). London: Penguin Books, 2002, 39.
- 4 Sigmund Freud, op. cit., 30.
- 5 Idem, 17–18.
- 6 Ibidem, 11.
- 7 Marianna Torgovnick analyses how Freud links the primitive and the female in the chapter “Entering Freud’s Study” *Gone Primitive. Savage Intellectuals; Modern Lives* (Marianna Torgovnick, ed.), Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990, 204–209.
- 8 Idem, 207. Torgovnick also points that there is a complex relation made by Freud between civilisation and primitiveness, since he and his family were persecuted and discriminated as Jews in Nazi-occupied Austria, and the anti-Jewish propaganda constructed an idea of Jews as the Other, as ‘primitives’. Freud’s work claims back civilisation for himself. Ibidem, 198–199.
- 9 Hal Foster, “Primitive Scenes”, *Prostetic Gods*. Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2004, 33.
- 10 In a 1937 interview conducted by André Malraux, quoted in Hal Foster. op. cit., 31.
- 11 Torgovnick, op. cit., 8.
- 12 See Leighton, op.cit., 79.
- 13 Idem, 58.
- 14 T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea. Episodes from a History of Modernism*. New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1999, 306–307.
- 15 Leighton, op.cit., in particular Chapter 2, “The White Peril. Colonialism, *L’Art Nègre*, and *Les Dames d’Avignon*” (57–84), and Chapter 3, “A Rational of Ugliness: Cubism and its Reception” (85–110).
- 16 Idem, 58.
- 17 Some of authors and works dealing with folk art during the dictatorship are: João Leal, *Etnografias Portuguesas (1870–1970): Cultura Popular e Identidade Nacional* [Portuguese Ethnographies 1870–1970: Folk Culture and National Identity]. Lisboa: Dom Quixote, 2000; Daniel Melo, *Salazarismo e Cultura Popular (1933–1958)* [Salazarism and Folk Culture]. Lisboa: Instituto de Ciências Sociais, 2001; Vera Marques Alves, *Arte popular e nação no Estado Novo. A política folclorista do Secretariado de Propaganda Nacional* [Folk Art and Nation under the Estado Novo. National Secretary for Propaganda’s Folklore Policies]. Lisbon: Imprensa de Ciências Sociais, 2013; Bártole, “The Story of a Portuguese Cock and other Knick-Knacks: Heritage, Propaganda and Design in Carlos a Far-right Dictatorship”, *Design, History and Time: New Temporalities in a Digital Age* (Zoë Hendon and Anne

- Massey eds.). London: Bloomsbury, 2019, and “Damned Words: The Use and Disuse of Modern as an Attribute for the Interpretation of Folk Customs in Theatrical Revue Stage and Costume Design at the Turn of the 1930s”, *RIHA Journal*, 0139, 2016. Vernacular architecture, regionalism, folk art were the core themes of the book *Southern Modernisms: From A to Z and Back Again* (Joana Cunha Leal, Maria Helena Maia, and Begonã Farré Torras, eds.), Lisboa/Porto: CEEA/IHA, 2015. Joana Cunha Leal’s art history work has continually analysed the relationship between local and global in Portuguese modernist practices. See, for instance, Cunha Leal, “Disclosing the Ultimate Mediterranean Cubist Village”, *Artl@s Bulletin*, 10, 2, Article 9, 2021; “Distance and Distortion: Amadeo Souza Cardoso’s and Joan Miró’s War-years Painting and the Words that Fail Them”, *Artl@s Bulletin*, 6, 2, Article 2, 2017; and “Trapped Bugs, Rotten Fruits and Faked Collages: Amadeo Souza Cardoso’s Troublesome Modernism”, *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift/Journal of Art History*, 82, 2, 2013, 99–114.
- 18 João Leal, “Center and Periphery: Anthropological Theory and National Identity in Portuguese Ethnography”, *The Palgrave Handbook of the History of Human Sciences* (David McCallum, ed.). Singapore: Palgrave McMillan, 2022, 1–20.
 - 19 Pinto dos Santos, Mariana, “On Belatedness. The Shaping of Portuguese Art History in Modern Times”, *Artium Quaestiones*, 30, 2019, 37–64.
 - 20 On the idea of periphery as a temporal concept, see Vlachou, Foteini, “Why Spatial? Time and the Periphery”, *Visual Resources*, 32, 1–2, 2016, 9–24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01973762.2016.1132500>, reprinted in Vlachou, Foteini, *The Disappointed Writer: Selected Essays*. Lisbon: Edições do Saguão, 2019.
 - 21 João Leal, op. cit., 7. This topic was extensively studied by Vera Marques Alves, *Arte popular e nação no Estado Novo. A política folclorista do Secretariado de Propaganda Nacional* [Folk Art and Nation under the Estado Novo. National Secretary for Propaganda’s Folklore Policies]. Lisboa: Imprensa de Ciências Sociais, 2013.
 - 22 See note 17.
 - 23 João Leal, op. cit., 8. The couple also undertook extensive research of peasant and folk traditions in Portugal.
 - 24 See for instance Dino Costantini, *Mission civilisatrice. Le rôle de l’histoire coloniale dans la construction de l’identité politique française*, Paris: ed. La Découverte, 2008; Fredrick Cooper and Ann Stoler, *Tensions of Empire. Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997. See also Leighton, op.cit., 59 and ff.
 - 25 Decree of 11 March 1877, quoted by Alexandre Valentim, “Nação e Império”, *História da Expansão Portuguesa* (Francisco Bethencourt and Kirti Chauduri eds.), vol. 4 – *Do Brasil para África*. Lisbon: Círculo de Leitores, 1998, 115. See also Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo, “The ‘Civilisation Guild’: Race and Labour in the Third Portuguese Empire, c. 1870–1930”, *Racism and Ethnic Relations in the Portuguese-speaking World* (Francisco Bethencourt and Adrian J. Pearce, eds.). New York: Oxford University Press, 2012, 173–199. Henrique de Carvalho was responsible for expeditions in the North of Angola between 1884 and 1888, capturing several objects from the Lunda region and he publishes *Ethnographia e História Tradicional dos Povos do Lunda* in 1890 (see José Redinha, *Quelques témoignages de l’esprit de la bonne entente entre les Portugais et les Africains*. Luanda: Museu de Angola, 1961).
 - 26 On the role of the Geographical Society throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Afonso Dias Ramos, “Sociedade de Geografia”, *Re-mapping Memories Lisboa-Hamburg*, 2021, <https://www.re-mapping.eu/pt/lugares-de-memoria/sociedade-de-geografia-de-lisboa> (consulted 6 May 2023).
 - 27 Besides the publishing related with the Dundo Museum since 1942 and its growing collection resulting from expeditions, José Redinha published studies on cave paintings from Zambeze (1948), on religious costumes and fetishes of the kiokos, Angola (1949), on African Masks (1952) and an important study on ephemeral mural painting in Lunda (*Paredes Pintadas do Lunda*, 1953). All of these were publications from the Museum of Dundo, financed by Diamang, Angola’s Diamond Company, founded in 1917 with Portuguese, Belgian, North-American and French capital (see Patrícia Ferraz de Matos, “Projectos coloniais e seus efeitos: o caso do trabalho de José Redinha desenvolvido no Museu do Dundo”, *Poiésis*, Universidade do Sul de Santa Catarina, UNISUL, Tubarão, 2, 2, July/December 2009, 42–61.
 - 28 From 1959 on to he would collaborate with the Angola Museum, collaborating with a younger anthropologist called Mesquitela Lima (1929–2007) who became director of the Angola Museum in 1963 and later founded the department of Anthropology of NOVA University in Lisbon. The Dundo

- Museum (1943) was financed by Diamang and was first named “Museu Gentílico” (1936), “Museu Ethnológico” (1938), “Museu Ethnográfico” (1940), and again “Museu Etnológico” (1942).
- 29 Patrícia Ferraz de Matos, op. cit., 49.
- 30 Idem, 51.
- 31 Ibidem.
- 32 I refer to Adam Kuper’s book, which surveys the constitution of European and USA colonial and ethnographic museums and the invention of ‘primitive’ art. Adam Kuper, *The Museum of Other People. From Colonial Acquisitions to Cosmopolitan Exhibitions*. London: Profile Books, 2023.
- 33 Ferraz de Matos, op. cit., 47.
- 34 The concept of allochronism, of relegating to a distant past what in fact shares the same chronology, was introduced by Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.
- 35 Alfredo Margarido, “A impossibilidade portuguesa de reconhecer a importância estética das máscaras e das esculturas africanas [the Portuguese impossibility of recognising the aesthetic importance of African masks and sculptures], *Latitudes. Cahiers Lusophones*, 13, décembre 2001. I thank the historian Diogo Ramada Curto for this reference. More recently Diogo Ramada Curto wrote an article in the newspaper in which he repeats Margarido’s arguments, saying there was not any true “primitivism” in Portuguese art. Diogo Ramada Curto, “Portugal em bicos de pés: etnografia colonial e modernismo truncado”, *Contacto*, 14 January 2022. (<https://www.contacto.lu/portugal/portugal-em-bicos-de-pes-etnografia-colonial-e-modernismo-truncado/489393.html>).
- 36 José-Augusto França, *A Arte em Portugal no Século XX*. Lisboa: Bertrand, 1991 (1974), 79–80. França did not acknowledge the critical reception of primitivism and consequent modifications made by Amadeo, namely by incorporating references of his own local folk art imaginary, such as the carnival masks from the North of Portugal (caretos de Podence) in his masks/heads painted in 1915. He refers to his masks/heads as “expressionist”. Idem, 87.
- 37 Alfredo Margarido, op. cit., 11.
- 38 See Pinto dos Santos, “On Belatedness...”, op. cit.
- 39 Nevertheless, there are several museums and collections in Portugal that must also deal with that debate, namely the Geographical Society.
- 40 Dan Hicks, *The Brutish Museums. The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution*. London: Pluto Press, 2020, 191–192. Hicks derives his concept from Achille Mbembe’s *necropolitics*, speaking “mummification, statuefication, and fetishization” performed by museums, and, going further back, to Franz Fanon and what he called the Europeans’ “compartmentalized world” and Aimé Césaire’s “chosification”, that is, societies “emptied of themselves, [...] men thorned away from life”. Referenced in Dan Hicks, op. cit., 190–192.
- 41 “Acto colonial”, *Diário do Governo*, Series I, n. 156, 8 July 1930. See also Ferraz de Matos, “O Acto Colonial e a ‘criação’ do ‘indígena’”, *Representações raciais no Império Colonial Português*. Lisboa: ICS, 2006, 62–68.
- 42 Ferraz de Matos, “Exibir o império, imaginar a nação: representações das colónias e dos portugueses de além-mar nas grandes exposições”, *As cores do império...*
- 43 Idem, 166–167.
- 44 Filipa Lowndes Vicente, “Rosita e o império como objecto de desejo”, *Público*, 25 August 2013. See also Filipa Lowndes Vicente, “Black Women’s Bodies in the Portuguese Colonial Visual Archive (1900–1975)”, *Portuguese Literary & Cultural Studies — Transnational Africas: Visual, Material and Sonic Cultures of Lusophone Africa*, 30/31, 2017, 16–67. And also Isabel Morais, “‘Little Black Rose’ at the 1934 Exposição Colonial Portuguesa”, *Gendering the Fair: Histories of Women and Gender at World’s Fairs* (T.J. Boisseau and Abigail M. Markwyn, eds.). Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010, 19–36.
- 45 The biweekly publication *Ulramar* started four months before the exhibition, in order to prepare the public for the event, and lasted until the end of the exhibition. *Acção Colonial* was a single-issue magazine dedicated to the exhibition. The magazine *Portugal Colonial* started in 1931, the year of the Paris exhibition, and lasted until 1937. *Civilização, Ilustração, Notícias Ilustrado*, the humorous newspaper *Maria Rita*, among other periodicals, had special issues dedicated to the exhibition, sometimes with humorous drawings and texts that contribute to a general racist discourse.
- 46 Diogo de Macedo, *Arte Indígena Portuguesa*. Lisbon: Agência Geral das Colónias, 1934.
- 47 Luís de Montalvor, Preface to *Arte Indígena Portuguesa*, op. cit., iv.

- 48 Alfredo Margarido suggests Diogo de Macedo started his African art collection after seeing the colonial exhibition of 1931 (he mistakenly writes 1929) at the Bois de Vincennes, for which he made a statue of a national “discovery era” hero, Afonso de Albuquerque. Margarido, op. cit., 9.
- 49 William Goldwater, *Primitivism in Modern Art* (1938). New York: Vintage Books, 1966.
- 50 William Rubin, “Introduction”, “Primitivism” in *20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*. New York: MoMA, 1984, 3. In this exhibition and catalogue, it was established that primitivism was “an aspect of modern art and not tribal art” (W. Rubin) and the main thesis was that the changes in modern art were not determined by “tribal art”; instead, they would have been underway since the industrial revolution, when the search for a more “pure” individual artistic expression would have manifested itself, from revivals to impressionism and post-impressionism. Thus, there would be “affinities” between modern art and tribal art, and not “influences”.
- 51 Diogo de Macedo, op. cit.
- 52 Idem.
- 53 Ibidem.
- 54 Teresa Matos Pereira also refers to Diogo de Macedo’s attribution of the Benin knowledge to the Portuguese and the European capacity of “feeling primitively”, albeit in a different reading from mine, one that describes Diogo de Macedo’s work within the context of a vast array of Portuguese references and events in a thorough and monumental cartography of Portuguese coloniality in art, collections, and exhibitions. Teresa Matos Pereira, *Uma Travessia da Colonialidade: Pintura, Coleções e Intervisualidades* [A Journey Through Coloniality: Painting, Collections and Intervisualities]. Lisbon: Caleidoscópio, 2019, 133–134.
- 55 Dan Hicks, op. cit., 150.
- 56 Idem., 199–200.
- 57 Diogo de Macedo, “Um problema nacional na arte de Benim” [A national problem in Benin art], separata *O Mundo Português*, March 1944.
- 58 Adam Kuper, *The Museum of Other People*. Op. cit., 234–235.
- 59 I thank the scholar and my colleague Nuno Senos (NOVA University) for clarification on the presence of the Portuguese commercial outpost or factory in Benin city. Susan Buck-Morss has noticed how much modern industrialization and the idea of civilisation is connected with the colonial enterprise, even in the word “factory”, that comes from the Portuguese *feitoria*, a place for trade of overseas resources that other colonial powers, such as the British and the Dutch, also installed. See Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti and Universal History*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009, 101–102.
- 60 Kuper, op. cit., 240.
- 61 Namely Casa Grande e Senzala, 1933.
- 62 “The final criterion is Form, the only context is Art, the primary subject is Man. In this way the exhibition confirmed the colonial extraction of the tribal work (in the guise of its redemption as art) and rehearsed its artistic appropriation into tradition. No counterdiscourse was posed: the imperialist precondition of primitivism was suppressed, and ‘primitivism’, a metonym of imperialism, served as its disavowal. [...] On the one hand, the primitivist incorporation of the other is another form of conquest [...]; on the other, it serves as its displacement, its disguise, even its excuse.” Foster, “The ‘Primitive’ Unconscious of Modern Art or White Skin, Black Masks” (1985), *Recodings. Art Spectacle, Cultural Politics*. New York: The New Press, 1999, 183 and 197.
- 63 Torgovnick, op. cit., 120–121.
- 64 Republished in James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture. Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature and Art*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988, 117–151.
- 65 Idem, 133–134.
- 66 Foster, “The ‘Primitive’ Unconscious”..., op. cit., 202.
- 67 Rosalind Krauss, “Giacometti”, “Primitivism” in *20th Century Art. Affinities of the Tribal and the Modern* (William Rubin ed.), vol. II. New York: MoMA, 1984, 503–534.
- 68 Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss, *Formless – A User’s Guide*. New York: Zone Books, 2000.
- 69 Pedro Serra, “Usos Do ‘Primitivo’ Africano na Cena de Orpheu. Uma incorporação de Fernando Pessoa”, *Modernismo & Primitivismo* (Pedro Serra, ed.). Coimbra: Centro de Literatura Portuguesa, 2006, 67–69.
- 70 Idem, 63.
- 71 Ibidem, 69. Pedro Serra proceeds to analyse the “transactions between the aesthetic discourse and the colonial grammar” of Fernando Pessoa. He considers that the primitivist imagery in Pessoa is

- connected with a colonial vocabulary that objectifies the African “other” and problematises the common assumption that Pessoa had a “fundamentally non colonialist attitude”, proposing that the opposite could be easily said too, that “Pessoa had a “fundamentally colonialist attitude” (95–96).
- 72 As Alfredo Margarido and Diogo Ramada Curto also argue.
- 73 See Pinto dos Santos, *Vanguarda & Outras Loas*. Lisboa: Assírio & Alvim, 2007.
- 74 See my “Apresentação de texto inédito de Ernesto de Sousa de 1946 — conferência ‘A escultura negra e a escola de Paris’” and the transcription of Ernesto de Sousa’s conference. In Pinto dos Santos and Ramos (eds.). *Ernesto de Sousa (1921–2021): uma criação consciente de situações / uma situação consciente de criações*. Lisbon: IHA (Art History Institute), FCSH, Universidade NOVA de Lisboa/Project Iberian modernisms and the primitivist imaginary (PTDC/ART-HIS/29837/2017), 2023.
- 75 In the 1940s, mural painting was the most celebrated and claimed language by the neo-realist artists, such as Júlio Pomar, Mário Dionísio and Ernesto de Sousa himself. Mural art would need the collaboration of a public able to receive it, a public that was, therefore, active. See Pinto dos Santos, *Vanguarda & Outras Loas*. op. cit., and “State-commission in modern times. Realism and modernism in the mural paintings of the artist Almada Negreiros (1893–1970)”, *Realisms of the Avant-Garde* (Moritz Baßler, Benedikt Hjartarson, Ursula Frohne, Sascha Bru, and David Ayers, eds.), *European Avant-Garde and Modernism Studies*, 6, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020, 439–456.
- 76 Ernesto de Sousa, “A escultura negra e a escola de Paris” (1946), *Ernesto de Sousa (1921–2021)...* Op. cit., 183.
- 77 Idem.
- 78 Mário Cesariny, Lecture of Mário Cesariny about Cruzeiro Seixas first exhibition in Luanda, Angola (radio programme “Voz do Império”, 1954). *A Intervenção Surrealista*. Lisboa: Assírio & Alvim, 1997, 73.
- 79 Now it is in a section of works from the Musée du Quai Branly shown at the Louvre.
- 80 I am using Stuart Hall’s terminology in “Ethnicity: Identity and Difference”, *Radical America*, 23, 4, 1989, 16: “Only when there is an Other can you know who you are. [...] The Other is not outside, but also inside the Self, the identity. So, identity is a process, identity is split.” This relates to Du Bois’s concept of “double conscious”, which refers to the conscious of the self as him/herself and other, that is, the “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others”. W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of the Black Folk*, 1903 (Project Gutenberg, available online).
- 81 Piotr Piotrowski, “From global to alter-globalist art history”. In *Teksty Drugie*, Warszawa: IBL PAN, 2016: “The ‘close other’, on the other hand, functions within the same episteme, in the same system of perceiving the world, in the area of the same cultural, traditional, religious models, and so on. Consequently, the culture of the European coloniser or occupant is not totally strange, or at least it is not as strange as in transoceanic relations. This makes a fundamental discrepancy as it also defines artistic relations”, 121. See also Vlachou, op. cit.
- 82 Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007, 29. Denise Ferreira da Silva also relates the strategy of engulfment to the advent of ethnography — and we might add, the museum and of art history — disciplines that ascribe temporality to subjects and objects: “[...] the emergence of the concept of the cultural as the privileged strategy of engulfment and of ethnography as the proper strategy of intervention marked the entry of the others of Europe into temporality [...]” Idem, 169. The book was recently (2022) translated in Brazil with the title *Homo Modernus – Para uma ideia global da raça*. Rio de Janeiro: Cobogó.
- 83 From this premise, Denise Ferreira da Silva discusses Dipesh Chakrabarty’s 2000 book *Provincializing Europe* and the perspective of the Subaltern Studies, which I cannot address in this chapter.

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8 Returning to what never was

Primitivisms in Canto da Maya

*Joana Brites (with the contribution
of Marta Barbosa Ribeiro)*

The research questions and primary sources

Canto da Maya is the modern Portuguese artist whose work is more frequently labeled with the primitivist rationale.¹ However, no historiographical endeavor had been undertaken to unpack this association. The chronology, prevalence, substance and, above all, the meaning of primitivism for the sculptor have remained as nebulous as the tag itself. The resilience of a foggy categorization, despite the absence of an empirical examination, is far from exceptional. Quite the contrary; one might argue that the longevity of containers in art history often rests on their ill-defined condition.

The unfolding of Maya's primitivism – or primitivisms, as I argue – led me to rethink my starting premise: his undisputed placing within the primitivism scope. Since primitivism is a relational concept,² I needed to first ascertain who identified a primitivist gaze in Canto da Maya's work. Bearing in mind that identification and description are highly subjective, relative, and contextual actions, I pondered the extent to which the linkage in question was an *a posteriori* construction orchestrated by art historians. I was aware of the risk of resignifying as primitivist something that was never conceived within this conceptual framework. As a result, it became crucial to fine-tune the research questions and begin by understanding whether the idea of primitivism, with its multiple avatars, was operative for Canto da Maya. And, if so, what did it mean to and entail for the artist throughout his life? These became my main lines of inquiry.

The central part of the research took place at the Carlos Machado Museum in Ponta Delgada, the principal city of the island of São Miguel, the political and administrative center of the Portuguese Azores archipelago in the North Atlantic Ocean. This museum holds the most extensive collection of Maya's works and the only archival collection entirely dedicated to the artist, enriched by the incorporation of, among other items, a significant part of the sculptor's correspondence in 2018, covering, in particular, the early stages of his career. In addition, I located and analyzed a body of letters written by Canto da Maya, kept in the Ponta Delgada Public Library and Regional Archive.

As this paper will demonstrate, there is a primitivist drive in Canto da Maya, one that was not limited to the aesthetic sphere, but which transpired in his worldview and the stripped-down lifestyle that he, born into an upper-class Azorean family, pursued. With an uncommon degree of diversity in terms of the temporal and geographical stimuli it entailed, Maya's primitivism was not linear. The ambivalences that surfaced in his trajectory, as in others, are particularly insightful for understanding primitivism itself.³

Transit, displacement, estrangement

A fixed notion of space and time impoverishes every art history. However, when transit and displacement are critical traits of an artist's life and the topic under analysis requires a global approach, it is indispensable to relate different scales of analysis and inquire into the several layers that any given point in time and space comprises. This is the case of Canto da Maya's primitivism, which, furthermore, is itself deeply connected to both these categories: it aimed to counter temporal and spatial alienation. By doing so, Maya conveyed a primary experience of modernity and a key feature of modernism.

Born in 1890 on São Miguel island, part of the Azores archipelago, Ernesto do Canto Machado de Faria e Maya – later known by his artistic name, Canto da Maya – left for Lisbon in his youth to attend the capital's School of Fine Arts. From 1907 to 1911, he completed the General Drawing Course, the four-year base of academic training. Having registered for the Architecture Course, one of the available degrees for furthering an artistic education, at the same school, the young artist soon changed his mind. Instead, he chose Paris in 1912 to complement his training, a path familiar to other artists, national and global, former and contemporary. In the absence of a scholarship, the financial support of his well-established family made the move possible. In the Montparnasse district, he enrolled in the Académie de la Grande Chaumière, where Émile-Antoine Bourdelle's teachings would resonate long after, and attended other classes without regularity.⁴

Two years later, Canto da Maya would again relocate twice. He entered the Geneva School of Fine Arts in 1914, where another professor whose early career was developed in proximity with Auguste Rodin – the Swiss sculptor James Vibert and the symbolist approach he expanded with the immersion in the Parisian milieu onward – would have a significant impact on him. The same year, with the outbreak of the First World War, Maya returned to Ponta Delgada, São Miguel.⁵ It was neither a soothing nor a lasting homecoming. In 1916, after an unsuccessful attempt to enter the Academy of Fine Arts in Madrid, he sought work with sculptors established in the Spanish capital. It was a short yet meaningful stay. In Madrid, he met the sculptor Julio Antonio (Antonio Rodríguez Hernández), whose impression on Maya has been open to speculation in terms of substance,⁶ but is unquestionable regarding its importance. One can, indeed, conjecture a strand connecting Julio Antonio's "Bustos de la Raza" (Busts of the Race) – a series of folk portraits where, as Carolyn P. Boyd points out,⁷ he intended to capture both the individuality of the Spanish people and the universal traits that surpassed their distinctiveness – and Canto da Maya's incursion through the national peasantry. However, both the theme and the conceptual approach can hardly be considered exclusive to Julio Antonio, a novelty at the time, or an unexpected route. On the other hand, the personal connection between the two artists is indubitable. The Azorean sculptor would later come to name his first child, in 1920, after his Tarragonese counterpart, deceased the previous year (1919).

In 1917, Canto da Maya returned to Ponta Delgada, and after the war, in 1919, returned to Geneva, where he married Louise Mathilde Biderbost (1887–1960). The couple's first son was born in São Miguel, in 1920. Afterwards, a phase of stability began. The pair left Portugal (to where they would only return for short stays), moved to Paris in 1921, and established their residence in the commune of Boulogne-sur-Seine (soon renamed Boulogne-Billancourt). Their second child, Violante, was born soon after, in 1923. The western Parisian suburb where they made their home was a flourishing area, thriving with urban growth, automobile and film industries, and inhabited by several other artists. The Frenchmen Joseph Bernard, Raoul Lamourdedieu, and Marcel Loyau, the Lithuanian-born Jacques Lipchitz, the Frenchman of Polish descent Paul Landowski, and the Russian Oscar Miestchaninoff were among the sculptors. Bernard

(1866–1931), who established his atelier in the area in 1921, stood out, given the nexus between his work and that of Canto da Maya. As Violante would later recall, the two were close, and Maya admired his “harmonious and classical”⁸ art.

Boulogne-sur-Seine was also the location of Albert Kahn’s property. Here, the well-traveled banker and philanthropist created a set of gardens evoking different world landscapes (including French, English, and Japanese styles) and set in motion his project “The Archives of the Planet” (1912–1931).⁹ Fueled by the pacifism triggered by the First World War and the desire to know and document different cultures of the globe, particularly those being transformed or in the peril of disappearing, Kahn funded their professional photographic and cinematographic record, under his supervision and under the scientific direction of Jean Brunhes. The footage was regularly brought back to Boulogne. Although this remarkable survey, comprehending more than 50 countries from all the continents except for Antarctica, was only accessible at the time to Kahn’s most notable guests, the endeavor speaks volumes of a wider fascination with a lost age, one that sculpture would also translate.

The international career of Canto da Maya took off from 1921 onward, with his participation and at times distinction in major international exhibitions, such as those held in Paris in 1925 (International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts), 1931 (International Colonial Exposition), and 1937 (International Exhibition of Arts and Techniques in Modern Life), and New York, in 1939 (World’s Fair). In addition, he became a habitué of the Parisian exhibition circuit, notably the Salon d’Automne and the Salon des Indépendants, having the latter dedicated a retrospective exhibition to him in 1935. Outside Paris and other European cities (namely Madrid and Brussels), he partook in displays organized in Japanese and Brazilian cities. Moreover, throughout his career, Maya maintained a connection to the Portuguese artistic scene, strengthened by his return to the country in 1938.

Divorced in 1937, Canto da Maya remarried and relocated with his new wife, the Russian-born Vera Wladimirovna Pouritz, to Lisbon. He suffered the loss of his first child (1940), Julio Antonio, and was a father for the third time, with the birth of his second daughter Marie, in 1944. After the Second World War, the family went back to Paris in 1946. Maya would remain in the French capital until 1953, after which he definitively returned to Ponta Delgada in São Miguel, Azores. Paris would remain, until the mid-1970s, an annual destination for short stays of cultural immersions in the spring, but no longer his home. The final homecoming to São Miguel, in the sculptor’s 60s, corresponded to an evident slowing down of the pace and reach of his artistic career, which, from then on, would to a great extent rely on reaping the benefits of a path and name built and recognized. He died in São Miguel in 1981, at the age of 90.¹⁰

The idea of an island is embedded in Canto da Maya’s identity, trajectory, and primitivist impulse. As a piece of land surrounded by water on all sides, and thus more impermeable to external influences, an island is par excellence one of the places where one hopes to find the untouched. Islands were fetish places for the primitive search. They fed visions of retreat, detachment, separation, alienation, and fostered the relational point of view on which primitivism concept is based: the existence of an “us” and a “them”.

“On this island, forgotten by the world”¹¹ is an excerpt from a sentence that Canto da Maya wrote in a 1914 draft letter after temporarily returning to Ponta Delgada. He felt forgotten when in São Miguel and displaced everywhere else. When first writing from Lisbon and Paris, it was common for Maya to express loneliness and estrangement. Soon after arriving in Lisbon to attend the School of Fine Arts, in a letter from 1907, he wrote: “I felt strange to this environment, I felt that the force that moves the whole city did not reach me, I was indifferent to

everyone and everything.”¹² A similar tone is used to describe Paris’s impact, which in addition reinforced the longing for meaning:

I’m finally in Paris ... but I still don’t love it. I have been feeling the beauty, the grandeur of the buildings, boulevards, and squares. Still, they also make me energetically feel the struggle for life which one must maintain in such an environment. And this question keeps constantly coming to my brain: is it worth fighting for? To enjoy and suffer this life? Isn’t it preferable to have a simple life in a province corner with the love of family? One would not have so much joy but would not suffer either. It’s hard to arrive in an unknown environment, to find yourself surrounded by strange people who are not interested nor care about you ... It’s difficult, and it’s hard for me until I don’t get used to it, until I don’t put down roots; for a moment I almost feel like leaving everything behind and just go live close to those who are mine ... there is hope that at the end of the month I will be used to it, I will even love Paris. So much art, so many beautiful things make me think: what purpose do I serve? What good do I do to humanity?¹³

To exist is to take place, and for the sculptor, to be, was coupled with a spatial dilemma. On the one hand, the Azores embodied home, family, roots, and a detox from modernization, which he longed for. On the other hand, he distanced himself from what he called the “spirit of the province”.¹⁴ His writing denotes a position on the outside and/or above it. A more extended stay on the island would stifle him and compromise his career. Each homecoming was appreciated and hoped for in the condition of its provisional nature, as a needed pause between the acts of a play. In turn, Paris triggered a sense of alienation too. The city that acted as the sculptor’s stage for artistic maturation and self-affirmation also appeared to be a source of disenchantment and hostility. In Maya’s description of the relationship between the Parisian Musée de Cluny and its surroundings, one can notice the projection of the artist’s feelings towards the city:

the garden full of historic stones and the architecture of the Palace seem to protest against the new avenues, the modern houses, the movement of the streets, the whole civilisation that surrounds it and seems to want to swallow it.¹⁵

Like the museum in question, Maya’s dwelling in the city was purposefully surrounded by abundant vegetation, acting as a protective barrier.

Ambivalence is not a contradiction. Duality permeates the artist’s discourse, but is only paradoxical in appearance: the artist who had a hierarchical view of society and the conviction that he occupied a higher position in it; the young man who, upon arriving in Lisbon in 1907, furnished his room with upholstered armchairs and drapes of silk and cotton,¹⁶ and for whom Paris, he wrote, “did not surprise”,¹⁷ is the same man who, on his return to Ponta Delgada in 1914, wrote:

I left ... the bourgeois car, and I chose the walk of the poor ... The soul of things better pierced me, and I received a purifying blessing. The less we depend on others, and the more we simplify, the happier we are. The maximum of happiness might perhaps be in the minimum of the needs.¹⁸

The frequent voiced need to retreat and the artist’s self-perception as a stranger should not cloud the fact that many of Maya’s relocations and, above all, the longer stays in Paris were his choices. As Christopher Reed stresses, many modernists – as it seems to be the case here – “eagerly

sought out geographic displacement”, since “to be alien is, among other things, to be free from the constraints of one’s home culture”.¹⁹ This does not mean or imply that a displaced artist straightforwardly rejects his native culture or desires to overcome, or at least minimize, its remnants in his present behavior or worldview. As Maya’s trajectory, writing, and work demonstrate, the relationship with home culture was far more complex and dynamic. The welcomed distance went hand in hand with the longing for the unique qualities of home. Homeland was as much a source of otherness as the distant cultures his sculpture addressed. As Reed rightly sums up, “ultimately alienation and identification are inseparable and complementary.”²⁰

What and whose primitivism

The attempt to define Canto da Maya’s primitivism by singling out a set of formal characteristics would be not only unproductive but also misleading. First, the conscious departure from academicism, mainly by emphasizing form and volume over the verisimilitude of the subject, is far from limited to those pieces that denote a primitivist drive in Maya’s body of work. Moreover, the same formal trajectory can be found in previous, contemporary, and later artists, connected or not with Western renditions of the primitive. In other words, primitivism tended to capitalize on the gradual erosion of academicism and came to be perceived as a device or path to its overcoming, without, nevertheless, being neither the first nor the exclusive route or tool to that end.

Second, in terms of allure supplies – reimagined and remixed, more than binary-appropriated – Canto da Maya’s primitivism is plural (see Figures 8.1–8.3)

The temporal and spatial references that intersected in his work, sometimes several in the same piece, are multiple: archaic and classical Greek art, medieval sculpture, folk motifs, Egypt, East, South, and Southeast Asia traces and, sporadically, Africa and Oceania ones. The experiences of time and place are, as Peter Osborne emphasizes, “inextricably bound together”.²¹ This is particularly clear when observing how intertwined both experiences are in a relational category, such as primitivism, even if it is considered to be “essentially a temporal concept”.²² As Johannes Fabian points out, one of the key aspects developed in the nineteenth century concerning the evolutionist conception of time is that “relationships between parts of the world (in the widest sense of both natural and sociocultural entities) can be understood as temporal relations”.²³ The primitive fabrication required the perception of a distance between the self and the other, an interval not just of space *or* time, but of space *thus* time and vice-versa. This rationale is better formulated by Fabian when analyzing Hegel’s *Aesthetics* and its underlying (and lasting) allochronic discourse: “That which is past is remote, that which is remote is past.”²⁴

Geography and chronology were loosely addressed in Maya’s works. The attitude was not singular, nor did it take place in a vacuum. It was in line with the imperial definitions in force. Despite the visible growth, from the nineteenth century onward, of ground-based scientific research and documentation of colonial territories (with cartography as a top priority), colonial empires often fed to the public fuzzy geographical limits to foster the projection and/or appearance of control, critical both internally and externally. Moreover, the artist’s gesture did not intend to be accurate. Quite the opposite; the quest for humanity’s permanent and common ground resulted in suprahistorical figures, capable of transcending time and space. Furthermore, in Canto da Maya’s eyes, the pursuit of genuineness seemed to require a sensorial approach, unburdened from the depth of intellectual dives. He had effective contact with museums that held collections that could have acted as a visual stimulus for the primitivism he came to pursue. The Ethnographic Museum of the Geographic Society of Lisbon, the Louvre Museum, the Trocadéro Museum of Ethnography, the Guimet National Museum of Asian Arts, and the Petit Palais in Paris, all visited by the artist,²⁵



Figure 8.1 Canto da Maya, *Dança e Música* (detail), c. 1926, bas-relief in painted cement, carried out for the Bristol Club cabaret hall in Lisbon (refurbished in that year), 185 × 150 × 3 cm. Collection Carlos Machado Museum (inventory no. 5275). © António Pacheco. Image courtesy Carlos Machado Museum.

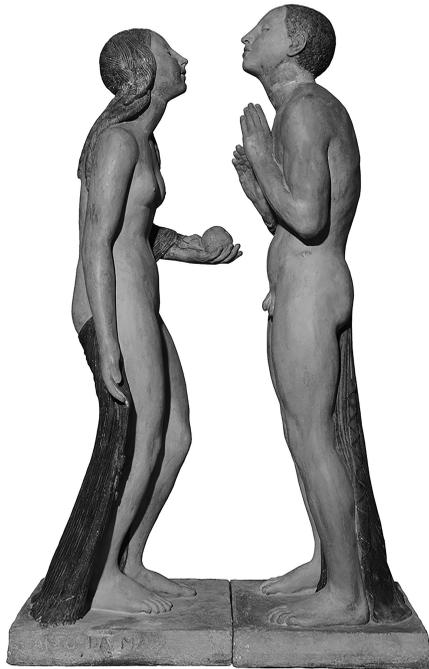


Figure 8.2 Canto da Maya, *Adão e Eva or Le Printemps*, c. 1929, painted terracotta, 160 × 48 × 54 cm, 166 × 50.5 × 48 cm. Collection Carlos Machado Museum (inventory no. 5725). © António Pacheco. Image courtesy Carlos Machado Museum.



Figure 8.3 Canto da Maya, *Namorados*, c. 1940, terracotta, 96.7 × 66 × 15 cm. Collection Carlos Machado Museum (inventory no. 5770). © António Pacheco. Image courtesy Carlos Machado Museum.

are among the most apparent interfaces between him and the mentioned cultures and regions. However, in my view, Canto da Maya's primitivism was, in terms of substance, a second-hand exercise for the most part. It was the outcome of an intuitive process, through which the artist took in previously digested visual references of other places and times. The delivery mediums of these references could be and certainly were multiple and disparate.

One can take Antiquity appropriation as an example. As the collection in the Carlos Machado Museum demonstrates, Canto da Maya's academic drawings naturally encompassed the sketching of famous classical sculptures, such as the *Discobolus* of Myron, the *Venus de Milo* or *Laocoön and His Sons*. He studied Greek and Roman architecture and Oriental art in his first (and last) year of Architecture training at the Lisbon School of Fine Arts.²⁶ He sailed past Greece and the North African coast in 1912²⁷ and visited Rome with his parents in 1913. Nevertheless, there is no expressive impact or self-reflection, let alone an overturning effect of these experiences in his writing. Moreover, Antiquity would not clearly surface in his sculpture until the end of the First World War. By then, his exposure to widespread interest and appropriation of ancient cultures was significant. Two examples of the plethora of fillips that surrounded him can be provided. First, in Boulogne, Maya had as a neighbor the archaeologist and religious historian Salomon Reinach, who published on, among other topics, Greek and Roman art. The sculptor admired him and took part in gatherings at his residence,²⁸ known as a center of gravity of the intelligentsia of the time. Second, given the weight of dance in the themes that stand out in the first stage of his career, it is not unreasonable to ponder, among others, a footprint of the *Ballets Russes* in his work,²⁹ as occurred with so many other artists. In fact, in an undated photographic album recently acquired by the Carlos Machado Museum, probably compiled by Canto da Maya himself in the early twentieth century, after several pictures of his works from 1912 and 1913, there is a full-body photo of him (see Figure 8.4), dressed in costumes that resemble those designed by Léon Bakst for the company for productions such as *Daphnis et Chloé* (1912) and *La Légende de Joseph* (1914).³⁰



Figure 8.4 Photograph of Canto da Maya, undated (1912–1914?). Collection Carlos Machado Museum (album no. 0327). © António Pacheco. Image courtesy Carlos Machado Museum.

It is important to stress that the interpretation proposed here does not intend to replace a linear explanation of the creative process – the belief in a self-found and self-made primitivism – for its opposite, equally reductive – the classification of Maya’s primitivism as entirely derivative. My goal is to further question both notions and their underlying evaluative hierarchy. As an alternative, I emphasize the concept of interchange to shed light on his work. Despite considering himself a stranger, not entirely integrated in Paris, Canto da Maya was in perfect tune with the ambiance and sociability of the French capital’s artistic scene. The critics received his works well, he collaborated with influential architects (Robert Mallet-Stevens, for instance), and circulated among the intelligentsia of the time. He operated within this imperial, international, transnational, and global framework, marked by more and less formal spaces and networks of transfer, circulation, interaction, and confluence of interests, ideas, and visual stimuli. Therefore, unknotting his work can be an impoverishing avenue, given its intertwined nature. It discloses the sculptor’s engagement with a context crossed by Rodin’s lasting impact, symbolism, art deco, naïve art, multiple appropriation drills of Antiquity, and a growing transnational visual narrative of European colonialism. The numerous similitudes and links that Maya’s work comprises are, therefore, to be expected.

The realization that Canto da Maya’s work is far from singular destabilizes an internalist conception of Portugal’s art history, one that praises the Azorean sculptor’s originality, while at the same time and without apparent contradiction grounding his eccentric domestic position in the formal parallels that his work presents with a few well-known Parisian artists. Portuguese art historiography is a fertile ground for exceptionality narratives that act as oxygen balloons in a scenario otherwise largely perceived as desolate. Adopting global history tools to the study of Portuguese art can, on the one hand, be a fearsome farewell to established cases of uniqueness. On the other hand, it

is a corrective maneuver that, instead, can put Portuguese art on the map, not through intermittent spasms nor epiphenomena, but via a systemic approach, able to place this art in a common global situation and ask how the first responded to latter. Canto da Maya is an exemplary case study to test this method, because it pushes art historians to drop national frontiers and defies the closed circuit connecting Lisbon and Paris. His work has links with that of artists he never met nor who lived in Paris, thus pointing to a broader phenomenon that prompted multiple and related responses. Paris, in turn, was a local stage for a global interchange. One does not need to look far for examples: Maya's neighborhood in the city was quite literally a portal to other intra- and extra-European realities.

Social and artistic rebirth

At the beginning of his sculpting career, Maya addressed sculpture as a medium to expose, with humor but assertiveness, his social critique towards what he perceived as bourgeois hypocrisy and a crisis of values.

He soon abandoned the small caricature format, as well as the moralist drive. However, his work continued to react to a perceived decay. Instead of denouncing, he shaped the alternative: the return to a more cohesive, simple, natural, and mystical state. The attitude condenses the core of Roger Griffin's maximalist definition of modernism: a countervailing palingenetic reaction to the alleged decadence resulting from the impact of Western modernization.³¹

In art as in life, Canto da Maya saw an urgent need to reestablish a connection with the essence of human nature, the fundamental impulses of life. In his view, other cultures, unlike Europe, had managed to maintain this vitality. After seeing an exhibition in Paris of Latin American artists, the sculptor, in a letter to his daughter Violante, stated that they had "another sensitivity, different from that of Europe in general, which had frozen and killed everything". Art, he asserted, "must have a bit of intellectualism, but it must also have sensitivity".³² Fascination and discrimination can be two sides of the same coin. The praise for Latin American artists contains their devaluation. These works' vitality resulted from their supposed lesser intellectual dimension, which translated, in artistic terms, into more naïve and spontaneous approaches. Europe was undoubtedly regarded as more advanced, but its perceived artistic progress, measured by the mastery of technique, had brought, in the eyes of many, an overbearing weight of the rational mind over spirituality and emotions. This assessment was far from new. It reverberated, for instance, nineteenth-century disenchantment with art after Raphael, condemned as the tipping point for an over-intellectualization of the creative process and the loss of its transcendental dimension and sense. At that time, too, a break with conventions was sought. Maya regarded simplification and essentialization as ways to rejuvenate European sculpture, which, to his eyes, was dry, sterilized by the excess of rationalism and the mechanical pursuit of technical virtuosity.

Maya's preference for terracotta, several times polychromed, perfectly suited his artistic agenda. First, this highly plastic and manually handled substance rendered the need for a mediation between the artist and the material null. The direct and unfiltered experience with the matter was characteristic of *avantgarde*, enhancing a break with the academic mindset and education. Second, a reversal of value judgments was in play: the affordable terracotta, hardly regarded as socially dignifying and often diminished as a substance mainly fit for the preliminary stages of an artwork creation (drafts and models), was now the elected material for the finished piece. Third, at stake was the rehabilitation of a material with a long historical track record, whose vitality had decayed in Europe but persisted in other parts of the globe. And, for a Portuguese sculptor, the gesture had an additional layer of meaning, given the noteworthy national tradition regarding the use of terracotta, at the time in decline since its impactful use in baroque Portuguese nativity scenes.

The primitivism in Canto da Maya acted as a path for a rebirth or a corrective realignment of the route. Resorting to the earliest stages of European art, to alternative cradles of civilisation, other

geographies, or social classes, was equally fruitful to the desired reboot. It was only a subversion strategy in appearance: the artistic hierarchy, similar to the civilizational one, remained unaffected in its worldview. The allure for modernity's otherness, its opposite, the pre-modern or the non-modern, only solidified the linear evaluative grid on which the modernity paradigm rested. The fascination with the other hardly conveyed the desire to know them. It was predominantly a way to imagine a different self, hence a process centered on the self, that departed and returned to the self. The difference, or the seduction with a particular difference, was assimilated and mainstreamed. The simplicity and candor of the outcome hinged on a conscious and thoughtful process.

The anemia detected in the artistic field was, for Canto da Maya, a sign of a wider and upstream lifelessness, that of modern life itself, marked, in his view, by the alienation of the individual, by the excess of individualism, rationalism, urbanism, and massification. Therefore, primitivism constituted a part of a broader and more multifaceted reaction to the modernization process, pointing out its decadent aspects and ways to overcome them. It is no coincidence that Eve detains a significant presence in Maya's work, just as she had in art since the end of the nineteenth century. Eve is the quintessential palingenetic icon, claiming the possibility of a fresh start. More than a nostalgia for a pre-modern world, there is a will to regenerate the present. This idea is evident in how Canto da Maya, in a letter to his parents in 1912, describes Puvis de Chavannes' murals in the Paris Pantheon:

his paintings have a light, an extremely beautiful, very special and very peculiar colorfulness, which has something of superior, of non-human; his characters are arranged and displayed in a very calm, very simple, almost stylized way, which has flavor, perhaps divine or better primitive, of a contemporary life to Adam and Eve.³³

Looking backwards to find the new was far from regressive. What might be read as reactionary was, for the artist, a drive towards what the future should be. A clear-cut example can be found in the bas-relief commissioned to Maya for the Portuguese pavilion in the New York International Exhibition of 1939, dedicated to the "World of Tomorrow". His participation in displaying the Portuguese version of the future, placed at the exterior of the pavilion, consisted of a bas-relief entitled "Family in Portugal" (see Figure 8.5) at the top of a flight of stairs.

Even considering the expectable artistic constraints regarding an artwork produced under and for the right-wing dictatorship that ruled the country from 1933 to 1974 (the so-called 'Estado Novo'/New State), Canto da Maya's bas-relief did not deviate significantly from previous works.



Figure 8.5 The world of tomorrow and family in Portugal: grandparents, children and grandchildren (frieze sculpted by Canto da Maya and presented at the Portugal Pavilion in the New York World's Fair of 1939). Detail of the photograph taken in 1939. © Mário Novais. Image courtesy Art Library of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, CFT003.102259.

It sheds light on the Janus-faced nature of the alternative modernity that he and, with its own agenda, the regime, too, searched for on a countryside landscape, an idyllic family of peasants emerges; children and animals cohabit in peace, and the manual care and tenderness extend to labor – suggested by agriculture harvests and the boats near the sea – as if a natural extension of the being. The undisturbed sequence of grandparents, children and grandchildren clung on to the timeless cycle of life, the homogeneity and predictability that offered ontological security.

For Maya, as for other modern artists, primitivism was a self-reflective exercise, which questioned the premises of modernity to reimagine it. It conveyed a reaction to modern alienation, proposing, in exchange, another form of alienation, one in which the artist, familiar with the hustle and bustle of the big city, reinvented its opposite: an authentic and straightforward way of life, such as Adam and Eve; the realm of the uncomplicated, the unsophisticated, the pure, and the unpolluted.

The primitive in him

In the search for a new vitality, Canto da Maya reinvented himself, as if carving his own rebirth. From 1927 onward, the sculptor stopped signing his work as “E. do Canto” or “Ernesto do Canto”, opting instead, from then on, to consistently use “Canto da Maya”, which literally translates as the “Chant of Maya”. Maya was already his surname, but he reframed its meaning. In an interview, partially transcribed and integrated in the exhibition dedicated to this sculptor in the Carlos Machado Museum, one can read the artist’s explanation: “Maya, the goddess of illusion in India, seduced me. Almost all of my sculptures could have that title.”³⁴ The reclaiming of the magical power of art, the belief that it could act as a medium to access the sacral and the idea that beyond the physical dimension of a work of art laid a transcendental world waiting to be unlocked were all dear notions to Canto da Maya. Marianna Torgovnick’s take on Lukács’s concept of “transcendental homelessness”³⁵ is useful for understand the Portuguese artist. Maya was not drawn to any kind of organized religion. What he longed for was the sense of being part of a wholeness not bound by time nor space, and art was a privileged tool to achieve so. He demanded that sculpture had “something of mighty, of immaterial, that comes close to a facet of the immense truth of the infinity”, and argued that art was “a way of better understanding the infinity, of perfecting oneself, of approaching the truth, not through the cold mathematical form of science, but the indecisive feeling”.³⁶

The artist also attempted to “primitivize” certain aspects of his life. This is, once again, a constructed and ambivalent endeavor. Maya’s efforts to adopt a more “natural” and “simple” existence, detached from what he perceived as superfluous or pretentious, could, with different lenses, be easily regarded at the time as eccentric or affected. For example, his frugal eating habits (opposed to restaurants and almost vegetarian-based for recurrent periods), do-it-yourself mindset (for instance, regarding home furnishing), and informal way of dressing, particularly until the early 1940s (with a beret, wide velour pants, and sandals in summer), evidenced by his correspondence and family accounts,³⁷ are often referred as signs of his strong personality and motive for the perception of ‘otherness’ within him.

In another context, the artist can be found embracing the performative nature of a “going native” attitude.³⁸ This appears to be the case when Canto da Maya staged the “primitive” he represented. The gesture of “reverse mimicry” is shown in a photograph of the artist posing in front of a bas-relief of his making, dressed and acting as the (supposed) African native he depicted (see Figure 8.6). Canto da Maya completed this bas-relief for the Pavilion of Honor and Lisbon, which stood in the Portuguese World Exhibition of 1940 in Lisbon.

There is nothing uncommon in the concrete act of having his work, himself, or both photographed. Canto da Maya had photographic equipment and the habit of using photography to promote his career and make his works known to friends, peers, and art critics.³⁹ What remains

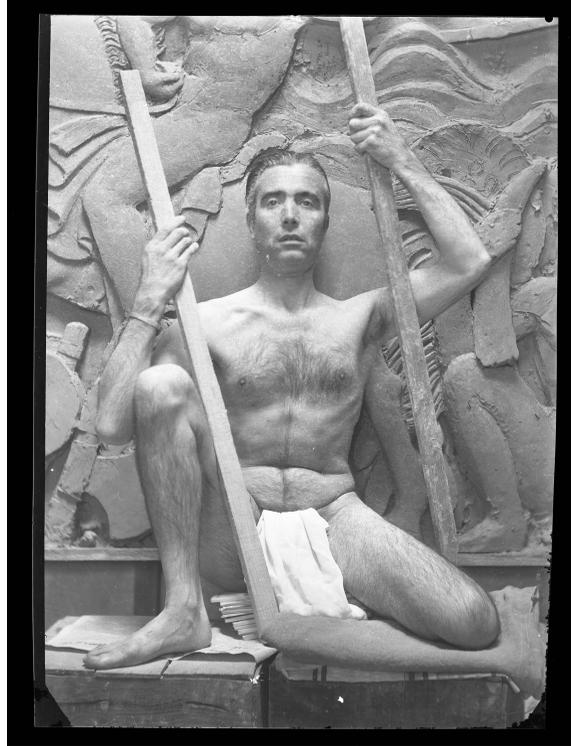


Figure 8.6 Canto da Maya posing as the supposed African native that he represented in the bas-relief, placed behind him (on the right). Unknown author and date (attributed to 1940). The final work was presented in a façade of the Pavilion of Honor and Lisbon, in the Portuguese World Exhibition of 1940. Part of the collection of glass plate photographs of Canto da Maya, his family and works, held by the Carlos Machado Museum (inventory no. 0191). Image courtesy Carlos Machado Museum.

unclear is the picture's layers of significance. The documentation available so far does not shed any light on how Canto da Maya perceived and related to Portuguese colonialism, of which the cited 1940s display was an indubitable celebration and legitimation initiative. This topic and the artist's thoughts about the regime that ruled his country for more than 40 years are usually circumvented in the literature and remain unclarified. For the moment, we are left with this striking photograph (see Figure 9.6), whose consumption and circulation remain unknown at this point. It is crucial to refrain from a dichotomic assessment when analyzing the very phenomenon of dichotomy creation and breeding. It is vital to question what is behind and beyond what appears to be a very conscious and deliberate act. At the same time, one must be aware that an image can resonate far beyond its author's or subject's plans. The artist dressed as the African that he stereotypically depicted could have had a subversive potential. But this possibility was exhausted in the face of artificial role-playing with little consequence, hardly able, even as a potentially ironic gesture, to overcome the barriers of the art world and move a larger audience. As such, regardless of the degree of commitment and awareness, and despite the ambiguous lines that separate accordance and obedience, Canto da Maya contributed to the continuous crafting of what Stoler and Cooper termed a "grammar of difference".⁴⁰

Maya's primitivism undoubtedly reverberates a European culture that naturalized colonialism. However, his work did not specifically address Portuguese colonies beyond the

occasional pieces produced for the country's pavilions in international exhibitions. In fact, the sculptor moved away from what could be perceived as the "primitive" closest to him: either the Azorean peasants or the nation's present and past colonial territories, whose material traces he observed as early as 1907, in Lisbon.⁴¹ Primitivism only emerged in his work around 1918–1919, after the impact of the Parisian milieu and the First World War, a conflict that, for the artist, confirmed the self-destructive capacity of Western civilisation.

The primitive impulse crossed virtually Canto da Maya's entire artistic journey, although not monopolizing his work. In addition, Maya's sculpture encompassed a stylized naturalism, every so often with a monumental scale, typical of official commissions, as well as multiple intimate sculptures that directly reflected significant people and moments of his personal life, from parenthood to the loss of his first child. Terracotta was Maya's preferred medium in works that fell into the realm of primitivism or his inner circle. In the event of State or city council commissions, terracotta was tellingly replaced by materials traditionally perceived as more dignified and which demanded a less intimate technique, thus quite literally further distancing the artist and the medium, such as bronze, cement imitating stone, or, in the case of national representations in temporary exhibitions, the use of plaster with the same simulation aims.

Mainly concentrated between 1918 and 1940, Maya's primitive drive manifested a clear deceleration after roughly two decades. Cautiousness precludes me to consider the existence of a full interruption of primitivism, since neither all the sculptor's artworks are available to the public nor a comprehensive inventory of his works in foreign museums exists. As stated, this research scope, though comprising most of Maya's work, focused on the pieces held in display or in the reserves of Portuguese museums, mainly that of Carlos Machado, in Ponta Delgada. The same applies to written documentation which, to a significant extent, is still kept by his heirs, especially in regard to the middle and latter stages of the artist's career. A consistent explanation for his primitivism deceleration or halt requires the analysis of more data. As such, to what degree of correlation or causation fall the undertaking of additional public commissions, the definitive return to the Azores, or merely the aging of the artist and the slower pace of his production remains open to discussion and reinforces the need to revisit this topic.

The last work identifiable as "primitive", that I only know through a photograph, is precisely in the possession of Canto da Maya's heirs. It is a set of two small bas-reliefs in painted terracotta attached to cabinet doors. Dated from circa 1965 and until now named "primitive men",⁴² they are, in fact, a representation of Adam and Eve. Despite the close similarity between the two figures, Eve is recognizable for her bust and the presence of a snake. This iconographic attribute is meaningfully rare in other Eves sculpted by Maya, attesting to an approach that dwells more in the notions of (lost) paradise and the raw creational force embodied, in the view of various civilizations, by the "first"/"primitive" woman, than in concepts of evil, temptation, and sin. The primordial couple, and in particular Eve, had captured the artist's interest from very early on. As in the case of other modern artists, the endurance of this theme throughout Maya's career expresses the modernist allure and search for a restart, a "spiritual palingenesis".⁴³ Eve encapsulated the possibility of both a reset and a re-enchantment. As such, Véronique Serrano's bulls-eye overture question⁴⁴ in the catalog dedicated to *The Nude from Gauguin to Bonnard: Eve, Icon of Modernity?* – can be taken as an assertion, increasingly documented with monographic studies.

The definitive return of Canto da Maya to the Azores in 1953 was a new beginning. Another beginning. Modern art wove not just "the tradition of the new",⁴⁵ but the specifically modernist tradition of the restart. Canto da Maya conceived his house from scratch, on an isolated hill located south of the island of São Miguel. Built between 1954 and 1968, it renders, in architectural language, the alternative modernity that Maya pursued: a place where nature and the human being could have a symbiotic relationship, where reinforced concrete and ornament dismissal could harmoniously dialogue with personal idiosyncrasies and handcrafted details.⁴⁶

The sculptor drew the plans, picked the materials, chose the surrounding vegetation, and, as was his habit, manufactured part of his furniture. He lived several years without electricity, phone, radio, or a car.⁴⁷ The search for simplicity, in art as in life, was deliberate and industrious. From Maya's late 20s onward, he became captivated by lost ages and ways that were not his, had never been his and that, in the last stage of his life, he decided, not without ambiguity, to make his own.

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Notes

- 1 See, among others, Raquel Henriques da Silva, "Sinais de ruptura: 'livres' e humoristas", *História da Arte Portuguesa* (Paulo Pereira, ed.), vol. 3. Lisbon: Círculo de Leitores, 1997, 369–405, 392; Paulo Henriques, "Isolation. Art in the Portugal of Fernando Pessoa", *Modern Art in Portugal. The Artists Contemporaries of Fernando Pessoa*. Zurich: Edition Stemmler, 1998, 34–59, 50; María Jesús Ávila, "Escultura moderna, uma árdua conquista", *Arte Portuguesa do Século XX: 1910–1960* (Pedro Lapa and Emília Tavares, eds.). Lisbon: Instituto dos Museus e da Conservação; Museu Nacional de Arte Contemporânea – Museu do Chiado; Leya, 2011, LXXVII–LXXXVII, LXXIX; José Silva Teixeira, "Escultura pública em Portugal: monumentos, heróis e mitos (séc. XX)", PhD thesis, Universidade de Lisboa, 2008, 68, 389, <https://repositorio.ul.pt/handle/10451/6661>; David Santos, "'Na ilha e com a ilha novamente'. Os Açores e as vanguardas artísticas", *História da Arte nos Açores (c.1427–2000)* (Delfim Sardo, João Vieira Caldas, and Vítor Serrão, eds.). N.p.: Secretaria Regional da Educação e Cultura dos Açores, 2018, 665–681; Victor dos Reis, "O primitivo moderno: Canto da Maya e os anos de Paris (1912–1937)", *Canto da Maya* (Sílvia Massa, ed.). Ponta Delgada: Secretaria Regional da Educação e Cultura; Direção Regional da Cultura; and Museu Carlos Machado, 2019, 33–39, 33.
- 2 See Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton, "Primitive", *Critical Terms for Art History* (Richard Shiff and Robert S. Nelson, eds.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003, 217–233, 217; Colin Rhodes, *Primitivism and Modern Art*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1994, 13; Fred Myers, "'Primitivism', Anthropology, and the Category of 'primitive art'", *Handbook of Material Culture* (Christopher Tilley et al., eds.). London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi: Sage, 2006, 267–284, 268.
- 3 For a pertinent demonstration of the Janus-faced nature of primitivism, see, for instance, Michael Bell, "Primitivism: Modernism as Anthropology", *The Oxford Handbook of Modernisms* (Peter Brooker et al., eds.). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, 353–367.
- 4 Paulo Henriques, "Insularidade de Canto da Maia", *Canto da Maia. Escultor* (Paulo Henriques, ed.). Lisbon: Instituto Português do Património Cultural and Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1990, 27–59, 29–30. Paulo Henriques was the first to produce a comprehensive analysis of Canto da Maya's life and work. His master thesis, completed in 1989, constituted the cornerstone of the catalogue just referenced, published in 1990, following the exhibition Henriques curated with the same title at the King Luís Painting Gallery, Lisbon. In this text, I follow Paulo Henriques' compilation of Canto da Maya biographical data.
- 5 Paulo Henriques, "Insularidade de Canto da Maia", op. cit., 30.
- 6 See Henriques, "Insularidade de Canto da Maia", op. cit., 31; Lúcia Almeida Matos, *Escultura em Portugal no Século XX (1910–1969)*. Lisbon: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian; Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia, 2007, 103–104.
- 7 Carolyn Boyd, "Julio Antonio, the 'Sculptor of the Race': The Making of a Modernist Myth", *Historia y Política. Ideas, Procesos y Movimientos Sociales*, 37, 2017, 395–413, 405–406.
- 8 Violante Canto da Maya, "Canto da Maya: un Parisien des îles", *Ernesto Canto da Maya: Sculpteur Portugais (XX^e siècle). Un Sculpteur des Açores dans le Paris des Années Trente* (Isabella Kent and Violante Canto da Maya, eds.). Paris: Centre Culturel C. Gulbenkian, 1995, 23. All translations from the French are mine.

- 9 See Jean-François Werner, “The Archives of the Planet: The Life and Works of Albert Kahn”, *Visual Anthropology*, 28, 5, 2015, 438–450.
- 10 Henriques, “Cronologia”, *Canto da Maia. Escultor*, op. cit., 75–83.
- 11 Draft letter written by Canto da Maya to Norberto Côrreia, [1914], PT/MCM/ECM-5.9.1. Archive of the Carlos Machado Museum, Ponta Delgada, Azores. All translations from the Portuguese are mine.
- 12 Letter written by Canto da Maya to his aunt, Ana Leite do Canto Bicudo, Lisbon, 1907, PT/MCM/ECM/COR/1/22 (1.31), Archive of the Carlos Machado Museum, Ponta Delgada, Azores.
- 13 Letter written by Canto da Maya to his parents, Paris, 29 November 1912. Collection of letters written by Ernesto Canto da Maya from Paris to his family, 1912–1913 (AÇORES 8/1335), Ponta Delgada Public Library and Regional Archive, Azores.
- 14 Idem.
- 15 Letter written by Canto da Maya to his parents, Paris, 12 December 1912. Collection of letters written by Ernesto Canto da Maya from Paris to his family, 1912–1913 (AÇORES 8/1335), Ponta Delgada Public Library and Regional Archive, Azores.
- 16 Letter written by Canto da Maya to his aunt, Ana Leite do Canto Bicudo, Lisbon, 19 November 1907, PT MCM ECM/COR/1/21 (1.30), archive of the Carlos Machado Museum, Ponta Delgada, Azores.
- 17 Letter written by Canto da Maya to his parents, Paris, 16 November 1912. Collection of letters written by Ernesto Canto da Maya from Paris to his family, 1912–1913 (AÇORES 8/1335), Ponta Delgada Public Library and Regional Archive, Azores.
- 18 Draft letter written by Canto da Maya to Armando Côrtes Rodrigues, São Miguel, 1914, PT/MCM/ECM-5.1. Archive of the Carlos Machado Museum, Ponta Delgada, Azores.
- 19 Christopher Reed, “Alienation”, *A New Vocabulary for Global Modernism* (Eric Hayot and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, eds.). New York: Columbia University Press, 2016, 11–28, 12–13.
- 20 Idem, 24.
- 21 Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-garde*. London: Verso, 1995, 15.
- 22 Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983, 18.
- 23 Idem, 11–12.
- 24 Ibidem, 127.
- 25 Letter written by Canto da Maya to his parents, Paris, undated [end of 1912–beginning of 1913]; Letter written by Canto da Maya to his parents, Paris, 22 January 1913. Collection of letters written by Ernesto Canto da Maya from Paris to his family, 1912–1913 (AÇORES 8/1335), Ponta Delgada Public Library and Regional Archive, Azores.
- 26 Silvia Massa, “A plástica de Canto da Maya”, *Canto da Maya* (Silvia Massa, ed.), op. cit., 7–25, 8.
- 27 Letter written by Canto da Maya to his parents, Paris, 16 November 1912. Collection of letters written by Ernesto Canto da Maya from Paris to his family, 1912–1913 (AÇORES 8/1335), Ponta Delgada Public Library and Regional Archive, Azores.
- 28 Violante Canto da Maya, “Canto da Maya...”, op. cit., 27–28.
- 29 As suggested by Victor dos Reis, “O primitivo moderno”, op. cit., 36–37.
- 30 For a recent and comprehensive reading of the multifaced and cross-cutting relationship between ancient Greece, Rome, and Egypt and the Ballets Russes, see Clare Fitzgerald (ed.), *Hymn to Apollo: The Ancient World and the Ballets Russes*. Princeton, NJ: Institute for the Study of Ancient World and Princeton University Press, 2019.
- 31 Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, 54.
- 32 Violante Canto da Maya, “Reflets dans un regard d’enfant”, *Ernesto Canto da Maya: Sculpteur...*, op. cit., 60.
- 33 Letter written by Canto da Maya to his parents, Paris, 7 December 1912. Collection of letters written by Ernesto Canto da Maya from Paris to his family, 1912–1913 (AÇORES 8/1335), Ponta Delgada Public Library and Regional Archive, Azores.
- 34 Written information included in the long-lasting exhibition dedicated to Canto da Maya at the Carlos Machado Museum, Ponta Delgada, Azores (visited in August 2019). Translation by the author. No date or source for this interview was provided with this interview excerpt (part of the exhibition materials), nor was it possible to trace this information after contacting the exhibition’s curator, Silvia Massa.
- 35 Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives*. Chicago, IL and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990, 188–189.

- 36 Letter written by Canto da Maya to his parents, Paris, 30 March 1913. Collection of letters written by Ernesto Canto da Maya from Paris to his family, 1912–1913 (AÇORES 8/1335), Ponta Delgada Public Library and Regional Archive, Azores.
- 37 Violante Canto da Maya, “Reflets dans un regard d’enfant”, op. cit., 44–46.
- 38 For a discussion of the relationship between photography and the colonial gaze (including but not limited to the analysis of mimicry and ‘going native’ phenomena), see, among the vast literature, David Bate, “Photography and the Colonial Vision”, *Third Text*, 7, 22, March 1993, 81–91; Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge, 1994; James R. Ryan, *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualization of the British Empire*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1997; Anne Maxwell, *Colonial Photography and Exhibitions: Representations of the “Native” and the Making of European Identities*. London: Leicester University Press, 2000; Linda Colley, “Going Native, Telling Tales: Captivity, Collaborations and Empire”, *Past & Present*, 168, 1, August 1, 2000, 170–193; Kymberly N. Pinder (ed.), *Race-Ing Art History: Critical Readings in Race and Art History*. New York: Routledge, 2002; Paul S. Landau, “Empires of the Visual: Photography and Colonial Administration in Africa”, *Images and Empires: Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa* (Paul Stuart Landau and Deborah D. Kaspin, eds.). Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002, 141–171; Eleanor M. Hight and Gary D. Sampson (eds.), *Colonialist Photography: Imag(In) Ing Race and Place*. London and New York: Routledge, 2005; Randal Rogers, “Colonial Imitation and Racial Insubordination: Photography at the Louisiana Purchase Exhibition of 1904”, *History of Photography*, 32, 4, 3 October 2008, 347–367; Filipa Lowndes Vicente (ed.), *O Império da Visão. Fotografia no Contexto Colonial Português (1860–1960)*. Lisbon: Edições 70, 2014; Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo and Joana Pontes (eds.), *Visões do Império*. Lisbon: Tinta da China, 2021.
- 39 See Massa, “A plástica de Canto da Maya”, op. cit., 14–15.
- 40 Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, “Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda”, *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (eds.). Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1997, 3.
- 41 Letter written by Canto da Maya to his aunt, Lisbon, 5 December 1907, PT/MCM/ECM/COR/1/25 (1.35), archive of the Carlos Machado Museum, Ponta Delgada, Azores.
- 42 Henriques (ed.), *Canto da Maia. Escultor*, op. cit., 202–203.
- 43 Roger Griffin, *Terrorist’s Creed: Fanatical Violence and the Human Need for Meaning*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, 54.
- 44 Véronique Serrano, “Eve, modern icon?”, *The Nude from Gauguin to Bonnard: Eve, Icon of Modernity?* (Véronique Serrano, ed.). Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2013, 9–11.
- 45 Harold Rosenberg, *The Tradition of the New*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959.
- 46 See Luís Bernardo Brito e Abreu, “Monte dos Vendavais”, *Canto da Maya* (Silvia Massa, ed.), op. cit., 27–31.
- 47 Violante Canto da Maya, “Reflets dans un regard d’enfant”, op. cit., 47.

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9 The pastoral in modern Catalan art

Joaquim Sunyer and Joan Miró

M. Lluïsa Faxedas Brujats

In 1911, the Catalan artist Joaquim Sunyer (1874–1956) painted and exhibited one of his most important works, titled *Pastoral*. Some years later, a younger Catalan artist, Joan Miró (1893–1993), would paint another work with the exact same motif and title, even if in a markedly different style. By comparing the two paintings, my aim is, on the one hand, to probe more deeply into the links between Miró’s work and the Catalan artistic context in which he emerged, and on the other hand, to discuss how his engagement with the idea of the primitive enabled him to move away from those aspects of this context that were more banal and limiting to him, while projecting the Catalan-ness of his work internationally.

The pastoral has long been, above all, a subject of study and analysis in the field of literary studies, as the genre is considered to have begun with the poetry of Theocritus and has been perfected with that of Virgil. However, some of the ideas developed by literary theorists have been applied fruitfully to the field of art. The pastoral has been defined as a mode or genre that recalls a mythical idea of an Edenic landscape, which always represents, in one way or another, an idyllic natural world in which humans and animals live harmoniously. Some of the keywords used to characterise pastoral art include idealism, nostalgia, order and stability; a Golden Age, a retreat (to nature) and a return (to civilisation), and Arcadia.¹ The theorist David Halperin attempted to define it based on four points. First, “Pastoral is the name commonly given to literature about or pertaining to herdsmen and their activities in a country setting”, activities that are assumed to be caring for the animals, singing or playing music, and making love. Second,

Pastoral achieves significance by oppositions, by the set of contrasts, expressed or implied, which the values embodied in its world create with other ways of life. The most traditional is between the little world of natural simplicity and the great world of civilisation, power, statecraft, ordered society, established codes of behaviour; artifice in general.

And third, and highly pertinent in this case, he reminds us that, in the pastoral, there is also a contrast “between a confused or conflict-ridden reality and the artistic depiction of it as comprehensible, meaningful, or harmonious”.² The fourth point is simply, “A work which satisfies the requirements of any two of the three preceding points has fulfilled the necessary and sufficient conditions of pastoral”.³

The first trait focuses on the fact that the central element in the art of pastoral is not that of the landscape, as is sometimes commonly thought,⁴ but that of the shepherd or shepherdess and the relationship they have with the landscape. This is because the representative anecdote of pastoral is the lives of shepherds, meaning “that pastoral works are representations of shepherds, who are felt to be representative of some other or of all other men”.⁵ Meanwhile, the second and third traits place the focus of interest of the pastoral on the fact that it is always related to an idea of

conflict and contrast, the more or less satisfactory resolution of which is found in the work of art. Jeremy Strick summarised this as follows: “While celebrating harmony and simple fulfilment, the pastoral is generated by alienation and dissatisfaction. The ideal world of the pastoral finds the real world wanting.”⁶ William Empson, long considered one of the most influential theorists in modern and contemporary discussions on the subject of the pastoral, summed it up more succinctly when he wrote about “the pastoral process of putting the complex into the simple”.⁷ This definition of the motif, which is quite reductive, is what eventually encouraged some authors to include apparently unrelated texts in the genre of the pastoral, such as *Alice in Wonderland* or even certain abstract paintings.⁸

We already find visual representations of the classical literary motif of the pastoral on the walls of Roman houses painted in the first centuries B.C. and A.D., but then, in the Middle Ages, the motif lost all importance. The revival began in the Renaissance (with artists of the stature of Giorgione, followed by Poussin and Claude Lorrain) and had a moment of singular iconographic importance between the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as can be seen in work by painters such as Signac, Gauguin and Matisse, among others.⁹ This resurgence of the pastoral is unsurprising, as it was a period in which tensions throughout Europe – between the “little world of natural simplicity” of the pre-industrial era, whose ostensible harmony was to be celebrated, and “the great world of civilisation” in which these artists were actually immersed – were acquiring a magnitude never before experienced, a result of the consolidation of capitalism, the growth of cities, and the various technical and scientific developments that made it all possible. This tension was also present in Catalonia, where the radical phenomenon of irreversible industrialisation, urbanisation, and territorial transformation was felt in an especially intense fashion in the 1910s.¹⁰

Such transformations meant that, in the first decades of the twentieth century, Catalonia underwent a period of intense social confrontation, often with outbreaks of violent demonstrations, the most notable of which was probably the *Setmana Tràgica* (Tragic Week) of 1909.¹¹ This period of social instability coincided with the early years of a political movement of *Catalanism*, which sought to reclaim the recognition of Catalonia within Spain as a political, cultural and national entity. In this context, there emerged a transformative ideological project promoted by the nationalist bourgeoisie, which had the support of numerous artists and intellectuals and which took the name of *Noucentisme*. This cultural and political movement originated around 1906 as a reaction against *Modernisme*¹² and the *fin-de-siècle* Decadentism, and exerted a long-lasting influence. It was defined as a modern, regenerating and urban movement, which looked to the future, to the 1900s (its name is a play on the word for 900 and *new century*, in Catalan). At the same time, however, it was rooted in a timeless notion of classicism, which sought to strengthen a sense of brotherhood of the Catalan people among themselves (regardless of the marked social differences that originated in class and economic circumstances), but also with other Mediterranean peoples. *Noucentisme* was not, therefore, without contradictions – although the fact that the movement had its own theorists (not least the philosopher Eugeni d’Ors and the art historian Joaquim Folch i Torres, who enunciated its main political and aesthetic ideas)¹³ has meant that many subsequent historians have seen it as somewhat hegemonic, controlled, and even dogmatic. It must be borne in mind, however, that *Noucentisme* coexisted alongside other approaches to art and culture, ranging from the final stages of *Modernisme*, and symbolism, to the early stirrings of the avant-garde. Moreover, some of the key terms of the movement, such as “Mediterraneanism”, were also championed and interpreted by other artists and intellectuals outside the movement. Finally, and of particular relevance to this discussion, *Noucentisme* is readily identifiable in literature, poetry and art theory to a much greater degree than it is in visual arts practice. Indeed, its very existence in the visual arts has even been called into question.¹⁴

In terms of aesthetics, the main concepts with which the theorists of the movement worked were arbitrariness, understood as a deliberate choice of the idealist form, and classicism; the latter has generally been understood and defined in a dichotomous relationship with primitivism:

Classical versus Oriental is one of the great generative oppositions in modern culture. It is perhaps second in importance in the modern visual arts only to another productive dichotomy, that between the classical and the primitive, to which it is sometimes closely related.¹⁵

Primitivism was key, as is well known, to the development of modern and avant-garde European art, in which context it became the regenerative *otherness* to all things seen as academic, traditional, and outdated; and, in a broader sense, to all things rational and Western. In the case of the turn-of-the-century Catalan art scene, however, *colonial* primitivism (understood as the appropriation of visual references belonging to peoples from other continents and cultures considered, from a European outlook, ‘primitive’) was not common. Before Spain ceased to be a major colonial power, at the end of the nineteenth century, colonial trade, including that of slaves, had been key to Catalonia’s industrial and economic development. Yet, the visual culture of these (now former) colonies had been given little visibility in Catalan (or Spanish) museums and exhibitions.¹⁶ Even in the case of Catalan artists who became familiar with this form of primitivism in Paris, where many of them travelled and sojourned extensively, it did not have a significant impact on their work (with the notable exception of Picasso, who was not Catalan but had been an active member of the artistic scene in Barcelona).

In any case, in the Catalan context, the term “primitive”, which appears quite frequently in the texts and critiques of the time, cannot be considered as directly opposed to classicism, even if its meaning is not always clear because writers “confuse primitive with archaic, traditional with primitive, primitive with racial (national?), primitive with Mediterranean, Arcadian with classic, Cézanne and new with primitive”.¹⁷ Rather than being related to what might be supplied by far-away cultures, the appropriation of the ‘primitive’ by modern artists, including the *noucentistas*, had more to do with the vernacular and with folk culture, and also with early medieval art, which is addressed further on. It could even include references taken from ancient as well as classical art, since interest in these forms often sought to reinforce “a sense of collective identity, promoting a supposed cultural – even racial – ancestry, shared with the peoples of the Mediterranean”.¹⁸ One could say, then, that *Noucentisme* made use of some aspects of the primitive when they helped to reinforce this idea of a shared ancestral Mediterranean spirit, and rejected them when it was felt that it contradicted its project of modernity and civilisation. In this context, the pastoral motif, with its inherent element of conflict, as referred earlier, becomes an ideal place in which to put these contrasts into play.

There are a few examples of the pastoral motif among Catalan painters from the early 1900s, such as in the work of Joaquim Torres-Garcia (1874–1949) and Josep Aragay (1889–1973), but the best-known work on the subject is arguably Joaquim Sunyer’s *Pastoral* (Figure 9.1). This painting, together with 59 other canvases, was part of the *Exhibition of the Works of Joaquim Sunyer*, his first solo show, which opened in Barcelona’s Fayans Català gallery in April 1911. Having first trained in Barcelona, Sunyer moved to Paris in 1896, and it was not until after 1908, when he began spending time in Catalonia ahead of his definitive return, that he would develop his signature style, which was presented for the first time at this exhibition. The show was a major, widely reviewed event, although its reception was controversial and, in some cases, even hostile.¹⁹ *Pastoral* rapidly emerged as the most significant work of the show, and its status grew over time to a point that today, it is considered by many art historians to be the visual icon of *Noucentisme*.²⁰ However, as I recently discussed elsewhere,²¹ this perception needs nuancing given that, at first, there was very little enthusiasm for this work from the *noucentista* writers and theorists: Eugeni d’Ors, the most prominent intellectual figure of the movement, completely



Figure 9.1 Joaquim Sunyer, *Pastoral*, 1910–1911. Oil on canvas, 106 × 152 cm. Arxiu Joan Maragall. Generalitat de Catalunya. Biblioteca de Catalunya, Barcelona. © Joaquim Sunyer/Biblioteca de Catalunya, Barcelona, 2022.

ignored it and did not write about Sunyer and his painting between 1908 and 1920; and Folch i Torres compared it, rather surprisingly, with Gaudí's *Sagrada Família*, based precisely on the fact that they shared an “extremely pure primitivism”.²² It must be said, incidentally, that the *noucentista* generation considered the *Sagrada Família* to be a “sublime abnormality”.²³ Other critics were also quick to note the primitivism in Sunyer's *Pastoral* rather more so than its classicism, which, as stated before, was considered a much more *noucentista* value. I would argue that the reception of this work had to do with the fact that at the very heart of the treatment of the pastoral motif in particular, as in other paintings by Sunyer at the time, lay a kind of nostalgic yearning to return to nature. Yet, *Noucentisme* was headed resolutely toward an urban project that looked to the future. The yearning in Sunyer's painting is expressed through the erotic, rather than maternal, connotations of the naked female figure at the centre of the composition (the shepherdess), which was also quite out of step with the vision of femininity promoted by *Noucentisme*.²⁴ Although this aspect has received scarce attention in historiography, the critic Gabriel Ferrater detected that Sunyer's work clearly expresses “a frank and joyful sexuality – in the manner of Renoir” and “a stamp of erotic enthusiasm”²⁵ which, in his view, was likely the main reason for the difficult reception of the exhibition by the Barcelona public of the time. One visitor even took a knife to one of the paintings, *Maternitat* (1908), in which a mother is seen breastfeeding her child. According to Ferrater, this clearly sexual component of Sunyer's work would not have escaped the notice of Joan Maragall (1860–1911), a modernist poet and art critic who most perceptively interpreted the painting *Pastoral* at the time. He saw Sunyer's work of this period as “a vision of primitive man, eyes fascinated by the corporeity (if I can put it like that) of things”. About the painting *Pastoral*, he specifically noted “the flesh of the landscape: it is a landscape that, enlivened, is made flesh. That woman there is not arbitrary, she is there by

fate”.²⁶ In any case, many of the most important elements of this “visual icon of *Noucentisme*” seem unconnected, if not antagonistic, to some of the essential values of the movement.

Despite the mixed reception it met with upon its first showing, Sunyer’s work quickly became an essential reference for other Catalan artists of the period, and clear echoes of his influence can be found in the work of many other painters, including Celso Lagar (1891–1966), particularly in his *Pastoral* (Figure 9.2). Lagar arrived in Catalonia from Paris in early 1915 with his wife, the sculptor Hortense Bégué (1890–1957), and this was where he carried out most of his work until early 1919. Lagar became immediately aware of the central and referential role that Sunyer played in the Catalan art scene at that time,²⁷ and soon exhibited – in February 1915, in his first show at Galeries Dalmau – a number of works inspired by Sunyer’s motifs and forms; Eugeni d’Ors himself compared the two artists in an article in 1915.²⁸ Lagar’s *Pastoral*, which came the following year, 1916, is one of these works that, in a way, are informed by paintings by Sunyer. Other instances are *The Mediterranean* (1910–1911) and *Three nudes in the forest* (1913), the latter sharing the title and theme of Sunyer’s best-known work. Lagar had been in Paris between 1911 and 1914, and again in 1915 and 1916, so he was well acquainted with the kind of primitivism that was rooted in colonialism. However, in most of his works from 1915 to 1916, he seems to be seeking other kinds of primitivist references that are much more Mediterranean and archaic. The trees and bodies are even more clearly stylised than in Sunyer’s work, whose references are, above all, to be found in Cézanne and in Luca Signorelli’s frescoes in the Orvieto Cathedral. Lagar wrote in 1915 that “we are, in our own time, the initiators of a primitive art”²⁹; and by championing a certain primitive Mediterraneanism, he attempted to immerse himself in the *noucentista* atmosphere that permeated Catalan culture at the time, without having to adhere to its ideological principles which were, essentially, foreign to him.

Nevertheless, Sunyer’s work did not further explore the most ‘primitive’ and forceful elements that can be identified in his paintings of the early 1910s; rather, what can be observed over this decade is a process in which lines and shapes are softened, the colour palette is diversified and the work becomes more cheerful, more delicate, the themes less controversial. This can be seen in another

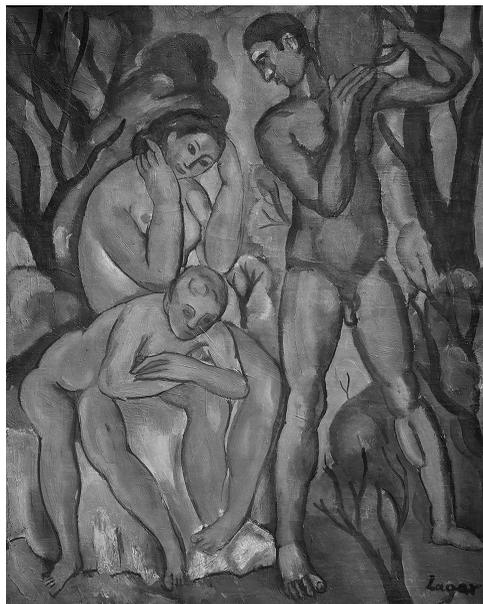


Figure 9.2 Celso Lagar, *Pastoral*, 1916. Oil on canvas, 80.5 × 65 cm. Museu Nacional d’Art de Catalunya, donated by J.S. Dellal, thanks to the Crane Kalman Gallery, London, 1960. Photo: Museu Nacional d’Art de Catalunya, Barcelona. © Celso Lagar/ADAGP, Paris 2022/SPA, Lisboa, 2022.



Figure 9.3 Joaquim Sunyer, *Cala Forn*, 1917. Oil on canvas, 120 × 140.5 cm. Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, donated by Associació d'Amics de les Arts, 1918. Photo: Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya. © Joaquim Sunyer, ADAGP, Paris 2022/SPA, Lisboa, 2022.

of his best-known works, *Cala Forn* (Figure 9.3), created in 1917, which can also be viewed as a pastoral, and perhaps even more explicitly so than his 1911 painting; because if, in the earlier work, the conflict is generated between the world that the picture evokes and the external reality in which it emerges (all the while encouraging a movement of withdrawal and return in keeping with the motif), in *Cala Forn* the conflict is made visible in the canvas itself as an iconographic element in the shape of the two steamships that ply the Mediterranean waters along an idyllic, Catalan coast. Here, these ships serve the same function that the steam train serves in various pastoral landscapes by British and American artists in the late nineteenth century, that is, to evince the clash between machine and nature that characterises the industrial age.³⁰ And yet, the obviousness of this incorporation works in detriment of the suggestive power of the image, in which, furthermore, the “shepherdesses” are fully dressed in the least sensual way possible, as if Sunyer wants expressly to erase all traces of the sexuality evident in the composition that inspired him, which is none other than Picasso’s *Les Desmoiselles d’Avignon*.³¹ *Pastoral* and *Cala Forn* share the same essential theme, the same Mediterraneanness, and they are both rooted in a very specific natural and cultural landscape; but in the latter, the provocative element linked to a certain assumption of the primitive has disappeared, and everything appears so diaphanous and well explained that it somehow becomes redundant.

The connections between the work of Miró and that of Sunyer, and Miró’s own origins in the *Noucentisme* movement, have been pointed out by various authors.³² Even so, only Josep Massot – one of Miró’s biographers – has directly compared Miró’s *Pastorale* (Figure 9.4) with Sunyer’s *Pastoral*, concluding that Miró’s version was “an absolute subversion” of Sunyer’s.³³ Moreover, no one appears to have compared Miró’s version with Lagar’s, although notable connections can be traced between works by Lagar and Miró from the period 1915–1918, which merit further investigation. In any case, what is evident is that Miró’s creative journey began in the context of the Catalan art scene of the 1910s, and that the relationships and tensions between his work and that of his *noucentista* colleagues can be traced back and forth in various directions.

Joan Miró visited Sunyer’s 1911 exhibition in which *Pastoral* was shown for the first time. According to Massot, who bases his account on the testimony of Miró’s close friend Joan Prats,³⁴ the exhibition had a huge impact on him, which is unsurprising since Miró was only 17 at the time. Miró referred to Sunyer a number of times in his correspondence, and this sheds some light

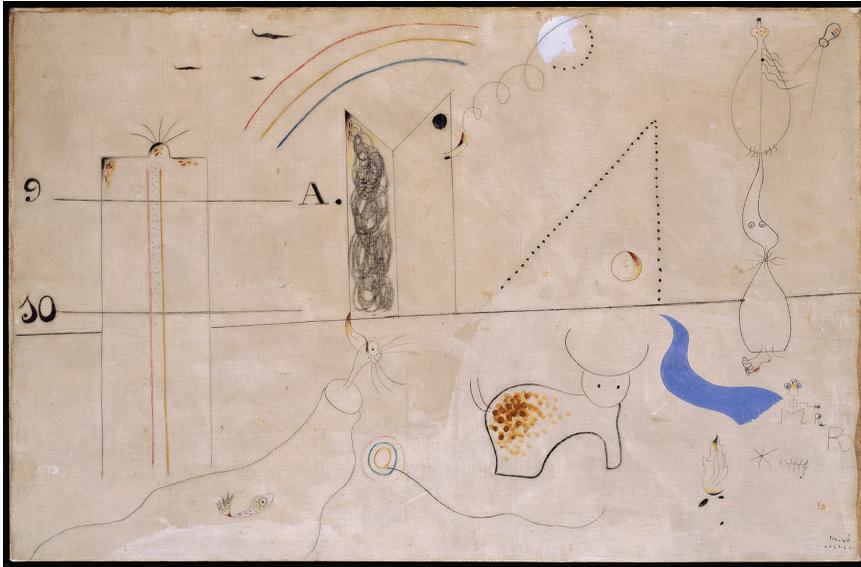


Figure 9.4 Joan Miró, *Pastorale*, 1923–1924. Charcoal and oil on canvas, 60 × 92 cm. MNCARS – Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía. © Joan Miró/ADAGP, Paris 2022/SPA, Lisboa, 2022.

on how his attitude evolved, over the years, towards what the older painter represented for him in the context of Catalan painting. First of all, it is clear that they were acquainted. For example, on several occasions, Miró mentions a recipe for paint that requires egg yolk, which Sunyer had passed on to him and which he used and recommended to his friends.³⁵ And second, it is clear that his attitude towards Sunyer, at least in the beginning, was one of admiration: in 1916, in reference to a group exhibition, he wrote that “Sunyer presented works from Mallorca and Banyuls. It is splendid; it has changed a lot, he has turned very Cezannistic”.³⁶ On another occasion, he points out Sunyer’s “high value”,³⁷ and discussing the 1918 exhibition in which *Cala Forn* was first exhibited, he calls him “admirable”.³⁸ However, as time goes on, Sunyer seems to become, for Miró, the main representative of a Catalan artistic milieu from which he wants to distance himself and, as will be noted later, his comments on Sunyer become more biting.

That said, certain links can be detected between the two men’s work, as indeed several authors have already observed. Regarding their common interest in portraying the Catalan landscape, for example, Eugenio Carmona tells us that

[...] The variation introduced by Sunyer consisted of placing oneself before the landscape with the aim of offering a synthesis and not a description. [...] And the Sunyerian synthesis was so successful among his contemporaries that it can be discerned in later works by Miró, Togores and Dalí. All three created landscapes in which trees, mountains and rustic houses seemed to be made in the manner of Sunyer.³⁹

In contrast, Arnau Puig pays closer attention to how Sunyer and Miró represented the female nude and concludes that, while *Pastoral* had no particular influence on this aspect of Miró’s work, as the naked figure appears diffuse and diluted, the figures in another Sunyer painting, *Tres nus al bosc* (Three nudes in the forest) (1915), “with modelled but not vibrant anatomies [...] may have also ended up prompting the young Miró to take up his charcoals and Chinese inks at Saint Luke [Artists Circle]”.⁴⁰

Although Sunyer's work has been considered by historians to be a paradigmatic example of *Noucentisme*, in reality, his contemporaries did not see it that way and, instead, detected a tone that was rather more primitive – in the sense, as previously explained, of a vague evocation of an ancestral and shared Mediterranean spirit, which is how primitivism was understood in the Catalan context. For the young Miró, the idea of the primitive was very important as a source of creative inspiration but also, in a way, as an aesthetic aspiration. With regard to the latter, his comments in a letter to his friend, Enric Ricart, in October 1917 are very interesting: "Let's be very manly. Let's transplant primitive man to ultra-modern New York, let's inject his soul with metropolitan noise, with flight paths, and have his brain turned into a long 'street' of 224-storey houses [...]"⁴¹ This "primitive man" was, in fact, himself, since in another letter to Ricart from the previous August, Miró describes himself as living as "a primitive, like those people of Ciurana, and a lover, like Dante"⁴² As for the concept of the primitive as a source of creative inspiration, at that time, for Miró, it included all those forms that can be linked with folk culture, but his inspiration also came from the Catalan Romanesque frescoes and the Gothic paintings of the fifteenth century, many of which were being recovered and restored at that time and would be soon exhibited in Barcelona. Years later, in various conversations, Miró would emphasise his admiration for what he called "primitive Catalans", adding that he "had always admired the primitive paintings in Catalan churches and Gothic altarpieces"⁴³ His enthusiasm for these works would be a major influence on what is now called Miró's 'detailist' period, which began around 1917 and culminated in *La masia* (The farm) (1921–1922).⁴⁴ Incidentally, while commenting on the letter from August 1917, Robert Lubar points out that "by contrasting the volatility of modern urban life with an idyllic, pastoral existence in the Catalan countryside, Miró was putting forward his archetypal vision of a primitive Catalonia, unchanged by time, by industrialisation or by political transformations"⁴⁵ In other words, the conflict that the pastoral implicitly evoked was at the centre of Miró's interests from the beginning of his career.

Miró was born in Barcelona, but he always considered home the farmhouse of Mont-roig (Tarragona) that his parents acquired in 1911, in the area where his father's family had originated. Indeed, he declared on numerous occasions that everything he knew and had done came from his stays there and from the intensely vivid relationship he managed to maintain with the surrounding landscape. However, although he would keep returning to Mont-roig and the Catalan landscape, both physically and as the source of much of his creativity, from 1921 Miró settled for a while mainly in Paris. There, his notion of what avant-garde art, in general, and primitivism, in particular, could be was open to enrichment via the interests of his new friends and peers. His contact in Paris with Picasso, with avant-garde painters such as André Masson, and especially with poets such as Max Jacob and Michel Leiris, was fundamental in opening up new paths in his work and encouraged him to push the boundaries of his practice. The fascination with African and Oceanic cultures – so important in the early avant-garde before World War I – was revived with Surrealism and Dadaism.⁴⁶ As I have pointed out before, the artistic objects produced by these cultures (though often misunderstood and disrespectfully appropriated) opened up a way for European artists to criticise a Western world driven only by technique, positivism and extreme rationalism, and to discover a different way of life, more in harmony with nature and with true humanity, as well as open to the power of magic and ritual.⁴⁷ In other words, primitive art was "a demonstration of 'primordial' creation, not mediated by language, but rather, expressed in forms and symbols that directly exposed the 'truth' of things – things 'in themselves'"⁴⁸ and, as such, it was admired. Nevertheless, Miró declared at one point that he was not particularly interested in "African art",⁴⁹ although it is true that, in some of his works from 1925, there are elements that appear to be inspired by masks or that have a totemic air.⁵⁰ On the other hand, years later, he did express his interest in Sumerian art, and this is evidenced

by the fact that he had a dozen or so photographic clippings of works of Sumerian art hanging in his workshop in Son Boter, in Mallorca.⁵¹ In any case, the notion of the primitive became an essential element in his practice. In the work he created between 1923 and 1924 – a momentous period in the definition of his own pictorial language – Miró sought to achieve something very similar to what so many avant-garde artists had pursued in adopting ‘primitive’ influences: not so much to seek out a lost world, but rather to elaborate a language capable of “replacing consciousness in its role as a matrix of thought”⁵² by what Miró himself would, years later, call “the primitive gaze, the savage gaze, the virgin gaze”.⁵³ His painting, *Pastorale*, was a paradigmatic example of this effort.

Work on the painting began in Mont-roig in the autumn of 1923 and ended in the summer of 1924, as was the case with *The Tilled Field* and *Catalan Landscape (The Hunter)*. Compared with these two paintings, however, *Pastorale* (the title appears among the preparatory drawings and on the back of the painting) advances further along the path of synthesis, stripping away the layers towards almost total transparency. In a landscape marked by a slightly sloped horizon line, from left to right, a vaguely anthropomorphic geometric shape can be seen, with numbers and letters (9, 10, A) arranged around it; a large M that is also like a door; and a set square, or triangle, made of dots (which for him, at that time, symbolised the female sex). On the earthly plain, there is an indeterminate, but more or less phallic, figure, like a large anthill with a fish lain out on its slopes and with a hare’s head emerging from the tip. To the right of this figure is a bull, a stream, then a fire; then comes what is, perhaps, a female figure, with one foot, who balances upon her head an indeterminate biomorphic shape: this would be the shepherdess that gives sense to the idea of the painting being pastoral. Below this figure are some symbols and letters: a star, fish bones, a figure reminiscent of the man-like baby of *The Farm*, and two letter Rs. In the sky, there is a rainbow, some birds, and a circular shape that could be either the sun or the moon. Many of these elements already appeared in the preparatory drawings that survive; in two of these, in addition to the title, several other inscriptions can be read: a reference to a “grenouille” (frog) next to the baby, and a reminder “to draw insects and flowers/draw insects and flowers/draw insects and flowers” (in French).

Despite the obvious differences between the two canvases, I argue that, to some extent, Miró had Sunyer’s painting in mind as he took on the subject of the Catalan pastoral at this very momentous point in his career. This thesis is sustained by the fact that it is possible to identify certain elements in his work that strongly resonate with Sunyer’s *Pastoral*: the horizontal format (although Sunyer’s canvas is larger) with the line of the horizon clearly present and, in the pointed shapes in the background of Miró’s painting, perhaps a reference to the mountainous landscape; the eroticism of the female figure, very evident in Sunyer’s work, and clearly indicated by the reference to the set square symbol of sex in Miró’s; some precise formal elements, such as the pine branch on the right in Sunyer’s work, which becomes the stream in Miró’s; and the grey hue of the background in Miró’s painting and the similar hue of Sunyer’s mountains. With regard to this last point – the monochrome quality of Sunyer’s work –, it is worth pointing out that, in 1915, the Catalan artist J. F. Ràfols, a close friend of Miró at the time, had written the following about Sunyer’s work: “He has sacrificed the graces of colour – or perhaps it was not much of a sacrifice; perhaps he hated colour – with the aim of penetrating to the very heart of our land...”⁵⁴

Miró’s *Pastorale* is, in fact, one of the first in a series of works noted for their “grey background”,⁵⁵ featuring scenes that are more like very sophisticated drawings than actual paintings, with very light and subtle touches of colour. The difficulty in classifying what these works are was alluded to by Miró himself in a letter he penned from Mont-roig on 10 August 1924, to his friend, the poet Michel Leiris. He writes about the canvases he has been working on

and declares that he no longer wants to call them canvases or paintings, although he does not yet have an appropriate word for them. This is a very important letter; in it, Miró explains his way of working and his motivations in this crucial moment of change, stepping away from the detailed painting of the past towards what would soon become the universe of his maturity. First of all, Miró explains that he has been trying to work in a way similar to that of his poet friends, including, in particular, Leiris himself: they had told him that they sometimes began with a random word or sound to see what emerged (he mentions, among the examples of such sounds, “the trilling ‘R’s produced by a cricket”⁵⁶ –, giving us a clue as to the presence of these letters in *Pastorale*).⁵⁷ He says he also wanted, therefore, to start off with small drawings to see where they would take him. Subsequently, he goes on to say that he had destroyed almost everything he had done the previous summer:

Still too real! I am undoing all pictorial convention (that poison). By placing my canvases – simply drawn, slightly coloured at most – side by side with painted canvases that touched the spirit less directly, I noticed something: the interference of these stimulating materials (colours), even if devoid of all pictorial sense, *agitated* the blood, and the soaring sensation that scratches at your soul began to flounder.⁵⁸

These “simply drawn”, only “slightly coloured” canvases are, in fact, works such as *Pastorale*, *The hermitage* or *Head of a Catalan farmer*, pieces which, as previously mentioned, brought an almost total dissolution to the landscapes of Mont-roig that Miró had been working on over the previous years. On the other hand, divested of colour, these simpler works had, in his opinion, a greater capacity to appeal to the spectator, to scratch the soul (to address a deeper level than the strictly rational, one could say). He concludes by declaring:

I am persisting with the most deeply moving character of these canvases which are only drawn, with a few points of colour, with a rainbow. These canvases move us in the highest sense of the word, as does a baby crying in a cradle. [...]
It is as if I was conceiving my latest canvases in a flash, absolutely detached from the outside world (from the world of men who have a pair of eyes in the cranny beneath their foreheads).⁵⁹

In this series of works, Miró delves deeper, as mentioned earlier, into another sense of the concept of the primitive, in which he does not renounce his roots in the Catalan landscape, but on the contrary, he essentialises its elements, he dematerialises them, and thus grants them a poetic transcendence that is located beyond all rational reading. Like many of his friends and fellow writers and painters, and in close contact with them, Miró seeks, from within the very heart of art and language, to destroy a conception of modern Western man that is constituted only on the basis of logical, intellectual thought and which, in painting, is based on conventional mimetic figurative representation. They search for direct access to the poetic heart through shock and lightning. The poet Louis Aragon, who for a time had *The hermitage* at home,⁶⁰ writes about the paintings of that time:

In 1924 [...] canvases of a very different character began to appear [...]. This is where, in Miró’s mirror, perhaps, anti-painting begins, where the new writing is born which, from a kind of prehistory of caverns, turns towards the hieroglyphic sense of the world, the contrast between the violence of colours and the protest of signs that no Champollion could ever pretend to decipher.⁶¹

As previously discussed, at the heart of the concept of the pastoral, there is a conflict, an antagonism – the most traditional one being that which sets the rural and primitive world against the world of civilisation and power. But it is not the only one. The art historian Thomas Crow extended the conflict, declaring that the pastoral also points to a contrast between

those who fashion or enjoy cultivated forms of art [who] are compelled to compare their own condition, which permits this refinement, with that of the rustic whose existence affords no such luxury but who enjoys, by compensation, a natural, more ‘truthful’ simplicity of life.⁶²

That is, the pastoral also embodies the opposition between the culturally sophisticated artist and the ordinary person, who is ‘simple’ but capable of capturing the important things of nature much more vividly. This is the contrast that Miró himself experienced in his own life, between his being an avant-garde artist and his desire to be a Catalan farmer, a “primitive of Siurana”. Moreover, according to Crow, the aforementioned William Empson would have distilled the meaning of the pastoral further upon discovering an example of it in any work of art, in which “a distinctive voice is constructed from the implied comparison between an author’s suitably large artistic ambitions and his or her inevitably limited horizons and modest strengths”.⁶³ Miró’s personal, artistic voice emerged precisely in the mid-1920s and, to a large extent, from this nucleus of works from the 1923–1925 period, as a result of the struggle between his limitations and his ambitions; a struggle he was extremely aware of. As he wrote in a letter towards the end of September 1923,

I know that I’m following very dangerous paths; I confess to you that sometimes I feel the panic of the walker who finds himself with unexplored paths ahead of him; I react immediately, thanks to the discipline and seriousness in which I work, and at once, confidence and optimism push us onwards.⁶⁴

The decision to ascribe one of his key works from this period to the pastoral seems, therefore, perfectly reasonable in the context of this understanding of the genre as a place of contrasts. On the one hand, Miró demonstrates his ties with the Catalan artistic and cultural tradition to which he belonged while further exploring his own formal language, which turns its usual motifs into universal signs and which will, in turn, become “a new mythology for the modern Catalan nation”.⁶⁵ On the other hand, this personal language means distancing himself from whatever was known previously in the entirety of European painting, and therefore he refuses to be confined to any movement (even the surrealists), but also to any idea that restricts what this nation must be. It is in relation to this question that Miró refers to Sunyer on several later occasions, this time to differentiate and distance himself from him, as previously pointed out. Thus, in March 1920, freshly arrived in Paris for the first time, Miró had written that “young Catalan painting is infinitely superior to that of the French; I have absolute confidence in the *saving impact* of Catalan art”,⁶⁶ whereas on his return in June he writes that “in Catalonia, no painter has reached his full potential. So, for example, Mr Sunyer – if he doesn’t decide to spend a few seasons in Paris, he’ll fall asleep forever!”. He goes on to say that “you have to be an *international Catalan*, a *Catalan at home* does not have, nor will he have, any value in the world”.⁶⁷ Some years later, in an important interview in which he strives to present himself as an authentically Catalan artist and at the same time one of international ambition, he talks about the desire to make his work known everywhere, which leads him to conclude that his own strategy of “nationalism on the offensive” is much

more effective than “the ‘Catalan genius’ Joaquim Sunyer exhibiting his ‘Catalan painting’ at the Saló de les Tuilleries, and being completely crushed by any one of his neighbours in the exhibition, insignificant people [...]”.⁶⁸

On 2 July 1925, at a banquet in honour of the poet Saint-Pol-Roux, Max Ernst shouted “Down with Germany!”, and Miró shouted “Down with the Mediterranean!”; later, he explained that he did so because

we were being engulfed by all those people who filled our heads with the Mediterranean, the ‘*noucentisme*’, balance, moderation, and all that. I did not want to be a prisoner of that mentality, with all that air it had of stillness and death.⁶⁹

It is hard to imagine a man as calm as Miró passionately shouting such a slogan in the midst of a formal dinner held in Paris. But this was something that had to do with his most pressing need to break free of the straight-jacket that was, for him, the Catalan context in which he had been trained and which he still held onto as a reference point. He had expressed so to his friends, declaring he would never return to Barcelona and that, for him, the only places that mattered were Mont-roig and Paris.⁷⁰ In his eyes, Catalan painting, including that of Sunyer, had not been able to project itself beyond the idealisation and mystification of a certain landscape because it had renounced the exploration of all formal novelty. For Miró, this meant it had become innocuous in every sense, including in the sense of awakening a certain useful imagery for the country. His way forward lay with his connection with the international avant-garde and, henceforth, his re-embrace of a primitivism he had already explored. The extreme simplification of *Pastorale* was his way of escaping from the place he came from and, at the same time, returning to it.

Notes

- 1 Terry Gifford, “Pastoral, Anti-Pastoral and Post-Pastoral as Reading Strategies”, *Critical Insights: Nature and Environment* (Scott Slovic, ed.). Ipswich: Salam Press, 2012, 42–61.
- 2 David Halperin, *Before Pastoral: Theocritus and the Ancient Tradition of Bucolic Poetry*. New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1983, 70–71.
- 3 Halperin, *op.cit.*, 71.
- 4 Leo Marx, “Does Pastoralism Have a Future?”, *The Pastoral Landscape* (John Dixon Hunt, ed.). Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1992, 209–225.
- 5 Paul Alpers, “What Is Pastoral?”, *Critical Inquiry*, 8, 3, Spring 1982, 456.
- 6 Jeremy Strick, “Notes on Some Instances of Irony in Modern Pastoral”, *The Pastoral Landscape* (John Dixon Hunt, ed.). *op.cit.*, 199.
- 7 William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*. Londres: Chatto & Windus, 1986 [1935], 22.
- 8 Strick, *op.cit.*
- 9 Incidentally, Gauguin and Matisse, along with Cézanne, have been identified as key influences on the artistic development of Sunyer.
- 10 Glòria Soler, “La recerca del paisatge essencial”, *La imaginació noucentista* (Antoni Marí, ed.). Barcelona: Angle editorial, 2009, 109–118.
- 11 Tragic Week is the name given to the popular uprisings that took place in Barcelona and other Catalan industrial cities between 26 July and 2 August 1909. See David Martínez, *La setmana tràgica*. Barcelona: Pòrtic, 2009.
- 12 *Modernisme* was a cultural and artistic movement close to Symbolism and Art Nouveau that manifested itself in all the arts, and was predominant in Catalonia at the end of the nineteenth century. See Francesc Fontbona (ed.), *El Modernisme*. Barcelona: L’Isard, 2002–2004 (5 vols).
- 13 Eugeni d’Ors (1881–1954) wrote an influential column, entitled *Glosari*, in the newspaper *La Veu de Catalunya* between 1906 and 1921, where he discussed the main concepts and ideas that came to define *Noucentisme*, including its name. Joaquim Folch i Torres (1886–1973) was an art critic for the

- same newspaper between 1910 and 1920, and in his writing he promoted the main aesthetic ideals of the movement.
- 14 Teresa Camps, “El nostre primitivisme”, *L’avanguardia de l’escultura catalana* (Josep-Miquel Garcia, ed.). Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya, 1989, 18–43, 42.
 - 15 John Klein, “Inventing Mediterranean Harmony in Matisse’s Paper Cut-Outs”, *Modern Art and the Idea of the Mediterranean* (Vojtech Jirat-Wasiutynski, ed.). Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007, 149.
 - 16 Begoña Farré Torras, “El concepte de primitivisme en l’art català de la dècada de 1910”, *Celso Lagar i Hortense Bégué. Els anys catalans 1915–1918* (M. Lluïsa Faxedas, ed.). Girona: Museu d’art de Girona, 2021, 73.
 - 17 Camps, op.cit., 5.
 - 18 Farré Torras, op.cit., 74.
 - 19 M. Lluïsa Faxedas, “Beyond Noucentisme: Joaquim Sunyer’s Mediterranean Pastoral”, *Artl@s Bulletin*, 10, 2, Fall 2021, 82–93.
 - 20 Cristina Mendoza and Mercè Doñate, “Pastoral”, *Joaquim Sunyer. La construcció d’una mirada*. Barcelona: MNAC, 1999, 178.
 - 21 Faxedas, op.cit.
 - 22 Joaquim Folch i Torres, “Les pintures den Sunyer”, *La Veu de Catalunya*, 14 April 1911.
 - 23 Xènius (Eugeni d’Ors), “Enllà i la generació noucentista”, *La Veu de Catalunya*, 29 June 1906.
 - 24 Cristina Dupláu, “Les dones i el pensament conservador contemporani”, *Més enllà del silenci: les dones a la història de Catalunya* (Mary Nash, ed.). Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya, 1988, 173–189.
 - 25 Gabriel Ferrater, *L’art de la pintura*. Santa Coloma de Queralt: Obrador Edèndum, 2021, 376 and 381.
 - 26 Joan Maragall, “Impresión de la exposición Sunyer. A un amigo”, *Museum*, I, 7, 1911, 253.
 - 27 Josep M. de Sagarra, “Celso Lagar”, *La Vanguardia Española*, 9 September 1959, 5.
 - 28 Xènius (Eugeni d’Ors), op.cit.
 - 29 Celso Lagar, “El renacimiento del arte después del cubismo”, *Cultura*, 6 February 1915, 181–182.
 - 30 Marx, op.cit.
 - 31 Maria-Josep Balsach, “Les arrels noucentistes de Joan Miró”, *La imaginació noucentista* (Antoni Marí, ed.). Barcelona: Angle editorial, 2009, 261.
 - 32 Robert Lubar, “La Mediterrània de Miró: concepcions d’una identitat cultural”, *Joan Miró* (Rosa M. Malet, ed.). Barcelona: Fundació Joan Miró, 1993, 25–48; Balsach, “Les arrels noucentistes de Joan Miró”.
 - 33 Josep Massot, *El nen que parlava amb els arbres*. Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2018, 260.
 - 34 Idem, 68.
 - 35 Joan Miró, *Epistolari català* (established by Joan Ainaud de Lasarte; J. M. Minguet, T. Montaner, and J. Santanach, eds.). Barcelona: Fundació Miró, 2009, 89.
 - 36 Idem, 55.
 - 37 Ibidem, 76.
 - 38 Ibidem, 76 and 85.
 - 39 Eugenio Carmona, “Novecentismo y vanguardia en las artes plásticas españolas, 1906–1926”, *La generación del 14 entre el Novecentismo y la vanguardia (1906–1926)*. Madrid: Fundación Cultural MAPFRE Vida, 2002, 27.
 - 40 Arnau Puig, “Joan Miró a Sant Lluç”, Arnau Puig and Daniel Giralt-Miracle, *Joan Miró a Sant Lluç / Les “Energies” de Joan Miró. Conferències donades al Cercle Artístic de Sant Lluç*. Barcelona: Cercle Artístic de Sant Lluç, 1996, 5.
 - 41 Miró, op.cit., 74.
 - 42 Idem, 66.
 - 43 Margit Rowell, *Joan Miró. Escritos y conversaciones*. Valencia-Murcia: IVAM – Colegio oficial de aparejadores y arquitectos técnicos de la región de Murcia, 2002, 291.
 - 44 Maria-Josep Balsach, *Joan Miró. Cosmogonies d’un món originari (1918–1939)*. Barcelona: Galaxia Gutemberg, 2007.
 - 45 Lubar, op.cit., 25.
 - 46 Vincent Debaene, “Les surréalistes et le musée d’ethnographie”, *Labyrinthe*, 12, 2002, 71–94; Cécile Débray, Cécile Girardeau and Valérie Loth (eds.), *Dada Africa*. Paris: Hazan, 2017.
 - 47 Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton, “Primitive”, *Critical terms for Art History* (Robert S. Nelson and Richard Schiff, eds.). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1996, 170–184, 181.

- 48 Pedro Azara, “Elegia sumèria”, *Sumer i el paradigma modern* (Pedro Azara, ed.). Barcelona: Fundació Joan Miró, 2017, 13–25, 16–17.
- 49 George Raillard, *Conversaciones con Miró*. Barcelona: Granica editor, 1978, 205.
- 50 Anna Del Valle, *El neguit del desig. Joan Miró, 1900–1932*. Barcelona: Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2021, 280 (PhD dissertation).
- 51 Marc Marín, “L’impacte sumeri”, *Sumer i el paradigma modern*, op.cit., 119–125.
- 52 Del Valle, op.cit., 242.
- 53 Raillard, op.cit., 188.
- 54 Josep Francesc Ràfols, “Col·lecció Plandiura”, *Themis*, 11, 5 December 1915, 3–4.
- 55 Jacques Dupin, *Miró*. Barcelona: Polígrafa, 1993.
- 56 Rowell, op.cit., 140.
- 57 It has also been pointed out that the letters could correspond to the initials of Raymond Roussel, a French writer friend of Leiris whom Miró did not know personally but who interested him very much; see Del Valle, op.cit., 239.
- 58 Rowell, op.cit., 141.
- 59 Idem, 141.
- 60 So explained Aragon in an article he published in 1969: Louis Aragon, “Barcelone à l’aube”, *Les Lettres françaises*, 1287, June 1969, 31–32. The article is thoroughly quoted in Raillard, op.cit., 254–255.
- 61 Aragon, op.cit., quoted in Raillard, op.cit., 254.
- 62 Thomas Crow, “The Simple Life: Pastoralism and the Persistence of Genre in Recent Art”, *October*, 63, Winter 1993, 47.
- 63 Crow, op.cit., 48.
- 64 Miró, op.cit., 267.
- 65 Lubar, op.cit., 48.
- 66 Miró, op.cit., 172.
- 67 Idem, 192.
- 68 Francesc Trabal, “Les Arts. Una conversa amb Joan Miró”, *La Publicitat*, 14 July 1928.
- 69 Raillard, op.cit., 138. In fact, in the Spanish edition of Raillard’s book it does not say “Noucentisme”, but “inocentismo”, but it is certainly an error of transcription by the author.
- 70 Miró, op.cit., 192.

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10 Puppets, child art and an illuminated manuscript

Puppet shows with multilayers of primitivism in 1920s Granada

Marta Soares

Introduction

Strongly connected to the ritualistic roots of theatre, folk art and the Grotesque, puppets are easily framed by the modernist celebration of the primitive and the quest for origins. In this context, it is not surprising that modern artists, such as Pierre Bonnard, Ramón Casas, Oskar Kokoschka, Paul Klee, Emmy Hennings, Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Otto Morach and Alexandra Exter, as well as writers, such as Alfred Jarry, Maeterlinck, Michel de Ghelderode, Arthur Schnitzler, Ivan Goll, Marinetti, Luciano Folgore, Edward Gordon Craig, Gertrude Stein, Jacinto Benavente, Ramón del Valle-Inclán and Federico García Lorca, among others, cherished the artistic potential of puppets and appropriated them in stylised, explicit or subtle ways.¹ Moreover, these appropriations parallel a heated debate on the actor versus the marionette,² which marked theatrical theory in the early twentieth century, one example being the discourse of the playwright, theorist and actor Edward Gordon Craig.³

Along with Spanish writers Jacinto Benavente, Santiago Rusiñol (also a painter), Jacinto Grau, Ramón del Valle-Inclán and Rafael Alberti, Federico García Lorca enthusiastically engaged with puppet theatre.⁴ Among the group of artists and intellectuals gathering around Café Alameda in early 1920s Granada, young Lorca, the composer Manuel de Falla and the artist Hermenegildo Lanz (1893–1949) shared an interest in puppets that would prove to be crucial for two key projects in 1923 – *Títeres de Cachiporra*, a performance for children that took place at Lorca’s family residence in Granada, and Falla’s *El Retablo de Maese Pedro*, an opera for puppets commissioned by Princesse Edmond de Polignac that premiered in Paris.⁵

Besides the primitiveness associated with puppets, these puppet shows unfold two other sides of primitivism – the fascination with the child universe and medieval art, which often stimulated modern artists in their fights against mimesis, academic art and bourgeois taste. Children’s drawings triggered Hermenegildo Lanz’s sets for the play *La niña que riega el albahaca y el principe preguntón* (The girl who waters the basil and the inquisitive prince), performed in the *Títeres de Cachiporra* show. Equally part of the *Títeres de Cachiporra* programme was the *Misterio de los Reyes Magos* (Mystery of the Magi) play. By reviving mystery plays, adapting a Spanish dramatic piece written in the late twelfth/early thirteenth century, and basing its sets and cut-out figures on an illuminated manuscript, it paved the way for the medieval imaginary that marked *El Retablo de Maese Pedro*.

Modernist discourses on puppetry

After Heinrich von Kleist’s apologetic discourse on the marionette in the early nineteenth century,⁶ there was a new round of aesthetic appraisal of puppets starting in the *fin de siècle*.

From the 1880s to the 1900s, shadow theatre or puppet shows took place at famous nightclubs, such as Le Chat Noir in Paris, Els Quatre Gats in Barcelona and the Fledermaus in Vienna.⁷ In the 1880s, milestone performances occurred, such as Alfred Jarry's *Ubu* plays and Henri Signoret's *Petit Théâtre* in Paris – which merited a positive review from Anatole France.⁸ From the 1910s to the 1920s, several Futurists and Dadaists were involved with puppets, while Paul Klee made puppets for his son Felix.

Following Anatole France and other *fin-de-siècle* discourses that favoured the marionette,⁹ the British playwright, director and stage designer Edward Gordon Craig epitomised the extreme side of this discourse in the essay “The Actor and the *Über-marionette*”. In it he famously declared:

Do away with the actor and you do away with the means by which a *debased stage-realism* is produced and flourishes (...)

The actor must go, and in his place comes the inanimate figure – the Über-marionette we may call him until he has won for himself a better name.

Much has been written about the puppet – or marionette. There are some excellent volumes upon him, and he has also inspired several works of Art. To-day in his least happy period many people have come to regard him as rather a superior doll – and to think he has developed from the doll. This is incorrect. *He is a descendant of the stone image of the old Temples – he is to-day a rather degenerated form of a God.* (...) Yet even Modern Puppets are extraordinary things.¹⁰

The dispute over the origin of the marionette (doll or sacred image) seems to be a symptom of primitivism. According to Christopher Innes, primitivism in avant-garde theatre was often expressed by the search for simplicity, immobility, textual economy, mysticism, the divine, the irrational and the emphasis on the origins of the theatre.¹¹ Similarly, Olga Taxidou approached the impact of Nietzsche in Craig and the *Mask* journal, as well as the interest in the origins of theatre – conveyed by the celebration of the Greek mask – frequently shows signs of neo-Hellenism.¹² Moreover, the primitivist dimensions of theatre fuelled the attack on the conventions of naturalist, bourgeois commercial theatre and the questioning of the theatre itself, contributing to its renewal.¹³

In general, Craig's discourse on the marionette is shaped by modernist traits (the attack on mimesis, photography, the naturalism of gestures and realistic renditions of stage designs).¹⁴ Deep down, it seems that the attack on the actor, who is equated with naturalism, is connected to an undervaluing of life itself. Hence, Craig's appraisal of death and the inanimate object as opposed to the ‘flesh-and-blood life’ is so valued in theatrical performance.¹⁵ These tropes of Craig's discourse were wittily caricatured in Luigi Pirandello's *Six Authors in Search of an Author*¹⁶:

DIRECTOR [*without hesitation, voicing the growing indignation of the Actors*]. I beg you to believe, my dear sir, that the profession of acting is a highly noble one. Even if, as things stand nowadays, the new playwrights give us silly comedies and puppets instead of real men, you should know that we can still boast of having given life – here, on these boards – to immortal works!

The ACTORS show their satisfaction and approval by applauding their DIRECTOR.

FATHER [*interrupting and seizing on the topic*]. That's it! Quite right! Life to living beings, more alive than those who breathe and wear clothes! Not as real, perhaps; but more true! We're in perfect agreement!¹⁷

1920s Granada

When José Mora Guarnido, one of the figures from the “Tertulia del Rinconcillo”,¹⁸ reviewed the *Títeres de Cachiporra* show at Federico García Lorca’s house in January 1923 (Figure 10.1), he echoed modernist discourses on puppetry. Not only were the “Cristobicas” shows (the Spanish equivalent of *Punch and Judy*) a powerful way to solve the failure of bourgeois Spanish theatre, but they were also ‘much more expressive and human than a theatre played by actors’.¹⁹

Lorca, who had devoted a few plays to Don Cristobal,²⁰ recollected this event in Buenos Aires in 1936. In his slightly distorted memories – the show had occurred in the winter, not in the spring – the poet adopted a naïve, childish tone and highlighted the reactions of the children in the audience in a dialogue with the glove puppet:

It is not the first time that I, Don Cristobal, the drunken puppet that marries Doña Rosita, go out hand in hand with Federico García Lorca to the stage, where I always live and never die. The first time was at this poet’s house, do you remember, Federico? It was spring in Granada, and your living room was full of children who said: ‘Are the dolls made of flesh? And how can they be so small and never grow up?’ The famous Manuel de Falla played the piano, and it was the Spanish premiere of *L’Histoire du soldat* [The Tale of the soldier], by Strawinski [sic]. I still remember the smiling faces of the newsboys invited by the poet, among the loops and ribbons of the faces of the rich children.²¹



Figure 10.1 José Francés, “Los bellos ejemplos. En Granada resucita el guiñol”, *La Esfera*, 10 February 1923. Archivo Lanz, Granada. Courtesy of the Heirs of Hermenegildo Lanz. © Hemeroteca del Museo Casa de los Tiros, Junta de Andalucía.

Resulting from the collaboration between Spanish artists based in Granada – mainly by the writer Federico García Lorca, the composer Manuel de Falla and the artist and drawing teacher Hermenegildo Lanz – the show *Titeres de Cachiporra* (The Billy-Club Puppets) was a sort of rehearsal of Falla's *El Retablo de Maese Pedro*, which premiered in Paris that year. Although its performances were included in literature, theatre and music histories, Lanz has been overshadowed by Lorca and Falla and erased from the narratives of art historiography.²² Equally overlooked were the primitivist layers attached to this show.

The first layer concerns the resistance to bourgeois culture and the quest for authenticity within folk art, which is typical of artists attracted to the 'primitive', as Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton have contextualised.²³ Lorca chatted with old villagers about oral and puppet traditions,²⁴ and Mora Guarnido underlined the innovative potentialities contained in the archaic, local art in his review by stating that folk art provoked as much strangeness in the masses as the avant-garde did:

For the children – and for the elderly – the party was an unforgettable episode. In the small room, converted into an improvised theatre, they all found a refuge of pure art that has long since moved away from the national stages and we don't know when it will return. Pure art, old and modern, because in Spain we have forgotten so much of our ancient pure art that every attempt to bring it back is seen by the masses with the strangeness of the most daring novelty. For this reason, when maestro Falla performed a song by Alfonso the Wise, transcribed by the great Pedrell before a Spanish audience, he gave the public as much novelty as when he interpreted a *Berceuse* by Ravel. When Federico García Lorca brought the popular 'Cristobicas' character to his puppet plays ..., they seemed 'as new' as if he had written a Cubist poem.²⁵

Puppetry, particularly the local glove puppets like Don Cristobal, fits well into this category as a form of folk art, and Lanz's glove puppet heads are interesting pieces combining the Grotesque, the archaic and the modern. Don Cristobal's head stands out from the more Grotesque characters, displaying a slightly faceted and multi-coloured face that conflates the puppet tradition, the Cubist portrait and the clown (Figure 10.2).

The second layer of primitivism deals with childhood. The performance at Lorca's house was aimed at children, and one piece of the musical repertoire was Debussy's *Serenade for the Doll*. In addition, Lanz's model theatre and the sets for the first two plays – *Los Dos Habladores* (The Two Talkers)²⁶ and *La niña que riega el albahaca y el príncipe preguntón* (*The girl that waters the basil and the inquisitive prince*)²⁷ – were inspired by children's drawings (Figure 10.3).

Like other modern artists, Lanz reportedly collected children's drawings and wrote a few notes for a lecture on child art archived at his library.²⁸ In that draft, he encouraged adults to stimulate children's imagination and listed different stages of children's drawings as well as pedagogues, namely Kerschensteiner, Froebel, Pestalozzi and Maria Montessori.²⁹ As Jonathan Fineberg observed, the topic of the child connects primitivism in regard to the search for origins, as it 'represented the prehistory of the adult' and 'became a kind of domestic noble savage'.³⁰ The scholar notes that, towards the end of the nineteenth century, there were several pieces of research relating child art to tribal art, as well as increasing studies and exhibitions on child art.

The last performance of the show *Misterio de los Reyes Magos* (Mystery of the Magi) still had a subtle childish aspect attached to the format of a toy theatre. Also known as "Juvenile Drama" in English, or 'Teatro de los Niños' in Spanish, it was initially a kind of souvenir of cut-out flat figures of famous actors and plays in the nineteenth century, having evolved as a child's play.³¹ Lanz and his fellows called their appropriation of toy theatre 'teatro planista' (flat theatre).



Figure 10.2 Hermenegildo Lanz, Heads of glove puppets for the Titeres de Cachiporra show, 1923. Archivo Lanz, Granada. Polychrome wood, $6 \times 9 \times 6$ cm. Courtesy of the Heirs of Hermenegildo Lanz. © The Heirs of Hermenegildo Lanz/Photographs by Enrique Lanz.

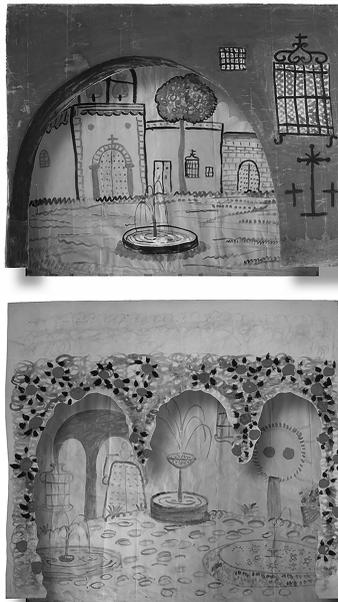


Figure 10.3 Hermenegildo Lanz, Sets for *Los dos habladores* (above) and for *La niña que riega el albahaca y el príncipe preguntón* (below), 1923, gouache on paper, $118.5 \times 154.5 \times 3.5$ cm (above) and $118.5 \times 160 \times 3.5$ cm (below). Colección Casa-Museo Huerta de San Vicente. Ayuntamiento de Granada. Courtesy of the Heirs of Hermenegildo Lanz. © The Heirs of Hermenegildo Lanz/Photograph by Enrique Lanz.



Figure 10.4 Hermenegildo Lanz, Cut-out flat figures (teatro planista) for *Misterio de los Reyes*, 1923, watercolor and gold glitter on cardboard, 24 × 12 cm (individual figures) and 40 × 25 cm (The Three Magi group), Archivo Lanz, Granada. Courtesy of the Heirs of Hermenegildo Lanz. © The Heirs of Hermenegildo Lanz/Photograph by Enrique Lanz.

Yet the main primitivist layer of *Misterio de los de Reyes Magos* is related to medieval art. As Begoña Farré Torras summarised, studies on the impact of medieval art in modernism are partly included in debates on primitivism and deal frequently with the ‘interest in medieval modes of representation’.³²

Puppetry scholarship has acknowledged a symbolist revival of mystery plays, which staged biblical subjects.³³ Edward Gordon Craig archived an article that reconstructed a Christmas mystery play from the fifteenth century,³⁴ and Maurice Bouchor had also performed mystery plays at Henri Signoret’s *Petit Théâtre*.³⁵ Later in the twentieth century, Mayakovsky’s *Mystery-Bouffe* and Rafael Alberti’s *Farsa de los Reyes Magos* were more subversive appropriations of the genre.³⁶

The performance in Granada drew upon a surviving fragment of the play *Auto de los Reyes Magos*. Probably dated back to the twelfth century, it is considered a pioneer vernacular document of the Christmas cycle in Europe.³⁷ Instead of a conventional mystery play performance outdoors with actors, the Spanish artists decided to base the sets and the cut-out figures on a fifteenth-century illuminated manuscript archived at the University of Granada (Figure 10.4).³⁸

In the transfer from the *Codex Granatensis* to the toy theatre, Lanz appropriated the illuminations attributed to Martinus Opifex that illustrated Saint Thomas of Cantimpré’s *De natura rerum* and Ibn-Butlán’s *Tacuinum Sanitatis*.³⁹ As a result, the original scientific topics were converted to fit into the narrative of the *Three Wise Men*.

Trees play an important role in that process. The original pose of interaction between a figure and nature, like the action of picking fruit or pulling water from the well, changes into a pose of adoration once these figures are cut and abstracted from the initial context. Important allegorical, symbolical and structural motifs in the Middle Ages, trees often served as pivots between the earthly and the heavenly.⁴⁰ In *Misterio de los Reyes Magos*, trees ultimately operated as vehicles for divine adoration as they attract the figures’ movements upwards.

‘Primitive’ puppets and the puppeteer as animator

Among the puppets, the flat cut-out figures and sketches for *El Retablo de Maese Pedro*, there are, in the Lanz archive, notes and two versions of a manuscript of an article on puppets that was not published.⁴¹ Most parts of the notes transited to the texts, apart from a few exceptions, such as a sketch illustrating the mechanics of a string puppet. The allusions to Totolín, a string puppet made by Lanz that ‘signed’ articles in the press, enable us to date these manuscripts back to the 1940s.⁴²

Lanz departs from the milestones of *Titeres de Cachiporra* and *El Retablo de Maese Pedro* to map a brief history of the marionette that emphasises its antiquity and universal qualities. Then he tags techniques according to nationalities.⁴³ Lanz understands the *guiñol* – a ‘Spanish invention’ – ‘as the simplest and most universal system for moving puppets with three fingers only’. After mentioning typical puppets from different countries – such as the Japanese *bunraku*,⁴⁴ as well as French, Dutch, Javanese, Mexican and Italian puppets – praising the hard work of family generations and puppet theatre companies – namely Vittorio Podrecca’s ‘Teatro dei Piccoli’ and ‘La Tia Norica’, in Cádiz – Lanz defined three types of puppets. The first, ‘*guiñol*’ or ‘*cachiporra*’, refers to the glove puppet, which displays ‘half body and complete volume’; the second, ‘*planista*’, is the flat cut-out figure ‘with or without articulations’; and the third, ‘*marionetas*’, displays the ‘full body, plus full volume and has more or less articulations’.⁴⁵ These categories allow him to distinguish between the ‘primitive puppet’, of rudimentary movements, typical of the *cachiporra* or *guiñol*, and the sophisticated string puppets. According to Lanz, this improvement from the glove puppet to the string puppet led to the ‘loss of innocence’ and a ‘gain in realism’. Moreover, it was responsible for the specialisation of the puppet constructor (a ‘technical director’, in Lanz’s words, who is analogous to an author) and the manipulator (an ‘animator’, a player, comparable to an actor). In his writings, the word ‘animator’ often appears in quotation marks, sometimes replacing the erased word ‘manipulator’, or in a more assertive way, in a note on the Italian glove puppet tradition as well as the actor and puppeteer Francesco Campogalliani (1870–1931):

In Italy there is also the *guiñol*, which we call *cachiporra* and in this field, the best animator, considered a genius or phenomenon, is the *burattinaio* Campogalliani.

(*burattinaio* is derived from *burattini*, the name of the puppet or doll theatre moved with one hand, therefore the *burattinaio* is the animator).⁴⁶

When Lanz refers to the puppeteer as ‘operator’, he states that the ‘soul of the actor is transferred to the puppet through strings’.⁴⁷ Although Lanz did not elaborate on his idea of animation, it is possible to extrapolate that the artist conceived puppetry as a form of animation.

On the one hand, Lanz’s distinction between a ‘primitive’ puppet and a sophisticated marionette brings him closer to a tradition of discourses on puppetry that celebrated the most elementary techniques, as we can read in George Sand:

[A *burattino* is] the classic, primitive marionette, and it is the best. It is not the *fantoccio* that hangs from the ceiling by strings and walks without touching the floor or making a ridiculous and impossible noise. That more sophisticated and complete invention of the speaking marionette succeeds, by means of great improvements in mechanism, in imitating natural gestures and graceful attitudes. (...) The larger and more like men they are, the sadder and more frightening the sight of these fake actors will become.⁴⁸

On the other hand, Lanz sees an equal value in both modes of puppetry, unlike George Sand and the American puppeteer Roman Paska who, more recently, opposed Oriental ‘puppet primitives’ with ‘little interest in mechanical perfection’ to Western puppets, ‘*uber-monkeys*’ attached to ‘narrative, mimesis and representation’ of human gestures.⁴⁹ In so doing, Paska echoed dominant discourses on modernism and placed the ‘puppet primitive’ on a pedestal.

Furthermore, Lanz’s hints on the puppeteer as an animator seem aligned with the discourse of the French puppeteer, architect and versatile artist Marcel Temporal. In his book *Comment*

construire et animer nos marionettes, published in the late 1930s, Temporal considered animation to be an essential part of puppetry:

To create a puppet, you have to: imagine, draw, carve, cut, model, sculpt, embroider, paint.

To animate a puppet, it is necessary: to imagine again, to write perhaps, to surely understand the concordance of optical rhythms and their correspondence with the sound rhythm of words or sounds emitted musically. Because the puppet is an optical instrument intended, just like a sound instrument, to provoke emotional shocks in us, to translate, to evoke or to awaken our sensitive possibilities...

All the arts which the theater asks for help fall entirely on the preparation and the very *anima* of the puppet play. The '*anima*', I will insist a lot on this point during this treatise, because what would be the use of having imagined, drawn, painted, sculpted, written, composed, spoken, sung, danced, if you do not manage to 'animate', yes, 'animate', give a soul to this doll of cardboard, wood or rag? To animate, it is in this dramatic game that the 'art' of the puppet begins; the rest is still literature, decoration, painting, sculpture, diction, music: the art of puppetry is knowing how to 'animate' a puppet.⁵⁰

Also in the 1940s, the French puppet historian Jacques Chesnais saw the puppeteer as 'a presenter of animated images'.⁵¹ Despite the lack of evidence of Chesnais and Temporal's books in Lanz's private library, these discourses show a correlation between animation and puppetry in a close chronology. Nowadays it is not uncommon to find remarks on animation in the literature on puppetry,⁵² or remarks on puppetry in animation theory.⁵³ Additionally, the concept of 'mechanical animation', recently proposed by the Danish art historian Hans Henrik Jørgensen, eventually contributes to consider puppetry as a form of animation and an object of art historiography.⁵⁴ In the late 1930s/early 1940s, though, one wonders if Lanz, Chesnais and Temporal were affected by the impact of the animated film and the concept of animism, which stemmed from anthropological studies on the 'primitive'.

In *Primitive Culture*, the British anthropologist Edward B. Tylor had posited animism as 'a doctrine of spirits' that often implied an extension of the 'notion of vitality' to inanimate things typical of 'lower stages of mental culture' and 'childlike conceptions'.⁵⁵ In contemporary puppet theatre studies, Penny Francis and John Bell also rooted puppetry on animism. Whereas Bell offered a more sophisticated approach to animism, primitivism and modernism within puppetry,⁵⁶ Francis uncritically perpetuated Tylor's animism⁵⁷:

The animation of objects, i.e., puppetry, can be directly traced to the atavistic, universal belief in the spirit life hidden within and embodied by natural phenomena, things and materials. The belief forms the core of the animist religion and is intrinsic to the understanding of the puppet's origins. Animism was humankind's first belief system and informed the early stages of awakening to its small world, its place in that world and its first questions as to the reason for its existence.⁵⁸

Closing remarks

Puppets relate to primitivism in several ways: as folk art and reminiscence of the ritualistic origins of theatre and the mask that fuelled modernist theories on theatre. By conflating the folk tradition of the *guiñol* puppets with the child and the medieval imaginary and sources, the

Titeres de Cachiporra show gains a ‘primitive-en-abyme’ effect that makes it a special episode in the history of modernist puppets.

Equally relevant in this story is the collaboration between the arts and the later memories from their protagonists. This experience was so memorable that it fostered Hermenegildo Lanz’s continued interest in the marionette. Remarkably attuned with thoughts on puppetry and animation and nuances of primitivism within puppetry, Lanz’s manuscripts point to different layers of primitivism that can be tied together. While the action of attributing life and movement to an inert puppet might lead to animism – Edward B. Tylor’s unavoidable anthropological concept associated with the ‘primitive’ religion – the puppet techniques unfold into different ways of animating, some more ‘primitive’, that is, less fluid, less lifelike, less sophisticated than others. Lanz linked the primitive puppet to innocence without creating a hierarchy of value. In contrast, the contemporary American puppeteer Roman Paska embraced the primitive puppet to criticise the naturalistic approaches to puppetry. Finally, these discourses are meaningful to grasp the diversity of puppet formats and techniques and the impact of modernism in the history and theory of puppetry.

Notes

- 1 For more about puppets and modernism, see Harold B. Segel, *Pinocchio’s Progeny: Puppets, Marionettes, Automats and Robots in Modernist and Avant-Garde Drama*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995; Henryk Jurkowski, *A History of European Puppetry, Vols. I & II* (Penny Francis, trans.). Lewiston, ME: Edwin Mellen Press, 1996; Henryk Jurkowski, “Prémices: un modernisme sur mesure”, *Métamorphoses: la marionnette au XX^{ème} siècle*. Montpellier: Institut international de la marionnette, L’Entretiens éd., 2008, 19–34; Martin Puchner, ‘Puppets’, *A New Vocabulary for Global Modernism* (Eric Hayot and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, eds.). New York: Columbia University Press, 2016, 185–197; Hal Foster, “1925c”, Hal Foster et al., *Art since 1900. Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2016, 3rd edition, 232–237.
- 2 Olga Taxidou, *Modernism and Performance: Jarry to Brecht*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, 2.
- 3 Edward Gordon Craig, “The Actor and the Über-marionette”, *The Mask*, 1, 2, 1908, 3–15. For more about Gordon Craig, see Christopher Innes, *Edward Gordon Craig: A Vision of Theatre*. New York: Routledge, 2004; Olga Taxidou, *The Mask: A Periodical Performance by Edward Gordon Craig*. New York: Routledge, 2013 [1998].
- 4 For more about Spanish writers and puppets, see Segel, op.cit., 124–172.
- 5 For more about *El Retablo* premiere in 1923 and its Spanish tour in 1925, see Yanisbel Martínez, “Le Retable de Maître Pierre ou l’histoire qui revient”, *Puck*, 16, 2009, 79–88.
- 6 Heinrich von Kleist, “Sobre el Teatro de Marionetas”, *Sobre el teatro de marionetas: y otros ensayos de arte y filosofía* (Jorge Riechmann, trans. & ed.). Madrid: Hiperión, 1988, 27–36.
- 7 For more about puppet and shadow plays at nightclubs, see Jurkowski, *A History of European Puppetry*, 5–13.
- 8 See Anatole France, *La Vie Littéraire/2*. Paris: Calmann-Lévy, Éditeurs, n. d., 145–150. For more about France’s discourse, see Segel, op.cit., 80–82.
- 9 For more about the authors that inspired Craig’s interest in puppets, see Taxidou, *The Mask*, 141–147 (Kindle edition).
- 10 Craig, op.cit., 11. As Jurkowski and other authors have shown, Craig became fonder of the folk puppet. See Jurkowski, *Aspects of Puppet Theatre* (Penny Francis, trans.). London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, 156; Patrick Le Boeuf, “Gordon Craig’s Self-contradictions”, *Revista Brasileira de Estudos da Presença*, 4, 3, 2014, 401–424.
- 11 Christopher Innes, *Avant Garde Theatre: 1892–1992*. Florence: Taylor and Francis, 2003, 2–17.
- 12 For more about Craig and Nietzsche, see Taxidou, *The Mask*, 23–31 (ebook edition). For more about Hellenism and primitivism, see Taxidou, *Modernism and Performance*, 148–179.
- 13 In Christopher Innes’ words: “Primitivism goes hand in hand with aesthetic experimentation designed to advance the technical progress of the art itself by exploring fundamental questions: The questions are: What is a theatre? What is a play? What is an actor? What is a spectator? What is the relation between them all? What conditions serve this best?”; Innes, *Avant Garde Theatre*, 3.

- 14 About Craig's criticism of stage design, see Innes, *Edward Gordon Craig*, 39.
- 15 Edward Gordon Craig, op.cit., 8–9. Christopher Innes reminded that Craig did value live actors, namely the actor and director Henry Irving, a Victorian actor-manager that worked with Craig's mother, the actress Ellen Terry. As Craig admitted himself, Irving's exceptional control over emotions and his stylised, dance-like movements made him a human model for the Über-marionette. For more about Craig and Irving, see Innes, *Edward Gordon Craig*, 26–39 (ebook edition), and Edward Gordon Craig, "The Actor" from *Henry Irving*, 1930 quoted in Innes, *Edward Gordon Craig*, 315, 317 (ebook edition).
- 16 Craig would later recollect the reception of his discourse: "The Über-marionette is the actor plus fire minus egoism; the fire of the gods and demons without the smoke and steam of mortality. The literal ones took me to mean pieces of wood one foot in height; that infuriated them; they talked of it for ten years as a mad, wrong, insulting idea. The point was gained by them, and I think I owe them here a word of thanks." Edward Gordon Craig, *On the Art of Theatre*, 1924 [1911], quoted in Henryk Jurkowski, *Aspects of Puppet Theatre* (Penny Francis, trans.). London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, 158.
- 17 Luigi Pirandello, *Three Plays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, 67–68 (ebook edition).
- 18 For more about the Granadian artistic circles, see Emilio J. Escoriza et al., *La generación de plata primeros pasos de la vanguardia en Granada*. Granada: Junta de Andalucía, Consejería de Cultura, 2007; Nicolás Antonio Fernández, *Federico García Lorca y El Grupo de La Revista 'Gallo': La Vanguardia Literaria en la Granada de los Años Veinte*. Granada: Diputación Provincial de Granada, 2012.
- 19 José Mora Guarnido, "Crónicas Granadinas. El teatro 'cachiporra' andaluz", *La Voz*, 12 January 1923, w/p.
- 20 *Tragicomedia de Don Cristóbal y la Señá Rosita and Retablillo de Don Cristóbal*. See Federico García Lorca, *Obra completa. Teatro*, 1 (Miguel García-Posada, ed.). Madrid: Akal, 2008, 91–176.
- 21 Free translation from the Spanish: "No es la primera vez que yo, don Cristobal, el muñeco borracho que se casa con doña Rosita, salgo de la mano de Federico García Lorca a la escenita, donde siempre vivo y nunca muero. La primera vez fue en casa de este poeta, ¿te acuerdas, Federico? Era la primavera granadina, y el salón de tu casa estaba lleno de niños que decían: 'Los muñecos son de carnecilla, ¿y cómo se quedan tan chicos y no crecen?' El insigne Manuel de Falla tocaba el piano, y allí se estrenó por vez primera en España *La historia de un soldado*, de Strawinski [sic]. Todavía recuerdo las caras sonrientes de los niños vendedores de periódicos que el poeta hizo subir, entre los bucles y las cintas de las caras de los niños ricos". García Lorca, "Dialogo del poeta y Don Cristobal", *Obra completa. Teatro*, 1, 178.
- 22 See, for instance, Mario Hernández, "Falla, Lorca y Lanz en una sesión Granadina de títeres (1923)", *El Teatro en España entre la tradición y la vanguardia, 1918–1939* (Dougherty and Vilches de Frutos, eds.). Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas; Fundación Federico García Lorca, 1992, 227–239; Eckhard Weber, "Los Títeres de Cachiporra und El Retablo de Maese Pedro: Manuel de Falla Beschäftigung mit dem Puppentheater und die Neuen Tendenzen im Musiktheater Seiner Zeit", *Falla y Lorca. Entre La Tradición y La Vanguardia* (Susana Zapke, ed.). Kassel: Edition Reichenberger, 1999, 117–151; Carol A. Hess, *Manuel de Falla and Modernism in Spain, 1898–1936*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001; Laura Santana Burgos, "La versión Inglesa del libreto de *El Retablo de Maese Pedro* de Manuel de Falla: Un estudio histórico, traductológico y musical", *Música y Cultura En La Edad de Plata, 1915–1939* (María Nagore et al., eds.). Madrid: Instituto Complutense de Ciencias Musicales, 2009, 563–574. About the erasure of Lanz from art historiography, see Emilio Escoriza, "Hermenegildo Lanz: La Humildad Creativa al Servicio de un nuevo civismo cultural en la Granada de 'Federico'", *El Artista, Mito y Realidad. Reflexiones Sobre El Gusto V* (Rebeca Carretero et al., eds). Zaragoza: Prensas de la Universidad de Zaragoza, 2021, 395–406. About Hermenegildo Lanz, see Juan Mata, *Apogeo y Silencio de Hermenegildo Lanz*. Granada: Diputación de Granada, 2003; Enrique Lanz, "Hermenegildo Lanz and Puppets", *All Strings Attached Bulletin*, 1, 2017, 16–19; Alejandro Víctor García et al., *Fulgor y castigo de Hermenegildo Lanz*. Granada: Diputación Provincial de Granada, 2019.
- 23 Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton, "Primitive", *Critical Terms for Art History* (Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff, eds.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003, 2nd edition, 217–233.
- 24 Hernández, "Falla, Lorca y Lanz en una sesión Granadina de títeres (1923)", 29.
- 25 Free translation from the Spanish: "Para los niños — y para las personas mayores — la fiesta constituyó un episodio inolvidable. En el pequeño salón, convertido en teatro improvisado, encontraron todos un refugio de arte puro que ha huido desde hace mucho tiempo de los escenarios nacionales y que no sabemos cuándo volverá. Arte puro, viejo y moderno, porque en España nos hemos olvidado de

- tanto de nuestro arte puro antiguo, que todo intento de reaparición es visto por la masa con la extrañeza con que se ve la novedad más atrevida. Por esta causa, al refrescar el maestro Falla ante un auditorio español, una cantiga de Alfonso el Sabio, transcrita por el gran Pedrell, daba tanta novedad al público como cuando interpretaba una *Berceuse* de Ravel. Federico García Lorca, al llevar a su escena de muñecos las picardías populares de ‘Cristobicas’ ..., parecía ‘tan nuevo’ como si hubiera hecho un poema cubista.”; José Mora Guarnido, “Crónicas Granadinas. El teatro ‘cachiporra’ andaluz”, w/p.
- 26 A seventeenth century short play that was for a long time attributed to Cervantes.
- 27 A play by Lorca based on Andalusian oral tradition. For more about this play, see Yanisbel Martínez, ‘En busca de la niña que riega la albahaca’, *Fantoche: Arte de Los Titeres*, 10, 2016, 63–124.
- 28 Hermenegildo Lanz himself was keen on child art and pedagogy, useful topics to his work as a drawing professor of elementary, middle, and high school teachers.
- 29 Hermenegildo Lanz, “El dibujo de los niños (conferencia)” (undated manuscript), Archivo Lanz, Granada. For more about these pedagogues, see Jonathan David Fineberg ed., *When We Were Young: New Perspectives on the Art of the Child*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006, 201–202, 214.
- 30 Jonathan Fineberg, *The Innocent Eye: Children’s Art and the Modern Artist*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997, 11.
- 31 For more about toy theatre, see George Speaight, *The History of the English Toy Theatre*. London: Studio Vista, 1969; Alain Lecucq, “Théâtre de Papier”, *Encyclopédie Mondiale des arts de la Marionnette* (Henryk Jurkowski and Thiéri Foulc, eds.). Montpellier: Unima, Entretemps, 2009, 530–531. As Olga Taxidou revealed, Craig was also very keen on toy theatre. See Taxidou, *The Mask*, 153–154 (ebook edition).
- 32 Begoña Farré Torras, *The Medieval in Modernism: Cathedrals, Stained Glass, and Constructive Painting in Joaquín Torres-García and in the European Avant-Garde*. Lisbon: School of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 2020, 2 (PhD dissertation).
- 33 Segel, Pinocchio’s Progeny, 79.
- 34 See Theodore Child, “A Christmas Mystery in the Fifteenth Century”, *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, 463, 1888, 59–77; Innes, *Edward Gordon Craig*, 44 (ebook edition).
- 35 For more about Bouchor’s mystery plays, see Segel, *Pinocchio’s Progeny*, 79–86.
- 36 See Vladimir Mayakovsky, ‘Mystery-Bouffe’, *Vladimir Mayakovsky: Plays* (Guy Daniels, trans.). Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1995, 50–150; Rafael Alberti, “Farsa de Los Reyes Magos”, *Rafael Alberti: Teatro I* (Eladio Mateos, ed.). Barcelona: Seix Barral, 2003, 353–386; Lynn Purkey, “Alberti and Mayakovsky: Subverting the Mystery Play”, *The Comparatist*, 35, 1, 2011, 107–132.
- 37 Ángel Gómez Moreno, “The Challenges of Historiography: The Theatre in Medieval Spain”, *A History of Theatre in Spain* (Maria M. Delgado and David T. Gies, eds.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, 21.
- 38 Codex Granatensis. De Natura Rerum, by Tomás de Cantimpré. De Avibus Nobilibus. Tacuinum Sanitatis, by Ibn-Butlán, n.d. (c. fifteenth century).
- 39 For more about Codex Granatensis, see Luis García Ballester, De Natura Rerum (Lib. IV–XII); Tacuinum Sanitatis, Codice C-67 (Fols. 2v–116r) de La Biblioteca Universitaria de Granada/Por Tomas de Cantimpré; Edición Facsimil, Estudio Preliminar, Transcripción y Traducciones Castellana y Inglesa. Granada: Universidad de Granada, 1974.
- 40 For more about the tree in the Middle Ages, see Michel Pastoureau et al. (eds.), *L’Arbre: Histoire naturelle et symbolique de l’arbre, du bois et du fruit au Moyen-Age*. Paris: Léopard d’or, 1993; Barbara Baert and Liesbet Kusters, “The Tree as Narrative, Formal and Allegorical Index in Representations of the Noli me Tangere”, *The Tree: Symbol, Allegory, and Mnemonic Device in Medieval Art and Thought* (Pippa Saloni and Andrea Worm, eds.). Turnhout: Brepols, 2014, 159–186.
- 41 Hermenegildo Lanz, “Marionetas (v1 and v2)”, undated manuscript [c. 1943–1944]. Archivo Lanz, Granada.
- 42 For more about Totolín, see Alejandro V. García, “Totolín, ética para marionetas”, García et al., *Fulgor y castigo de Hermenegildo Lanz*, 29–45; Hermenegildo Lanz and Antonio Covalada, “La Filosofía de Totolín”, García et al., *Fulgor y castigo de Hermenegildo Lanz*, 47–67.
- 43 “In the year 1922 and 1923 on Three Kings Day 1923, a great musician, a great poet and an unknown painter made and presented in Granada the most alluring and interesting puppet theatre that has been played in Spain.” Free translation from the Spanish: “El año 1922 e 1923 en el día de Reyes de 1923, un gran músico, un gran poeta y un desconocido pintor hicieron y presentaron en Granada construido expresamente el teatro de muñecos más sugestivo e interesante de los que hasta el presente se han exhibido por los escenarios españoles.” Hermenegildo Lanz, “Marionetas (v1)”, undated manuscript [c. 1943–1944]. Archivo Lanz, Granada.

- 44 For more about *bunraku* theatre, see Roland Barthes, “On *Bunraku*”, *The Drama Review*, 15, 2, 1971, 76–80.
- 45 Lanz, “Marionetas (v2)”, undated manuscript [c. 1943–1944]. Archivo Lanz, Granada.
- 46 Free translation from the Spanish: “Hay en Italia también el guiñol, que nosotros llamamos cachiporra y en esta especialidade, el mejor animador, considerado como un genio o fenómeno es el *burattinaio* Campo Gayiani [sic]. (*burattinaio* se deriva de *burattini* nombre del guiñol o teatro de muñecos movidos con una sola mano, por lo tanto *burattinaio* es el animador.”); Lanz, “Campo Gayiani [sic]” (note), undated.
- 47 Lanz, “Untitled”, undated manuscript, Archivo Lanz, Granada.
- 48 George Sand, *L’Homme de Neige*, 1859, quoted in Segel, *Pinocchio’s Progeny*, 32.
- 49 Roman Paska, “Notes on Puppet Primitives and the Future of an Illusion”, *Puppetry: A Reader in Theatre Practice* (Penny Francis, ed.). New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012 [1990], 137.
- 50 Free translation from the French: “Pour créer une marionnette, il faut: imaginer, dessiner, tailler, couper, modeler, sculpter, broder, peindre.
Pour animer une marionnette, il faut: imaginer encore, rédiger peut-être, comprendre sûrement la concordance des rythmes optiques et leur correspondance avec le rythme sonore des mots ou des sons émis musicalement. Car la marionnette est un instrument optique destiné, tout comme un instrument sonore, à provoquer en nous des chocs émotionnels, à traduire, à évoquer ou à éveiller nos possibilités sensibles ...
Tous les arts auxquels le théâtre demande un secours entrent intégralement dans la préparation et dans l’anima même du jeu de la marionnette. L’«anima», je vais beaucoup insister sur ce point au cours de ce traité, car à quoi servirait d’avoir imaginé, dessiné, peint, sculpté, écrit, composé, parlé, chanté, dansé, si vous ne parvenez pas à «animer», oui, «animer», donner une âme à cette poupée de carton, de bois ou de chiffons ? Animer, c’est dans ce jeu dramatique que commence «l’art» de la marionnette ; le reste est encore littérature, décoration, peinture, sculpture, diction, musique : l’art de la marionnette, c’est de savoir «animer» une marionnette.”; Marcel Temporal, *Comment construire et animer nos marionnettes*. Paris: Bourrelier, 1942 [1938], 1–2.
- 51 Jacques Chesnais, *Histoire Générale des Marionnettes*. Paris: Bordas, 1947, 14.
- 52 See, for instance, Kenneth Gross, *Puppet: An Essay on Uncanny Life*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2012; Colette Searls, “Unholy Alliances and Harmonious Hybrids: New Fusions in Puppetry and Animation”, *The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance* (Dassia N. Posner, Claudia Orenstein, and John Bell, eds.). New York: Routledge, 2014, 294–307.
- 53 See Eric Herhuth, “The Politics of Animation and the Animation of Politics”, *Animation*, 11, 1, March 2016, 4–22, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1746847715624581>.
- 54 Hans Henrik Lohfert Jørgensen, “Live Matter and Living Images: Towards a Theory of Animation in Material Media”, *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift/Journal of Art History*, 86, 3, 3 July 2017, 251–270.
- 55 Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*. New York: Dover Publications, 2016, 1, 923–924 (ebook edition).
- 56 John Bell, “Playing with the Eternal Uncanny: The Persistent Life of Lifeless Objects”, *The Routledge Companion to Puppetry*, 43–52.
- 57 Francis’s discourse fits into Nurit Bird-David’s remark that ‘the century-old Tylorian concept appears in all these diverse sources (popular and academic, general, and specific) revised little if at all.’ Nurit Bird-David, “‘Animism’ Revisited: Personhood, Environment, and Relational Epistemology”, *Current Anthropology*, 40, 1, 1999, 67. For more about the contemporary revisions of animism, see, for instance, Ernst Halbmayer, “Debating Animism, Perspectivism and the Construction of Ontologies”, *Indiana*, 29, 2012, 9–23; Graham Harvey, ed., *The Handbook of Contemporary Animism*. Durham: Acumen, 2013.
- 58 Penny Francis (ed.), *Puppetry: A Reader in Theatre Practice*, 5.

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