

2017

Distance and Distortion: Amadeo Souza Cardoso's and Joan Miró's War-years Painting and the Words that Fail Them

Joana Cunha Leal
Universidade Nova de Lisboa, j.cunhaleal@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/artlas>



Part of the [Modern Art and Architecture Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Leal, Joana Cunha. "Distance and Distortion: Amadeo Souza Cardoso's and Joan Miró's War-years Painting and the Words that Fail Them." *Artl@s Bulletin* 6, no. 2 (2017): Article 2.

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

This is an Open Access journal. This means that it uses a funding model that does not charge readers or their institutions for access. Readers may freely read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of articles. This journal is covered under the [CC BY-NC-ND license](#).

Distance and Distortion: Amadeo Souza Cardoso's and Joan Miró's War-Years Painting and the Words that Fail Them

Joana Cunha Leal *

Universidade NOVA de Lisboa

Abstract

This essay considers art historical discourses on the work produced during the First World War by two painters born and living in the Iberian Peninsula: the Portuguese Amadeo de Souza Cardoso (1887–1918) and the Catalan Joan Miró (1893–1983). It considers the dialogues and relations maintained by these painters in their war-affected national artistic milieus and with the equally disrupted, international avant-garde circles, while discussing historiographical biased assumptions about production-places and their meanings, namely how *localness* was read as expressing isolation, distance, and lack of aesthetic significance.

Resumo

Este artigo analisa os discursos da historiografia da arte sobre a obra produzida no decurso da 1ª Guerra por dois pintores da Península Ibérica: o português Amadeo de Souza Cardoso (1887-1918) e o catalão Joan Miró (1893-1983). O artigo considera os diálogos e as relações que estes pintores mantiveram nos seus meios artísticos nacionais e nos círculos da vanguarda internacional. Discute, ao mesmo tempo, os pontos de partida das análises historiográficas sobre esses locais de produção e o seu significado, muito particularmente o modo como a pertença local foi lida como expressão de isolamento, distância e falta de pertinência estética.

** Joana Cunha Leal is assistant professor at the Art History Department, and associate researcher at the Art History Institute, of the School of Social Sciences and Humanities of the Universidade NOVA de Lisboa. Her recent work privileges the study of Iberian modernisms and the avant-garde.*

It is only a hypothesis, but it seems possible that the conviction of the historian that he has "found" the form of his narrative in the events themselves, rather than imposed it upon them, in the way the poet does, is a result of a certain lack of linguistic self-consciousness which obscures the extent to which descriptions of events *already* constitute interpretations of their nature.
- Hayden White¹

Cardoso and Miró: Common Traces and Sheer Differences

Amadeo Souza Cardoso and Joan Miró are essential cases to address the effect of the First World War in the Iberian Peninsula. Several common traces assert their relevance. Firstly, the fact that they were both recognized as avant-garde artists during this period. They both exhibited their work as such: Souza Cardoso, who died from the Spanish influenza pandemic a few days before the armistice,² organized two solo exhibitions of more than one hundred works in Oporto and Lisbon in December 1916;³ Miró showed his 1914–1917 production at the prominent Dalmau Gallery in Barcelona in March 1918.⁴ Moreover, they both had hostile responses from the general public. Such negative reception matches perfectly the converse appraisal of their work by the sympathetic national avant-garde intellectual and artistic cliques.⁵

Secondly, both Souza Cardoso and Miró became key references for the history of modern art in Portugal and Spain appearing as counterparts to the artistic enquiries occurring in the international milieu. Art history writing on Miró has gone far beyond nationally bounded approaches on modernism and the avant-garde,⁶ but the fact that Miró's most praised works are firmly linked to his Catalan roots might explain why he did not suffer from the same *foreignization* process as Pablo Picasso (and to a certain extent, Juan Gris). Joan Miró is bound to Catalonia,⁷ and Souza Cardoso is identified as Portuguese.⁸ They are both taken as examples of regional painters triumphing in the strenuous arena of the international avant-garde.

As far as the period analyzed in this essay is concerned, Souza Cardoso and Miró share another distinctive common feature: the fact that some key art historical accounts have portrayed them as carrying out distorted appropriations of the international trends they were in dialogue with during the war. Such dialogue concerns, first and foremost, the reception of cubism, and as we shall see specifically encompasses the invention of collage and Robert Delaunay's defense of a *simultaneist* alternative to cubism. Delaunay's pre-eminence here being certainly associated with his stay in Portugal and Spain between 1915 and 1921.⁹

¹ Hayden White, "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact," *Tropics of Discourse: essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1978), 95.

² A thoroughly documented biography of Amadeo Souza Cardoso has been published by M. Helena de Freitas (ed.), *Catálogo Raisoné Amadeo Souza Cardoso*, Vol. I - *Fotobiografia* (Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2007).

³ In Oporto, the exhibition appeared under the generic title "Abstractionism." See the exhibition catalogue *Amadeo de Souza Cardoso Porto-Lisboa 2016-1916*, Ana Paula Machado, Elisa Soares and Marta Soares eds. (Porto: Museu Nacional de Soares dos Reis, Blue Book, 2016).

⁴ There are 64 paintings referenced in the catalogue; see Enric Jardí, *Els Moviments d'Avanguardia a Barcelona* (Barcelona: Ediciones Cotal, 1983), 63-67; Victoria Comballá, *El descubrimiento de Miró. Miró y sus críticos, 1918-1929* (Barcelona: Ediciones Destino, 1990); and Jaume Vidal i Oliveras, "Josep Dalmau: El primer marxant de Joan Miró," in *Miró-Dalmau-Gasch l'aventura per l'art modern, 1918-1937* (Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya, 1993), 70-74.

⁵ The Portuguese writer and painter José de Almada Negreiros, considered Cardoso as "the first Portuguese discovery of the 20th century" in a leaflet-manifesto distributed in his exhibition in Lisbon. The exhibition put Cardoso in the orbit of the Lisbon avant-garde group gathered around the *Orpheu* journal (1915). Cardoso was invited to publish four works as hors-text in *Orpheu's* third issue. The issue never came out, but the invitation is mentioned by the poet Fernando Pessoa, who also described him as being "the most famous advanced painter in Portugal," main documents related to the exhibition were published by M. Helena de Freitas (ed.), *Catálogo Raisoné Amadeo Souza Cardoso*, I, 248-253; transl. by the author. Miró's exhibition had an enthusiastic review in *Troços* signed by the Catalan poet Josep Junoy. Junoy had taken the letters of Miró's name in the catalogue cover to compose

a calligram; see Enric Jardí, *Els Moviments d'Avanguardia a Barcelona*, 63-67. The negative responses of the general public are signalled by the famous episode of these very catalogue letters being changed to produce the word "merda" (shit) by an anonymous visitor, or by the fact that Miró's name "became synonymous with the 'eccentricities' and 'abuses' of modern painting;" see Robert S. Lubar, "Art and Anti-Art: Miró, Dalí, and the Catalan Avant-Garde," in *Barcelona and Modernity: Picasso, Gaudí, Miró, Dalí, William Robinson, Jordi Falgás, Carmen Belen Lord* eds. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), 339-347. These episodes parallel Souza Cardoso's aggression by another outraged visitor of his exhibition in Lisbon; see M. Helena de Freitas (ed.), *Catálogo Raisoné Amadeo Souza Cardoso*, I, 243; and also the recent study on the exhibition's reception by Marta Soares, "A pintura entre o cinematógrafo e a colecção oceanográfica," in *Amadeo de Souza Cardoso Porto-Lisboa 2016-1916*, 53-57.

⁶ A retrospective exhibition of his work was held at MoMA as early as 1941. Another significant example would be Clement Greenberg's seminal essay on Miró. See Clement Greenberg, *Joan Miró* (New York: The Quadrangle Press, 1948).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ See José-Augusto França, "Amadeo de Souza Cardoso," in *Amadeo & Almada* (Venda Nova: Bertrand, 1985 [1st ed. 1957]), 11-158; and the exhibition catalogue *At the Edge: A Portuguese Futurist*, Lourdes Simões Carvalho and Laura Coyle eds. (Lisbon: GRI/Corcoran Gallery, 1999).

⁹ The Delaunays had also been surprised by the outbreak of the war in Spain, and after a period living in Madrid, ended up settling in Portugal from 1915 to 1917; see Paulo Ferreira, *Correspondance de quatre artistes portugais Almada Negreiros, José Pacheco, Souza Cardoso, Eduardo Viana avec Robert et Sonia Delaunay* (Paris: PUF, 1972), 40-56; Rosemary O'Neill, "Modernist Rendez-vous: Amadeo de Souza Cardoso and the Delaunays," in *At the Edge*, 61-77; and Pascal Rousseau, "El arte nuevo nos sonríe" Robert y Sonia Delaunay en Iberia (1914-1921), in *Robert y Sonia Delaunay*, Lluís Bagunyà ed. (Barcelona: Carroggio, Museu Picasso, 2000), 40-70.

Finally, there are also major differences between the two painters to be considered in the scope of this essay. Such variance contributes to assert the significance of both painters to my discussion as well. Namely, it is essential to stress the contrast between their specific national contexts regarding the conflict, with Portugal entering the war in 1915, while Spain remained a neutral country all the way through.

Furthermore, it is key to consider the differences between their backgrounds, previous artistic experiences, career development stages, international connections, etc. These differences add another layer to the diversity and complexity of the contaminations mentioned earlier. At least they show that, as far as the Iberian artistic milieu of the first decades of the twentieth century are concerned, there is no such thing as a geographical homogenized periphery in Europe's southwest ready to mirror an ideal center, even though passionate representations of Paris did prevail and were fully absorbed by art historical narratives.¹⁰

Amadeo Souza Cardoso (1887–1918)

Souza Cardoso was six years older than Joan Miró and, unlike him, was completely established within the Parisian avant-garde by the time the war arrived. He had left for Paris in 1906 aged 19 to continue the architectural training he had started in Lisbon,¹¹ but ended up studying painting with one of the most praised Catalan painters based in Paris—Anglada Camarasa (1871–1959).¹² Souza Cardoso first exhibited his work in Paris with Amedeo Modigliani in 1911.¹³ This show was followed by his regular presence at various collective exhibitions, including the *Salon des Indépendants* (1911, 1912, where he showed his work with the "Salon cubists"), the *Salon*

d'Automne (1912), and the *Armory Show* (1913).¹⁴ By 1913, Souza Cardoso's circle of friends and acquaintances included all the major figures of the Parisian avant-garde namely those attending the famous café *La Closerie des Lilas*.¹⁵ He also benefited from his contact with the *Der Blaue Reiter* circle via the Delaunays,¹⁶ and was accordingly invited to exhibit his work at the *Der Sturm's Herbstsalon* (1913).¹⁷ Having started a promising artistic career in Paris, Souza Cardoso would have undoubtedly returned to the city if it were not for the outbreak of the war in August 1914.

Portuguese art history reads Souza Cardoso's forced sojourn at Manhufe during the war as a condemnation to strict isolation.¹⁸ Although he maintained significant contacts with two avant-garde clusters active in Portugal, the exchanges and projects involving Lisbon's *Orpheu* group¹⁹ and the Delaunays are made to fit in with the narrative on isolation. This is mainly attributed to the conspicuous failure of these projects. Firstly, the third issue of the avant-garde journal *Orpheu*, where Cardoso should have published four reproductions of his canvas, never came out.²⁰ Secondly, the ambitious venture instigated by the Delaunays concerning the creation of a *Corporation Nouvelle* (New Corporation) destined to promote publications—where the work of the Portuguese and the Delaunays would go with Guillaume Apollinaire's and Blaise Cendrars' poetry (Fig. 1)—and exhibitions that, as we shall

¹⁴ Ibid. For a thorough discussion on the political and artistic arguments put forward in these exhibitions see David Cottigton, *Cubism in the Shadow of War: The Avant-Garde and Politics in Paris 1905-1914* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, *Les avant-gardes artistiques - 1848-1920* (Paris: Gallimard, 2015), 404-419.

¹⁵ Kenneth Silver, *Esprit de Corps: the Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War, 1914-1925*, 51-59, and M. Helena de Freitas, "Amadeo de Souza Cardoso, Diálogo de Vanguardas," in *Diálogo de Vanguardas*, M. Helena de Freitas ed. (Lisboa, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2006), 19-67.

¹⁶ See Ferreira, *Correspondance de quatre artistes portugais*; see also O'Neill, "Modernist Rendez-vous," 61-77.

¹⁷ Freitas, *Catálogo Raisoné Amadeo Souza Cardoso*, I, 186.

¹⁸ Cardoso was based at his family estate at Manhufe near the northeastern town of Amarante; see José-Augusto França, "Amadeo de Souza Cardoso," 11-15; Freitas, *Diálogo de Vanguardas*.

¹⁹ The first issue of *Orpheu* was published in 1915. *Orpheu* gathered artists, composers and poets like Mário de Sá Carneiro, Fernando Pessoa and Santa Rita Pintor. The group might be extended to key figures such as the writer and painter José de Almada Negreiros (who would write a Futurist Manifesto in 1917), the architect José Pacheco and the painter Eduardo Viana (who would accompany the Delaunays during part of their sojourn in Portugal); Ferreira, *Correspondance de quatre artistes portugais*.

²⁰ These *hors text* were recently discussed by Marta Soares, "Os 4 hors-textes de *Orpheu* 3," in *Os Caminhos de Orpheu*, Richard Zenith ed. (Lisboa: Babel, 2015), 103-108.

¹⁰ See Jaime Brihuega, *Las Vanguardias artísticas en España. 1909-1936* (Madrid: Istmo, 1981), and also his "The Language of Avant-garde Art in Spain: A collage on the Margin," in *The Spanish avant-garde*, Derek Harris ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 84-95.

¹¹ See Freitas, *Catálogo Raisoné Amadeo Souza Cardoso*, I, 45.

¹² Ibid., 102.

¹³ Ibid., 139.



Figure 1. Robert Delaunay (1885-1941), *Project Bulletin de souscription pour l'Album n.1 des Expositions Mouvantes Nord-Sud-Est-Ouest (Subscription Bulletin for the Album n.1 of the Traveling Exhibitions North-South-East-West project)*, c. 1916. Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation Museum - Modern collection.

see, were planned to bind northern and southern European artists in a “Simultaneist International,” never took place.²¹ In consequence, significant as they may be, these projects ended up failing to secure the historiographical recognition of previous Parisian networking.

The abiding idea of Souza Cardoso’s isolation is furthermore bound to a specific art historical reading of his work. It is one that insists on the fragility of the national artistic milieu as mirroring the insurmountable geographical and aesthetic distance from the centers of the avant-garde. Despite this common polarization, Portuguese art history has drawn opposite, though interconnected, readings of the individual hallmark of Souza Cardoso’s painting, particularly the move towards collage practiced between 1916 and 1917.²² Art historian José-Augusto França speaks of these collage-paintings as opening a new

works testify that: “Amadeo’s futurist option had developed in a heterogeneous way [...] progressively increasing the tension, increasing the rage that allowed him to exceed the world of rhythmic architectures and suggestions of the ‘tumultuous [modern] life’ in order to achieve a Dadaist universe of poetry and destruction.”²⁴

Despite these words, França’s seminal account on Souza Cardoso’s paintings of 1916–1917 is rather negative. França discredits the idea of Cardoso’s prime Parisian-rank merits that would be conversely praised by his followers. Though França considers his last works exceptional as far as the Portuguese milieu is concerned, he does not consider them to have escaped the specter of peripheral (ultimately low) standards he attributes to Portuguese modernism. This judgment lies in the belief that Souza Cardoso’s longstanding dialogue and friendship with Robert Delaunay was rather an asymmetric relation, ostensibly a straightforward artistic indebtedness by the Portuguese.²⁵

²¹ Souza Cardoso did send a series of paintings to Robert Delaunay in 1916 destined for a collective exhibition scheduled for Barcelona; see O’Neill, “Modernist Rendez-vous,” 75–76; and Pascal Rousseau, *La Aventura Simultánea: Sonia y Robert Delaunay en Barcelona* (Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona, 1995), 22–50. The Delaunays postponed this exhibition and Amadeo Souza Cardoso ended up quitting the project; see Joana Cunha Leal, “Corporation Nouvelle, the Barcelona Exhibition Plans and the Simultaneist International,” in *O Círculo Delaunay/The Delaunay Circle*, Ana Vasconcelos ed. (Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2015), 205–225.

²² See Joana Cunha Leal, “Trapped bugs, rotten fruits and faked collages: Amadeo Souza Cardoso’s troublesome modernism,” in *Konsthistorisk tidskrift/Journal of Art History*, Vol. 82, Issue 2 (2013): 99–114.

²³ França wrote the first and seminal essay on Souza Cardoso’s work, establishing the basis of all subsequent accounts up to the present day; see José-Augusto França, “Amadeo de Souza Cardoso;” see also Joana Cunha Leal, “Uma entrada para Entrada. Amadeo, a historiografia e os territórios da pintura,” in *Intervalo*, N.4 (2010): 133–153.

²⁴ França, “Amadeo de Souza Cardoso,” 122; my translation.

²⁵ Cunha Leal, “Trapped bugs, rotten fruits and faked collages.”

Souza Cardoso met the Delaunays in 1911.²⁶ Robert Delaunay's influence is clearly traceable in some of his 1913 paintings as they approach the abstract compositions of the French, namely by building pictorial space out of light and color simultaneous contrasts.²⁷ While momentarily sharing these simultaneist principles, the famous color discs arrived at Souza Cardoso's paintings bringing in the potential for color contrasts to create movement and to reinstate a new (pure) pictorial space through complementary and dissonant contrasts displayed in circular forms.

Amadeo Souza Cardoso recovered the simultaneous color circles when he re-encountered the Delaunays in Portugal. His pervasive use of color circles at that time contrasted with his previous fleeting experiences, and precisely because there was a conspicuous difference, the circles were taken to prove not only Delaunay's longstanding influence on him, but also Delaunay's über-position.²⁸ França stresses that Cardoso's appropriation of the Delaunayan circles was now distorted by the "various degrees of use and compositional meaning" attributed to them.²⁹ In his words, the painter operates a distasteful "functional inversion" of the circles' original terms: he withdraws the simultaneous circles from their (putative) original sanctuary—Delaunay's quest for pure painting—and threw them into the ordinary world of representation, as they appear in Cardoso's paintings as apron adornments, elbow joints, bull's-eye targets or signals in space.³⁰ As a consequence, França writes, they took on a degraded *decorative* dimension.³¹

França's modernist perspective was backed by an essentialist notion of art and by the belief that abstraction was painting's necessary historical

outcome. Therefore, *decorativeness* was a "capital crime" not only because it outshone the structural dimension of color circles, but also because, in so doing, earlier abstract tendencies conducive to autonomous painting were swept away in favor of representation. In sum, the adjective denotes what the historian believes is the adamant distance between Robert Delaunay's pure *Frenchness* and Souza Cardoso's 'second-hand' Parisian experience. Put differently, his peripheral provenance.

This question achieves its highpoint *a propos* Souza Cardoso's collage-paintings of 1916 and 1917, where such potentially legible signs prevail, and occasionally get extra narrative potential. Uncertain and polysemic as they may be, references to shared experiences and life events do surface in those collage-paintings, as happens with the untitled 1917 canvas known as the *Register Machine* (Máquina Registradora; attributed title; Fig. 2).



Figure 2. Amadeo Souza Cardoso (1887-1918), *Untitled (Máquina Registradora/Register Machine)*, c. 1917. Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation Museum - Modern collection.

²⁶ Freitas, *Catálogo Raisoné Amadeo Souza Cardoso*, I, 143.

²⁷ França, "Amadeo de Souza Cardoso," 73-78.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 140.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 139.

³⁰ It is worth noticing that, as Joyeux-Prunel's has shown, Robert Delaunay was never a "pure" abstract painter himself. In fact, he maintained a strategic double approach to painting before the War, exhibiting figurative "simultaneous" pieces in Paris, while showing his "pure" abstract works abroad, especially in Germany; see Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, *Nul n'est prophète en son pays?: l'internationalisation de la peinture des avant-gardes parisiennes (1855-1914)* (Paris: Musée d'Orsay, 2009), 182 ff.

³¹ França, "Amadeo de Souza Cardoso," 139-140; decorative has here a straightforward pejorative meaning specified in the version that Gleizes and Metzinger gave of cubism in 1912, while stating that decorative work is the very antithesis of autonomous painting; see Cunha Leal, "Trapped bugs, rotten fruits and faked collages."

As I have written elsewhere, the untitled canvas known as *Entrada* (Entrance; c. 1917; attributed title; Fig. 3) also gives us a striking example of the unspotted merging of modernist aesthetics, referenced modes of representation and narrative play.³²



Figure 3. Amadeo Souza Cardoso (1887-1918), *Untitled (Entrada/Entrance)*, c. 1917. Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation Museum - Modern collection.

In *Entrada* several elements signal the involvement of Portugal (and the US) in the First World War—namely the word “entrance” and the allusion to the tragic sinking of the transatlantic liner, *Lusitania*, hit by a torpedo fired from a German U-boat in 1915. *Entrada* also incorporates references to a well-known episode of the staggering accusation of espionage that, in that context, befell Sonia Delaunay during her Portuguese sojourn (Souza Cardoso took charge of Sonia Delaunay’s defense, securing and funding proper legal advice while her husband was away in Spain).³³

³² Cunha Leal, “Trapped bugs, rotten fruits and faked collages.”

³³ The episode can be followed through the letters exchanged between Cardoso and Robert Delaunay; see Ferreira, *Correspondance de quatre artistes portugais*, 123–124.

The tower and the periscope of a U-boat with the Austrian colors are placed just above the word “entrance.” An interior space is also suggested among pieces of guitars and violins. It is illuminated by an electric lamp and separated from the apparent nocturnal darkness by the horizontal lines of gold colored shutters (that are also the strings of a guitar which has a mirror for a sound hole). The faked *papier collé* decorated with a gigantic flower in the upper left corner might well belong to this interior ambiance. Also present are the color discs, which had been the basis of the accusation against Sonia (the Portuguese denouncer accused Sonia of sending encrypted messages to German U-boats located along the Atlantic coast via the simultaneous color discs).

This collage painting explores the potential of representation through un-sequenced narrative and non-illusionist figuration. By no means do these references turn *Entrada* into a straightforward synecdoche aiming to be but a fragmented composition of figurative signs. Quite the opposite, the modernist canonical contempt for the decorative use of Delaunayan color circles can be taken here as signaling both Souza Cardoso’s highlighting of the humorous fall of those color circles’ original pureness into the worldly grounds of allegory (here emulating encoded messages of espionage), and his critical distance from Robert Delaunay’s pictorial project. In other words, *decorativeness* may point to Souza Cardoso’s voluntary and conscious distancing from Robert Delaunay’s reinterpretation of simultaneism as pure painting, therefore signaling Souza Cardoso’s informed criticism of ongoing debates on the place and fate of painting (namely through the extensive use of faked collages). This would be contrary to any sort of devoted recognition, much less pious indebtedness.³⁴

The diversity and complexity of the exchanges and dialogues occurring in *Entrada*, reinforced as they are by Souza Cardoso’s sophisticated and witty decision to infest the Delaunayan color circles with bugs and flies and to challenge *papier collés* by

³⁴ Cunha Leal, “Trapped bugs, rotten fruits and faked collages,” 11.

faking them, contradicts the thesis of incognizant appropriations. And the fact that there is no asymmetry between Cardoso and Delaunay ready to be measured by notions such as “indebtedness” or “distorted appropriation,” allows us to discuss straightforward center/periphery dichotomies and their geographical and aesthetic assumptions. In this case, the logic of a geographical opposition is destabilized by the fact that Cardoso is both Parisian and Portuguese.³⁵ Common pre-conceptions about production-places and their meanings do not hold, in the sense that Souza Cardoso's painting extreme *localness* cannot be read as opposed to the Parisian center, nor can it be measured in terms of distance from that center. Though conceived in the remote region of Manhufe, Cardoso's collage-paintings kept a dialogue with an international milieu that circulated at ease beyond its Parisian navel, incorporating regional references in Manhufe as his former paintings did in Montparnasse.³⁶

On the other hand, once one considers the literary dimension of historical narratives,³⁷ formalist aesthetics interpretations are also destabilized because there is no such thing as an evident right path to be traced in the history of art. Therefore, pure abstraction and Dadaism are not rightful achievements against which Cardoso's painting must necessarily be gauged, but significant events that happen to be defined as epilogues by canonical modernist historical narrative.

Joan Miró (1893–1983)

These considerations apply to Joan Miró's case as well. Despite the considerable differences between the two painters, it is worth noticing that the analysis of avant-garde eruptions in Spain, and particularly in Barcelona, is affected by exactly the

same notions of isolation and “distorted appropriations” we found in Souza Cardoso's case.

The idea of Miró's isolation during the war years prevailed in Spanish art history, usually signaling the uniqueness of his individual artistic pursuit in the face of the putative fragility of his local companions and friends. Again, this polarized approach takes the geographical and aesthetic distance between the Barcelonean milieu and the centers of the avant-garde as an indisputable fact, regardless of the contaminations and dialogues occurring by that time. Valeriano Bozal firmly sustains that Miró became familiar with modern art from 1912 on,³⁸ as he could then attend to the manifold international shows brought to Barcelona by, as we shall see, Josep Dalmau and Ambroise Vollard. And though Miró is taken to be at the center of “the most advanced Catalan art during those years,” his 1916-17 paintings would give evidence of his detachment from the local artistic milieu and pictorial tradition.³⁹ From such a binary standpoint, the recognition of a trope as dominant implies the receding of the other, and perhaps more importantly it withdraws any possibility of a composite reading of Barcelona as a production-place. So, just as had been the case with Souza Cardoso, Miró would have been a completely isolated painter, unexpectedly flourishing in his local milieu. Not surprisingly, so the narrative follows, he would distance himself from his Catalan colleagues and friends, accomplishing a solitary stroll around cubism's lessons that he incorporated with “few cubist concerns.”⁴⁰

Distortedness is likewise asserted on the basis of an a priori compliance with the binary geographical and aesthetic center/periphery opposition. As I have been discussing, the diversity associated with circulation, and to the complexity

³⁵ Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel has keenly pointed out the insufficiency of all studies that approach the avant-garde from a national perspective, because even the painting classified as national issues from an internationalized artworld; see Joyeux-Prunel, “Nul n'est prophète en son pays...” ou la logique avant-gardiste. *L'internationalisation de la peinture des avant-gardes parisiennes, 1855-1914*. Ph.D. Dissertation (Paris: Université Paris 1 - Panthéon Sorbonne, 2005), 792.

³⁶ Delaunay himself has produced in many different places, including Portugal, and his centralness in the Parisian landscape can be, of course, very much discussed.

³⁷ Hayden White, *Metahistory. The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1973).

³⁸ By 1912, Miró started to study at the Art School of Francesc Galí in Barcelona; see Valeriano Bozal, *Arte del siglo XX en España* (Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1991), 320.

³⁹ It would be through the contact with modern French painters, whose work Miró got to see in those exhibitions and whose lesson he began to incorporate, that he would have “elevated” himself from his regional background: “up to a point one has to say that the work he produces during these years ‘looking’ at Paris signals the end of the Barcelonean pictorial protagonism: modern art is from now on, as Miró clearly shows, something else;” Valeriano Bozal, *Arte del siglo XX en España*, 321-322. The thesis of Miró's isolation is had previously been stated by Jaime Brihuega, *Las Vanguardias artísticas en España. 1909-1936* (Madrid: Istmo, 1981), 441 ff.

⁴⁰ Bozal, *Arte del siglo XX en España*, 322; my translation.



Figure 4. Joan Miró (1893-1983), *Retrat de Vicenç Nubiola* (*Portrait of Vicent Nubiola*), c.1917. Folkwang Museum, Essen. © Successió Miró / ADAGP, Paris, 2017.

of references and dialogues occurring in the work of these painters during the war period, which for Miró meant the very beginning of his career as a painter, seems to be underestimated.

Robert S. Lubar's analysis of Joan Miró's early painting is worthy of attention in this context,⁴¹ as he has been one of the main voices challenging the formalist celebration of Miró's oeuvre by U.S. criticism, consistently insisting instead on the idea that "Miró reacted against esthetic purity as an end

in itself throughout his long career."⁴² Indeed, Lubar points out an essential antinomy in Miró's work: the fact that it conflates a "fundamental devotion to painting" with a radical challenge to it.⁴³

This thesis (that celebrates Miró's *post-modern* potential) is mainly discussed on the account of paintings and collages from the 1920s up to the 1950s. Nevertheless, the author takes the early dialogue Miró maintained with cubism during the

⁴¹ Robert S. Lubar, "Miró's Defiance of Painting," *Art in America* 82/9 (1994): 86-92, 132.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 86.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 88.

war years in Catalonia as a fundamental starting point:

For Miró's generation, Cubism was synonymous with advanced modernism, and Miró's perception of both was conditioned by his experience of geographical distance and cultural difference. It is important to remember that Miró began his career with a somewhat distorted view of modern art and of modernism as a theoretical enterprise. He was, for example, more likely to have read Maurice Raynal's and Pierre Reverdy's philosophical tracts on Cubism than he was to have actually seen much Cubist painting in Barcelona. That situation changed with his first trip to Paris in March 1920.⁴⁴

The evidence that "Modernism represented an alien tradition which Miró attempted simultaneously to master and submit to a sustained critique," is given by the thorough analysis of two paintings that, just like Souza Cardoso's collage paintings previously referred to, date from 1917: *Portrait of Vicent Nubiola* (Retrat de Vicenç Nubiola; Fig. 4) and *Nord-Sud* (Fig. 5). For Lubar, these paintings show, through the all-inclusive, new, yet putatively distorted, superficial influences they denote—from Cézanne and the Cubists to Fauvism and Italian Futurism—that the young Miró was a "precocious outsider" of the "modernist tradition." For instance, the vibrating color lines defined in the upper-right-hand section of the canvas in Nubiola's portrait are read as having been inspired by Futurist painting, even though, Lubar stresses, Miró skipped the descriptive function inferable in a stylistic appropriation of such kind. Nevertheless, the author concludes: "The point here is less that Miró misunderstood the pictorial syntax of Futurism than that he was engaged in a discreet dismantling of a borrowed formal language, using it to a different end."⁴⁵

Yet the idea that Miró distorted some of his influences, and had only access in Barcelona to a theoretical, and thus incomplete understanding of modern art and modernism prevails.



Figure 5. Joan Miró (1893-1983), *Nord-Sud* (North-South), 1917. Collection Adrien Maeght, Saint Paul. © Successió Miró / ADAGP, Paris, 2017.

Indeed, it reappears in 2004, in the text written for the Pompidou catalogue.⁴⁶ Miró's early work (1916–1919) would give evidence of "a rudimentary understanding of the principles of cubist painting, to which he obliquely refers through tentatively faceting objects and tilting the picture plane forward."⁴⁷ Though Miró's theoretical understanding of cubism would be irreproachable, those canvases would have been "Cézannist in inspiration and structure," distancing themselves from cubist painting:

Miró deliberately combines pictorial strategies from a broad range of sources, including Catalan Romanesque art, Fauvism, Italian Futurism and the work of ex-patriot artists like Kees van Dongen, Robert and Sonia Delaunay and Albert Gleizes all of whom passed through and/or exhibited in Barcelona during the World War years.⁴⁸

And also:

if there is a structural principle that governs Miró's work at this time, it is its radical heterogeneity, as the artist's contact with advanced French and Italian painting was partial, sporadic and mediated by the work of local artists.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Ibid., my emphasis.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Robert S. Lubar, "Miró in 1924: Cubism and the subject of vision," in *Joan Miró, 1916–1934*, Agnès Anglivièl de La Beaumelle ed. (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 2004), 52–59.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 53.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

There is much to be read here besides the disturbing idea that cubism had an inner formal homogeneity, one that putatively contrasted with its theoretical diversity. For instance, just as stated in the accounts celebrating Souza Cardoso's last works, thanks to his unique individual capacities Miró would have been able to transform a negative condition (his supposed distorted view of modern art and of modernism; or the fact that he misunderstood futurism's pictorial syntax) into an unforeseen possibility (a prelude of a post-modern critique of Modernism).⁵⁰ Contrary to Amadeo Souza Cardoso though, Joan Miró's creative freedom would arise not from a well-developed Parisian career, but from his ill-informed and naïve relation to the Parisian art world (that is, again, his peripheral position). The fact that Miró was educated in Barcelona and never had the chance to visit Paris before the war is taken to have produced a paradoxical situation: on the one hand, a potentially adequate response to *high* Modernism arises; while distorted and naïve, this response is taken as sufficient to tell him apart from his local counterparts (namely those associated to *Noucentisme*);⁵¹ on the other hand, Miró's response was still inherently peripheral. Consequently, Miró would only achieve his full potential after benefiting from a thorough immersion in post-war Paris.⁵²

Twenty years have passed since the articles quoted above were written. This temporal gap is key if one considers post-colonial critical revisions of modernist art history and the history of modernisms. Seen from a distance, these kinds of approaches appear too narrow, designed as they were from the assumption that a modernist canon prevails beyond modernist historiographical narratives, and could not have been challenged from within. Moreover, they ended up validating the paradigmatic geographical and aesthetical a priori divide between center and periphery.

These polarized narratives contrast not only with the multitude of artists who, having benefited from a Parisian immersion, remained outside both from canonical accounts of central modernism and from critical perspectives on the modernist canon, but also, and most importantly, with Barcelona's quest for centrality during the war period, namely its ambition of being recognized as "the capital of art," eventually overcoming Paris, as stated in *La Veu de Catalunya* [The voice of Catalonia] in 1917.⁵³ So, maybe one should abandon standard preconceptions about production-places and begin by asking: how faraway was Miró from the center of modernism and the avant-garde before he went to Paris? What did it mean to become a painter in Barcelona during the war period?

Iberian cultural and artistic landscape of the early twentieth century was, of course, rather diverse. Unlike Madrid or Lisbon where avant-garde disruptions appeared as more isolated phenomena,⁵⁴ Barcelona was, as is well known, a primary location of artistic production by the time the war arrived.⁵⁵ Catalan artistic circles were looking into the international avant-garde long before Miró started to paint,⁵⁶ and debates around cubism streaming from Paris were immediately heard in Barcelona.⁵⁷

Josep Dalmau (1867–1937) played a major role during those years in Barcelona, since his gallery initiated a program favoring both national and international circles of the avant-garde.⁵⁸ His famous 1912 cubist show⁵⁹ responded to the

⁵³ See William H. Robinson, Jordi Falgàs, Carmen Belen Lord eds., *Barcelona and Modernity*; and also Rousseau, *La Aventura Simultánea*, 14.

⁵⁴ Like the translation of the Futurist Manifesto in 1910 by Ramon Gomez de la Serna published in *Prometeo*; see Carola Sbriziolo, "Futurist Texts in the Madrilenian Review *Prometeo*," in *Iberian Futurisms (International Yearbook of Futurism Studies 3)*, Gunter Berghaus ed. (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2013), 99–121; or the publication of *Orpheu* journal in Lisbon in 1915; see Steffen Dix ed., *1915 O ano do Orpheu* (Lisboa: Tinta da China, 2015).

⁵⁵ Brihuega, *Las Vanguardias artísticas en España*; Bozal, *Arte del siglo XX en España*; Robinson et alii, *Barcelona and Modernity*.

⁵⁶ These circles were particularly engaged in the affirmation of a national identity, namely (but not exclusively) through the right-wing progressive political agenda of *Noucentisme* and its artistic quest for a national Mediterranean classicism; see Robinson et alii, *Barcelona and Modernity*.

⁵⁷ See Robert S. Lubar, "Cubism, Classicism and Ideology: The 1912 Exposició d'Art Cubista in Barcelona and French Cubist Criticism," in *On Classic Ground: Picasso, Léger, de Chirico and the New Classicism 1910-1930*, Elizabeth Cowling and Jennifer Mundy eds. (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1990), 309–23; and also Mark Antliff, "Cubism, Celtism, and the Body Politic," in *The Art Bulletin*, 74/4 (1992): 655–668.

⁵⁸ Jaume Vidal i Oliveras, *Josep Dalmau: l'aventura per l'art modern* (Barcelona: Fundació Caixa Manresa, 1993), 61–77.

⁵⁹ Featuring August Agero, Marcel Duchamp, Albert Gleizes, Juan Gris, Marie Laurencin, Metzinger, Le Fauconnier and Fernand Léger; see Mercè Vidal, *1912 L'Exposició d'Art Cubista de les Galeries Dalmau* (Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona, 1996), 37–53.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 88.

⁵¹ William H. Robinson, Jordi Falgàs, Carmen Belen Lord eds., *Barcelona and Modernity: Picasso, Gaudí, Miró, Dalí* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007).

⁵² Lubar's thesis is partly shared by Bozal, *Arte del siglo XX en España*, 323–324.

growing interest in the movement,⁶⁰ portrayed by avant-garde criticism as radically surpassing impressionism and as “expand[ing] traditions in the direction of the classicism of the future.”⁶¹ Dalmau’s exhibition brought about an impressive local debate: more than twenty lengthy critical articles debating cubism and the exhibition appeared in the Catalan press.⁶² So, instead of straightforward manifestations of repudiation, shock or bathetic amazement, the pervasive narrative of cubism’s affiliation to the *grand tradition* of French painting was thoroughly discussed in Barcelona at that time. This happened not only because Catalan artists and critics thought that cubism could not be equated without considering the work of Picasso (the local hero whose absence was the main fragility pointed to in Dalmau’s initiative),⁶³ but also because it clashed with *Noucentisme’s* notion of classicism. Thus, the critical reception of cubism in Barcelona cannot be pictured as an out-of-the-box de-contextualized presentation, for it was assimilated by an informed public able to intertwine cubism’s propositions and dissensus with the Catalan art agenda.

As previously mentioned, by 1912 Miró was already studying at the Art School of Francesc Galí in Barcelona, and could therefore have benefited from the international shows that have established Dalmau’s gallery as a renowned reference (its importance would grow significantly during the war, as the city benefited from Spanish neutrality).⁶⁴ Albert Gleizes had a solo show there in 1916, and so did Kees van Dongen a year before. Around the same period, Dalmau was supporting Francis Picabia’s edition of the Dada magazine *391*, whom Miró got to know and admired, both for his

artworks and his poems.⁶⁵ The challenging *simultaneist* exhibition mentioned earlier, devised by Robert and Sonia Delaunay with their Portuguese friends and the Italian, Stockholm-based painter and gallery owner Arturo Ciacelli, should also have occurred there in 1916 but never did.⁶⁶

Alongside Dalmau’s activities, a major exhibition of French art organized by Ambroise Vollard, and funded by Barcelona’s city council, in 1917 showcased the entire generation of French Impressionists and Fauves.⁶⁷ By that time, Robert Delaunay was already established in Madrid, and finally managed to exhibit his work in Barcelona in 1918 (in the Municipal Show held at the Fine Arts Palace).⁶⁸ The invitation had come from a group of national artists responding to the major impact of three long illustrated articles Delaunay had published in the magazine *Vell i Nou* in December 1917.⁶⁹ These articles had appeared in turn as an answer to Joan Sacs’ (1878–1948) study *Modern French painting up to cubism (La pintura francesa moderna fins el cubisme)* published earlier the same year, which defended “the unique sensibility of French art” while criticizing cubism.⁷⁰ Delaunay cheered Sacs’ perspective, taking the opportunity to demonstrate that his *simultaneist* project pertained to the very painterly clearness and sophisticated construction attributed to the French tradition, and was therefore contrary to all versions of cubism. Aware of the cheerful reception offered to Picasso during his visit to Barcelona that same year, as well as its major repercussions in the newspapers (as several articles asserting Picasso’s leading role in modern art were published), he moreover classified cubism as deleterious, hermetic and “foreigner.”⁷¹

⁶⁰ This interest is particularly secure after the scandals associated with the 1911 *Salons*; as Vidal writes: “The Salon d’Automne, specially its 8th room, constitutes an affirmation and testimony of the new movement [...] From this exhibition on references to cubism are regularly published in the Catalan press, particularly in the *Pàgina Artística de La Veu de Catalunya* and *La Publicidad*. These regular references corroborate the fact that, since 1911, major endorsement and diffusion of the new movement is made [in Catalonia];” see Vidal, *1912 L’Exposició d’Art Cubista de les Galeries Dalmau*, 21–22, my translation.

⁶¹ Roger Allard, “Au salon d’Automne de Paris” [1910], in *A Cubism Reader: Documents and Criticism 1906–1914*, Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton eds. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 85.

⁶² Vidal, *1912 L’Exposició d’Art Cubista de les Galeries Dalmau*.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 28, 54–57.

⁶⁴ Namely the exhibition of fifteen Polish artists established in Paris in that same Spring; see Vidal i Oliveras, *Josep Dalmau*, 221; Brihuega, *Las Vanguardias artísticas en España*, 176; Bozal, *Arte del siglo XX en España*, 320; and Felix Fanés and Joan M. Minguet eds., *Barcelona, zona neutral 1914–1918* (Barcelona: Fundació Joan Miró, 2014).

⁶⁵ See Bozal, *Arte del siglo XX en España*, 320. Picabia would also show his paintings at the Dalmau gallery a bit later, in 1922; see Vidal i Oliveras, *Josep Dalmau*, 221–225.

⁶⁶ Rousseau, *La Aventura Simultánea*, 32–36; on Sonia Delaunay’s exhibition in Stockholm see Annika Öhrner, “Delaunay and Stockholm,” in *O Círculo Delaunay / The Delaunay Circle*, Ana Vasconcelos ed. (Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2015), 226–240.

⁶⁷ Christopher Green, *Cubism and its enemies* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), 305; Fanés and Minguet, *Barcelona, zona neutral 1914–1918*, 279–280.

⁶⁸ Rousseau, *La Aventura Simultánea*, 49–83.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 100–114.

⁷⁰ Joan Sacs [pseud. of Felii Elias], *La pintura moderna francesa fins al cubisme* (Barcelona: “La Revista,” 1917).

⁷¹ See Rousseau, *La Aventura Simultánea*, 54–58.

Such had been the spirit of the “Simultaneist International” project the Delaunays had tried (but failed) to put together during their Iberian sojourn. The project should have brought together artists from “Moscow, Portugal, America, Switzerland and Italy,” and as mentioned above, from Nordic countries too,⁷² without configuring another artistic movement (which was a possibility that, in his plea for “pure painting,” Robert Delaunay abhorred).⁷³ Instead, a network would be created in order to expand the “north-south axis” the Delaunay’s sought to establish against cubism at that time.⁷⁴

Miró was very close to Dalmau’s avant-garde circles, which did not have an exclusive international profile.⁷⁵ Among the many artists who took refuge in Barcelona contributing to the liveliness of its art circles, one counts several Catalan and Spanish sculptors and painters, such as Pau Gargallo, Manolo Hugué, Joaquin Sunyer, Celso Lagar or even Pablo Picasso, who returned to the city for several months in 1917.⁷⁶ Other Barcelona-based artists, like Joaquin Torres-Garcia and Rafael Barradas, were regularly showing their work at the very Dalmau gallery.⁷⁷ Besides having joined other prominent young Catalan (or Catalan-based) painters at the *Agrupació Courbet* (Courbet group), Miró was also friends with other Catalan avant-garde protagonists, namely the poet Josep Junoy (1887–1955) who would take the letters of Miró’s name and compose a calligram for the cover of his Dalmau gallery exhibition in 1918.⁷⁸

Let us finally look at Miró’s 1917 *Nord-Sud* painting, keeping this composite of local and international artistic references in mind. Let us re-open the interrogation about his putative distorted view of modern art and modernism as a theoretical enterprise, as it becomes apparent that

Miró did not have to leave Barcelona, nor estrange himself from local art circles, to experience an avant-garde milieu and have access to significant exhibitions and discussions on modern art during the war.⁷⁹ Moreover, Miró could not have ignored the thorough discussion prompted by cubism’s impact on the means and possibilities of representation and painting taking place in Barcelona, and by extension the argument of its severe flaws presented by Robert Delaunay in the pages of *Vell i Nou* in 1917 as he praised *simultaneist* painting virtues.

Miró’s *Nord-Sud* has been rightfully associated to Pierre Reverdy’s magazine, where cubism was being reinstated as an outcome of the French classical tradition and defined as necessarily belonging to a sphere of aesthetic purity.⁸⁰ Robert S. Lubar gives us a perfect description of this painting stressing how Miró “fractured the space of his composition with explosive, centrifugal force,” and how the painted objects— “a potted plant, a bird cage, a pear, a book of Goethe’s poetry, a brilliantly colored change purse, an earthenware pitcher and the French literary journal which lends the painting its title” —appear “within isolated pockets of space defined by luminous aureoles of pure hue.” Furthermore, the art historian points out that *Nord-Sud*’s “effect is of extreme syntactical disjunction, since many of the objects are pushed out towards the edges of the painting. The scissors in the foreground, a symbolic reference to the cuts and breaks in the visual field, in turn thematizes this spatial and optical discontinuity, announcing *avant la lettre* the paradigmatic role that collage, with its disjunctions, would have in Miró’s art. And indeed, by 1928 Miró would begin systematically using the technique of collage itself to challenge the modernist idea of a unified optical field.”⁸¹

Miró’s first experiences with collage date precisely from the war years (1916–1917), as is shown by the still life entitled “*La Publicitat*” and the vase of

⁷² *Ibid.*, 32.

⁷³ As he stated in *Vell i Nou*; *Ibid.*, 100–114.

⁷⁴ O’Neill, “Modernist Rendez-vous,” 61–77; Rousseau, “‘El arte nuevo nos sonríe’ Robert y Sonia Delaunay en Iberia (1914–1921),” 41.

⁷⁵ Vidal i Oliveras, “Josep Dalmau,” 70–74.

⁷⁶ See Fanés and Minguet, *Barcelona, zona neutral 1914–1918*, 280–281.

⁷⁷ See Vidal i Oliveras, *Josep Dalmau*, 221–225.

⁷⁸ Dalmau would be responsible for Miró’s first exhibition in Barcelona, and likewise for the future promotion of his work in Paris. Miró’s exhibition had an enthusiastic review in *Troços* signed by Josep Junoy. Furthermore Miró would publish a drawing in the second series of *Troços* (1917–1918) in March 1918; see Jardí, *Els Moviments d’Avanguardia a Barcelona*, 63–65.

⁷⁹ See Green, *Cubism and its enemies*, 66 and Bozal, *Arte del siglo XX en España*, 320–322.

⁸⁰ See Antliff and Leighton, *A Cubism Reader*, 348–349.

⁸¹ Lubar, “Miró’s Defiance of Painting,” 88–89.

flowers (Fig. 6). As in *Nord-Sud*, Miró makes use of the newspaper headline, but in this case the headline is a real *papier collé* appearing, as in cubist collages of 1912, cut mid-way through. There is another *papier collé* glued slightly below the main headline with three smaller article or section titles where one can read: “Taula d’equivalencies” (equivalence chart), “Full dietary” (daily chronicle) and “Arte” (art). As these titles are positioned in an easily readable row it is hard to avoid the idea that Miró was directly addressing the artistic pursuits and debates of his heyday, particularly if one considers the “cézannian resonances, with a final result very close to cubism” attributed to the remaining composition of the still life.⁸²

Though the composition and colors used in “*La Publicitat*” are considerably saturated and therefore contrast with the lighter palette and airy composition of *Nord-Sud*, these two works take part in the same ongoing conversation on the means and possibilities of representation and painting prompted by cubism. While clearly referencing *simultaneist* painting through the use of color circles, *Nord-Sud* alludes to collage through the painted scissors and through the faked *papier collé*—the headline of Reverdy’s journal *Nord-Sud*—arriving at a core debate that Souza Cardoso had likewise considered in his work. Given the significance of Delaunay’s exhibition project for the Dalmau gallery and the proximity Miró had with Josep Dalmau, it is perhaps admissible to consider that *Nord-Sud* might also allude to the unfulfilled exhibition project put together by the Delaunays, and particularly their determination to build a north-south axis between artists. At least *Nord-Sud*’s tribute to Goethe might be associated not only to his poetry, but also to his theory of colour (1810), brought in by Miró to dialogue with Delaunay’s *simultaneism*.

Be that as it may, *Nord-Sud*’s juxtapositions stage painting’s fenceless bird cage and Miró’s critical

understanding of the main debates occurring in Barcelona in 1917, starring Delaunay’s quest for pure painting and his celebration of *simultaneism*. Such understanding is made to dialogue with both the theoretical developments proposed by Reverdy, and the impact of collage, here symbolized, as Lubar clearly stated, by the scissors he paints over the table.

What I want to stress finally is that Miró was able critically to acknowledge the debates of his contemporaries, constructing a position that concerns his Catalan counterparts just as much as the international pursuits of avant-garde painting. Furthermore, *Nord-Sud* demonstrates that a key tendency identified by Valeriano Bozal in Miró’s later work is deeply rooted in these early years:

the image brings together diverse motifs, amongst which there is not a mimetic-naturalist one anymore, but that, once reunited, allow us to recognize a subject-matter, as if one would look at an inventory of things that might appear or become significant, in order to, while trying to represent that inventory, give a visual order to those elements.⁸³

Curiously enough, this is the exact tendency found in Souza Cardoso’s last collage-paintings, where the potential of representation through unsequenced narrative and non-illusionist figuration is also explored, while furthermore dialoging with contemporary painting by the means of painting (namely by faking collages and commenting on Delaunay’s quest for pure painting). The fact that polysemic references to ongoing dialogues, experiences, and life events surface in Miró’s and Cardoso’s work allowing us to consider that, despite the fact that Barcelona’s wartime momentum did not endure,⁸⁴ these painters brilliantly transformed the tensions of their heyday in “food for painting.”

⁸² Fèlix Fanés, *Pintura, collage, cultura de masas: Joan Miró, 1919–1934* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2007), 99; my translation.

⁸³ Bozal, *Arte del siglo XX en España*, 322–323; my translation.

⁸⁴ William H. Robinson, “Avant-garde for a new Century,” in *Barcelona and Modernity*, 312.

Conclusion

Circulation and contaminations are disturbing because they imply transformation, and because transformation adds a degree of complexity that weaves the particular and the general, the regional/national and the international/cosmopolitan in artistic approaches. The richness of these transformational processes can only be acknowledged if historical narratives avoid polarized modes of thinking, namely those complying with the center/periphery geographical and aesthetical pre-conceptions about production-places and the meanings (including value) attributed to them. Amadeo de Souza Cardoso's and Miró's paintings from the war years show us, through the dialogues they maintain both with their local milieus and their international counterparts, that center and off-center positions are often entwined, and that *localness* in art production is not a synonym of straightforward distance or simplistic (distorted) appropriations. Moreover, they show that formalist interpretations, often reduced to stylistic approaches, also need to be destabilized. Stylistic purity is an ideal constructed by historical narratives. It relies on choices made by historians on the basis of, again, polarized principles. Once defined, these principles allow them to approach invariably complex, and therefore rich, artistic contexts in order to exclude from them all the parts that do not fit pre-established formal principles. This is how canonical modernist historical narratives have been operating, and this explains why the complexity of the exchanges, contaminations and dialogues occurring in the work of these painters significantly challenges core historiographical assumptions by simply disclosing the constructed dimension of their main premises.