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The Medieval in Modernism: Cathedrals, Stained Glass, and Constructive Painting in Joaquín Torres-García and in the European Avant-garde

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To Rogério, Marc and Ana

(in no particular order)

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CATHEDRALS, STAINED GLASS, AND CONSTRUCTIVE PAINTING
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O MEDIEVAL NO MODERNISMO:
CATEDRAIS, VITRAIS, E PINTURA CONSTRUTIVA
EM JOAQUÍN TORRES-GARCÍA E NA AVANGUARDA EUROPEIA

BEGOÑA FARRÉ TORRAS

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PALAVRAS-CHAVE: pintura construtiva, referentes medievais, modernismo, catedral, vitral, Joaquín Torres-García

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines modernist attitudes towards the past generally and towards the medieval past in particular, by exploring the significance of gothic architecture and stained glass to the constructive pictorial enquiries of Joaquín Torres-García, František Kupka, Robert Delaunay, Otto Freundlich, Piet Mondrian, Theo van Doesburg and Josef Albers. Torres-García is taken as a case study given that his painted and written work shows an actual engagement with the medieval that has hitherto gone largely

unnoticed. The discussion thus traces Torres-García's complex and changing relationship with the gothic over time, and examines its place in his constructive pictorial practice. Close attention is given to two particular periods in Torres-García's career. Firstly, his transition from Noucentisme to the avant-garde in the mid-1910s in Barcelona, coinciding with his involvement in a stained glass project for a public building. This period is examined under the light of prevalent attitudes towards the medieval in classicist noucentista Barcelona, which are inferred through a comprehensive survey of local modernist magazines. A second period of interest is Torres-García's late-1920s formulation of Constructive Universalism, the distinct primitive-constructive idiom he characterised as "the style of a cathedral," coinciding with a time when he was closely associated with three of the artists also under study here, van Doesburg, Freundlich and Mondrian.

The discussion on these, as well as on Kupka, Delaunay and Albers, takes into consideration that, unlike Torres-García, they all developed their practice within a cultural context that celebrated the gothic. Their rapport with the gothic is analysed, when relevant, in the light of Worringer's theories on the subject. Additionally, several of these artists' interest in the pictorial constructive was concomitant with research into the sensorial properties of colour fragmentation and interaction. This area of pictorial enquiry, in which the study of stained glass proved especially useful, is also explored in the relevant cases.

The focus on the constructive as a common denominator to the practice of all these artists, and a common motivator of their engagement with the cathedral, implies a largely formal approach to the issue at hand. This, nevertheless, takes into consideration that these artists' rapport with the gothic was mediated by contemporary discourses surrounding the Middle Ages and their legacy. As such, the analysis necessarily considers the ideological factors (political leanings, identitary issues, religious backgrounds) that came into play in each artist's relationship with the medieval. This, ultimately, serves to address the problem of how these forward-looking artists found a legitimate place in their modernist practice for references sourced in the medieval past.

RESUMO

A presente tese explora as atitudes do modernismo em relação com o passado em geral e o passado medieval em particular, por meio de uma análise da relevância da arquitetura e do vitral góticos nas pesquisas pictóricas construtivas de Joaquín Torres-García, František Kupka, Robert Delaunay, Otto Freundlich, Piet Mondrian, Theo van Doesburg e Josef Albers. Torres-García constitui o caso de estudo da tese uma vez que a sua obra pictórica e teórica evidencia um diálogo com o medieval que até a data passou largamente desapercebido. O estudo traça portanto a complexa e variável relação que Torres-García estabelece com o gótico ao longo do tempo, e examina o lugar deste referente na sua prática pictórica construtiva. Dois períodos concretos da carreira de Torres-García merecem particular atenção. Em primeiro lugar, a sua transição do Noucentisme para a vanguarda, em meados da década de 1910 em Barcelona, que coincide com o seu envolvimento num projeto de vitral para um edifício público. Este período é analisado à luz das atitudes predominantes em relação ao medieval no ambiente classicista noucentista de Barcelona, atitudes estas que são inferidas a partir de uma análise abrangente da sua expressão nas revistas modernistas da cidade. Um segundo período de interesse situa-se nos finais da década de 1920, quando Torres-García formula o Universalismo Construtivo, a sua singular linguagem primitiva-construtiva que ele próprio caracteriza como "um estilo de catedral", num momento em trabalha em estreita associação com três dos artistas objeto de estudo desta tese: van Doesburg, Freundlich e Mondrian.

A discussão acerca da obra destes três artistas, bem como a de Kupka, Delaunay e Albers, leva em consideração que, ao contrário de Torres-García, todos eles desenvolveram a sua prática num contexto cultural que celebrava o legado gótico. A sua relação com o gótico é examinada, segundo o caso, à luz das teorias de Wilhelm Worringer sobre a arquitetura medieval. Em alguns dos artistas aqui contemplados, ao interesse pela dimensão construtiva da pintura acrescia a pesquisa sobre as propriedades sensoriais da fragmentação e a interação da cor. Esta área de pesquisa pictórica, em que o estudo do vitral se revelou particularmente fecundo, é também explorada aqui para os casos pertinentes.

O enfoque na dimensão construtiva da pintura enquanto denominador comum da prática destes artistas à par que motivo comum da sua interação com a catedral, resulta numa abordagem fundamentalmente formal. No entanto, a discussão tem em consideração que a aproximação destes artistas ao gótico esteve mediada por discursos contemporâneos acerca da Idade Média e do seu legado. Em consequência, a discussão contempla necessariamente os fatores ideológicos (inclinações políticas, questões identitárias, filiações religiosas) que entraram em jogo na relação de cada um destes artistas com o medieval. A análise destes fatores serve, em última instância, para abordar o problema da legitimação de referentes apropriados num passado medieval, na prática de artistas cujo modernismo implica um olhar para o futuro.

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Purpose, methodology, literature review

Purpose

"Throughout the hundred years
stretching from the mid-19th to the mid-20th centuries,
modernism and the avant-gardes were consistently future-bound"[1]

Modernism, it is generally agreed, was fundamentally forward-looking. It had a "claim to the future"[2] based on a belief in progress through constant innovation, and espoused change as a way to a better future. While true, this claim has sometimes carried the implicit assumption, or even the explicit interpretation, that modernism was *exclusively* forward-looking, that its belief in progress rendered the past worthless, something from which to break away. If modernists were not interested in the past generally, it is to be inferred, they must have been even less curious about a particular period in such past – the Middle Ages – that to this day continues to be portrayed, in popular culture as in everyday language, as synonymous with backwardness, the very opposite of the idea of progress and modernity.

In truth, the break-with-the-past narrative of modernism was relatively easy to support with the help of iconoclastic statements made by the artists themselves: from Pissarro's claim that he wanted to burn down the Louvre,[3] and Marinetti's famous futurist call to demolish museums and libraries,[4] to Miró's advice to let go of the past and step over its rotting bodies and fossils,[5] among others. By taking such statements at face value, however, this interpretation overlooked the manifold links that, contrary to such statements, can in fact be traced between modernist art and that of previous periods. More recent scholarship, therefore, has countered the idea of rupture in

[1] Éva Forgács, 'Modernism's Lost Future', *Filozofski Vestnik* 35, no. 2 (2014): 30.

[2] Forgács, 30.

[3] Ann Dumas, ed., *Inspiring Impressionism: The Impressionists and the Art of the Past* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 16.

[4] Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, 'Le Futurisme', *Le Figaro*, 20 February 1909.

[5] Joan Miró, *Epistolari Català Joan Miró 1911-1945*, ed. Joan Ainaud de Lasarte et al., 1st ed. (Barcelona: Fundació Joan Miro; Editorial Barcino, 2010), 85.

modernism by exploring its reception of a number of European artistic traditions and figures.[6] In so doing, it has shown that a forward-looking attitude among modernist artists did not prevent them from appreciating the potential contribution of the European artistic past to their own practice. This has questioned the rupturist stance of modernism and shown that, for the most part, the purported break with the past was actually only effected either with regard to the canon of the Academy or by each new artistic movement with regard to its immediately preceding one.

While most of this research has focused on the modernist appropriation of art since the Renaissance, the study of modernist engagement with the medieval has also been gathering pace. To date, this has tended to focus on two main areas: on the one hand, it has looked at the value of the medieval to modernism as part of its primitivist enquiries; on the other, it has examined the appropriation of medieval referents with ideological purposes, that is, the perception and artistic expression of concepts such as the cathedral or the guild as models for social progress, often underscored by identitary considerations. The first approach has yielded scholarship that, for the most part, has focused on modernist interest in medieval modes of representation, with a particular emphasis on those from the romanesque period.[7] In approaching the medieval as the primitive, this line of research has been able to sidestep the problem of its historicity. With its associations to notions such as 'the primeval' or 'the original', the 'primitive' resists a precise placement in a linear conception of history. Even when the objects

[6] Examples of this line of research resulting in large-scale exhibitions at major museums include: the Impressionist reception of 17th century Spanish and Dutch art, as well as 18th century French art in Dumas, *Inspiring Impressionism: The Impressionists and the Art of the Past*. Picasso's "competitive and collaborative" stance towards the art of the 'Old Masters', in Elizabeth Cowling et al., *Picasso: Challenging the Past* (London: National Gallery, 2009). The appeal of El Greco among modern practitioners from Impressionism and Post-Impressionism to German Expressionism, Cubism, Surrealism and American Abstract Impressionism, in Javier Barón, ed., *El Greco y la Pintura Moderna* (Madrid: Museo Nacional del Prado, 2014). Or the insights drawn from the academy-defying work and writings of Delacroix by artists such as Gauguin, Van Gogh, Redon, Matisse, Signac, Metzinger and Kandinsky, among others, in Patrick Noon and Christopher Riopelle, *Delacroix and the Rise of Modern Art* (London: National Gallery, 2015).

[7] See, for example, Pilar Parcerisas, ed., *Agnus Dei: L'art Romànic i Els Artistes Del Segle XX: Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona, Desembre 1995 - Març 1996* (Barcelona: Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, 1995); Maria Josep Balsach, *Cosmogonías de un mundo originario (1918-1939)* (Barcelona: Círculo de Lectores; Galaxia Gutenberg, 2007); Manuel Castiñeiras, *El Romànic a Les Col·leccions Del MNAC (El Llegat de l'art Romànic: La Visió de La Modernitat)* (Barcelona: MNAC ; Abertis ; Lunwerg, 2008); Philippe Dagen, *Le peintre, le poète, le sauvage: les voies du primitivisme dans l'art français* (Flammarion, 2010); Juan José Lahuerta, ed., *Romanesque-Picasso* (Barcelona: Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, 2016).

under study can in fact be dated to a specific point in the European past – say 17th century 'popular' ceramics, or a 13th century sculpture of the Virgin Mary and Child – their characterisation as 'primitive' automatically brings them under the umbrella of the timelessness/universality binomial that has been recognised as a legitimate pursuit of modernism.[8] The timelessness that is attributed to the primitive effectively obscures the actual historicity of these objects. As a result, the study of their presence in modernism has not needed to address the fact that forward-looking artists, in appropriating them, were, wittingly or not, engaging with the past.

On the contrary, the second main line of research into the medieval in modernism, that of its ideological appropriation by progressively-minded artists, has inevitably had to deal with the historical nature of their referents. This scholarship has examined how art forms and modes of production pertaining to Europe's medieval past gained new currency in the 19th century as a result of being endowed with values projected from the political struggles of the period. This phenomenon encompassed mostly referents from the later part of the Middle Ages, namely its gothic cathedrals and artisans guilds.

The interest of the cathedral to modernist practitioners, however, went beyond its embodiment of projected progressive values. In the first decades of the 20th century its ongoing presence in the work of a considerable number of artists attests to its concomitant value as an object of avant-garde pictorial enquiry. In particular, gothic architecture and stained glass emerge quite visibly in the work of artists who, notwithstanding the diversity of their respective practices, all share what could be characterised as a 'constructive' approach to painting. As will be discussed in the literature review section, the study of these gothic referents in their work has been fragmentary: the place of the cathedral and stained glass has remained unexplored in the work of Joaquín Torres-García (1874-1949), this thesis' case study. With regard to the remaining artists under study here – František Kupka (1871-1957), Robert Delaunay (1885-1941), Otto Freundlich (1878-1943), Piet Mondrian (1872-1944), Theo van

[8] On the timeless, non-historic, perception of these referents, see Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighten, 'Primitivism', in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 170–72.

Doesburg (1883-1931), and Josef Albers (1888-1976) – existing scholarship has mostly acknowledged the presence of gothic architecture and stained glass in their work, yet it has only rarely examined its significance, what it can tell us about the avant-garde's rapport to the medieval past. In art historiography, the relative obscurity of these artists' engagement with the gothic may owe to lingering perceptions of 'medieval' and 'modernism' as antithetical categories. The perceived validity of this opposition was likely aided by the influential writings of Clement Greenberg, in whose lexicon, T. J. Clark points out, "Gothic-ness […] was a code word for Surrealism, than which art could sink no lower."[9]

This thesis thus sets out to examine the value of the medieval to modernism as evidenced by the place of the gothic cathedral and stained glass in the artistic enquiries of practitioners with a markedly constructive approach to painting. The formal focus of this exploration does not disregard that these artists' engagement with these art forms was mediated by contemporary discourses surrounding the Middle Ages and their legacy. As such, the analysis necessarily considers the ideological factors (political leanings, identitary issues, religious backgrounds) that came into play in each artist's relationship with the medieval. This, ultimately, serves to address the problem of how these forward-looking artists found a legitimate place in their modernist practice for references sourced in the medieval past.

[9] T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1999), 317. Clark bases this claim on Clement Greenberg, 'Surrealist Painting', in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), vols I, 226. Clark further posits that Pollock's *Gothic* and *Cathedral* paintings were titled precisely as a provocation to Greenberg's views on the gothic.

Problem, thesis structure, and methodological considerations

The problem of the gothic in Joaquín Torres-García and in the European 'constructive' avant-garde

Joaquín Torres-García initiated his artistic career as part of the markedly classicist Noucentisme movement in Barcelona. His work at the time, mostly dominated by scenes of Arcadian serenity, shows a preoccupation with issues of structure and construction that would define his entire oeuvre.[10] In the mid-1910s he became disillusioned with the movement and moved closer to the city's avant-garde circles.[11] After stays in New York (1920-22), Livorno (1922-24), and Villefranche-sur-mer (1925-26), he moved to Paris in 1926. In the following years, and as part of the city's avant-garde milieu concerned with abstraction and constructivism, he developed a distinct pictorial idiom of primitivist figuration in orthogonally arranged compositions that he theorised as Constructive Universalism. Writing to a friend about this new conceptual solution to years of pictorial enquiry, he described it as the style of "a cathedral".[12]

'Cathedral' makes a peculiar choice of word for an artist whose oeuvre is known to have been profoundly shaped by his early involvement with classicist Noucentisme that identified with the Mediterranean[13] and, by and large, rejected the gothic as 'Northern'.[14] Significantly, the cathedral appears in Torres-García's oeuvre as part of his constructive pictorial enquiries at a time when he was working in close association with artists from a European 'North' whose work was, or had been, informed by their engagement with gothic architecture and stained glass. This is not to say that he

[10] Luis Pérez-Oramas, 'The Anonymous Rule: Joaquín Torres-García, the Schematic Impulse, and Arcadian Modernity', in *Joaquín Torres-García: The Arcadian Modern*, by Luis Pérez-Oramas (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2015), 28.

[11] Jed Morse, 'Art-Evolució and Vibracionismo: Torres-García, Barradas, and an Art of Higher Consciousness', in *Barcelona and Modernity: Picasso, Gaudí, Miró, Dalí*, by William H. Robinson, Jordi Falgàs, and Carmen Belen Lord (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 2007), 333.

[12] Pérez-Oramas, 'The Anonymous Rule: Joaquín Torres-García, the Schematic Impulse, and Arcadian Modernity', 29.

[13] Luis Pérez-Oramas, *Joaquín Torres-García: The Arcadian Modern* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2015).

[14] As will be discussed in Part II, Chapter 1, the anti-Northern, anti-medieval, element of noucentista classicism was promoted by the movement's founder, Eugeni d'Ors, but cannot be assumed to be hegemonic, as it was not shared by another key theorist of Noucentisme, Joaquim Folch i Torres, whose views Torres-García also took into consideration.

somehow 'discovered' the idea of the cathedral as a result of his Parisian contacts in the late 1920s. Torres-García's early work shows that gothic architecture had caught his interest from as early as 1910 during a trip to Brussels, when he painted the church of Saint Gudule. The negative reception of this 'Northern' work in the Mediterraneanist atmosphere of Barcelona[15] suppressed any further enquiries into the subject at the time. Yet, for all its noucentista classicism, the Catalan art scene was also informed by conservation policies that attached great value to the region's medieval heritage. As part of these, Torres-García was involved in the creation of modern stained glass windows for the cathedral of Majorca, between 1903 and 1905, under Antoni Gaudí. A few years later, in 1912, he would receive his own commission to design stained glass windows for a room in the gothic wing of the Catalan regional government palace. These projects not only provided a first-hand experience of gothic architecture, but also gave him the opportunity to observe and work through the constructive processes involved in stained glass.

In 'Northern' Europe, meanwhile, the avant-garde had been developing within an artistic culture in which the cathedral was celebrated with nationalist purposes while also being legitimised as a progressive symbol of collective anonymous endeavour, the unified work of art or the spiritual elevation that modern art should provide for society.[16] From 1908, moreover, the theories on the gothic set forth by art historian Wilhelm Worringer established a direct association between the gothic and constructive-geometric abstraction.[17] By the 1910s, therefore, gothic architecture (and its equally constructive-geometric stained glass windows) had become a legitimate object of study in the pictorial enquiries of a number of avant-garde artists whose practice, like that of Torres-García, was concerned with the idea of construction. Among these were František Kupka, Robert Delaunay, Otto Freundlich, Piet Mondrian, Theo van Doesburg and Josef Albers.

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[15] Joan Sureda i Pons, *Torres García: Pasión Clásica* (Ediciones AKAL, 1998), 88–89.

[16] On the significance of the gothic cathedral to European societies in the 19th and early 20th centuries, see Stephanie A. Glaser, ed., 'Introduction: The Medieval Edifice in the Modern Period', in *The Idea of the Gothic Cathedral: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Meaning of the Medieval Edifice in the Modern Period* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), 1–44.

[17] Hilton Kramer, 'Introduction', in *Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style*, by Wilhelm Worringer (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1997), VII–XIV.

The above discussion raises a number of historiographical problems that this thesis will seek to address. Firstly, in the case of Torres-García, his painted and written work shows an actual engagement with the medieval that has hitherto gone largely unnoticed. The strong classicist-Mediterranean element in the early part of his career is assumed to have precluded any significant interest in the medieval. It is also the same classicist background that is rightly interpreted as a major factor in his lifelong pursuit of the structural in painting.[18] As a result, the actual place of the medieval in his practice – from the early Brussels paintings and his experience in stained glass, to the more recurrent mentions of the cathedral in his later painted and written oeuvre – has not been explored in any depth; neither has, in consequence, the potential significance of gothic architecture and stained glass as additional referents in his constructive pictorial research.

Secondly, in the case of the six 'Northern' artists mentioned above, the problem lies not so much in the acknowledgment of their engagement with the gothic, but rather in its underexamination. That is, existing scholarship on these artists has generally recognised, to a greater or lesser degree, the presence of medieval referents in their work. Yet, with the exception of Freundlich, it has not considered the possibility of a constructive link between gothic architecture, stained glass and their respective pictorial practices. Moreover, only in some cases, most notably again that of Freundlich and, to a lesser extent, Delaunay and Albers, has historiography considered the significance of this engagement beyond its formal repercussions, that is, the artists' reasons for approaching the medieval in their practice, and/or the possible ideological factors at play in its appropriation.

Thesis structure

In order to address the problems identified above, this thesis is structured in two parts that will take into consideration the idea of 'construction' as a common denominator in the practice of all seven artists, as well as a common motivator for their engagement with the gothic. Part I will consider the place of the gothic in the work of

[18] Pérez-Oramas, *Joaquín Torres-García: The Arcadian Modern*.

the six 'Northern' artists František Kupka, Robert Delaunay, Otto Freundlich, Piet Mondrian, Theo van Doesburg, and Josef Albers. The analysis will look at how gothic architecture and stained glass informed their enquiries into pictorial problems such as field fragmentation and construction, and motif deconstruction. Their rapport with the gothic is analysed, when relevant, in the light of Worringer's theories on the subject. Additionally, several of these artists' interest in the pictorial constructive was concomitant with research into the sensorial properties of colour fragmentation and interaction. This area of pictorial enquiry, in which the study of stained glass proved especially useful, is also explored in the relevant cases. The analysis will take into consideration the ideological and identitary implications of such an engagement, and will serve to examine these artists' respective stances towards the past and its value for modern art.

Part II then focuses on Joaquín Torres-García. Given his classicist-Mediterranean background, his engagement with the medieval, hitherto unexplored, is more problematic than that of the six artists in Part I. As such, it is examined in-depth as a separate case study. Part II is, in turn, divided in two chapters. The first one explores the attitudes towards the medieval in the noucentista art scene where Torres-García initiated his career. It does so based on a comprehensive survey of the modernist magazines published in Barcelona in the first two decades of the 20th century, while Torres-García was part of the city's artistic scene and a contributor himself to these publications. The second chapter then traces Torres-García's complex and changing relationship with the gothic over time, and examines its place in his constructive pictorial practice. The discussion pays close attention to two particular periods in Torres-García's career. Firstly, his transition from Noucentisme to the avant-garde in the mid-1910s in Barcelona, coinciding with his involvement in a stained glass project for a public building. Secondly, his late-1920s formulation of Constructive Universalism, the distinct primitive-constructive idiom he characterised as "the style of a cathedral," coinciding with a period of close association with three of the artists surveyed in Part I: van Doesburg, Freundlich and Mondrian.

Methodological considerations

The focus on the 'constructive' in painting underlying this entire study does not make it a thesis on Constructivism. While this label is a more or less comfortable fit for the work of Freundlich, Mondrian, van Doesburg and Albers, it does not apply to that of Kupka, Delaunay or Torres-García. In fact, as pointed out by Luis Pérez-Oramas, despite Torres-García's dedication to the idea of construction throughout his oeuvre, he made a point of theorising his aesthetics under the name Constructive Universalism and making no suggestion of a connection between it and constructivism. Rather,

> "[Constructive Universalism] was a program of symbolic universalism grounded in his certainty that the basic elements of visual art, either concrete or abstract, were universal and therefore based on the idea of construction. What interested Torres-García, both as an artist and as a theorist of art, was construction."[19]

The idea of pictorial construction, or constructive painting, is central to Torres-García's oeuvre and, I will argue, is key to understand his engagement with gothic architecture and stained glass. As such, it constitutes the rationale for the selection of artists in Part I. That is, Kupka, Delaunay, Freundlich, Mondrian, van Doesburg and Albers have been included in this study in the first place because their pictorial practice, like that of Torres-García, is concerned in one way or another with the idea of construction. That is, regardless of their aesthetic differences, their work shows a common concern with processes of deconstruction and construction be it with regard to the pictorial field, motif, colour or light. Secondly, they have been included in this study because, again like Torres-García, they all engaged in one way or another with gothic architecture and/or stained glass on account, I will argue, of their constructive approach to painting.

All six artists in Part I explored various forms of motif-less, nonobjective, nonconcrete, or abstract art. This is contingent to this thesis and does not constitute a factor for their inclusion in this study. In other words, while abstraction will necessarily be part of the discussion, not least because Worringer theorised the gothic as abstraction, the thesis will not delve into the abstract dimension of these artists'

[19] Pérez-Oramas, 'The Anonymous Rule: Joaquín Torres-García, the Schematic Impulse, and Arcadian Modernity', 28.

practice, but rather into the constructive one as informed by the gothic. In this regard, it is worth stressing that Torres-García rejected abstraction as understood by van Doesburg and others in the *Circle et carré* group, a position that constituted, in fact, a key point of disagreement between these two artists.[20] In Torres-García's thinking, the 'abstract' corresponded only to the nonmimetic, by opposition to the 'concrete' or mimetic.[21]

The thesis structure defined above is thus not meant as a comparative study between Torres-García and the six artists in Part I. Given the significant aesthetic differences between all of them and, in particular, Torres-García's rejection of both Constructivism and Abstraction, a comparative approach would not be productive. From a methodological perspective Part I serves two interrelated purposes: first, it aims to establish the recurrent presence and significance of the gothic in the work of the six artists, as motivated by a shared constructive approach to painting; second, the evidence thus collected is meant to support the argument, in Part II, for the presence and significance of the gothic in Torres-García's oeuvre on account of an equally constructive motivation. Without attempting a comparative analysis, this structure does make it possible to identify parallels between all seven artists that are explained by a common constructive interest in the gothic despite their aesthetic differences. These formal parallels, as well as any shared or differing ideological attitudes towards the past in general and the medieval in particular, are then highlighted in the Final Considerations section of the thesis.

In Part II, Chapter 1, the analysis of attitudes towards the medieval in Catalan art theory in the first two decades of the 20th century is based on a comprehensive survey of the modernist magazines published in Barcelona at the time. Of the extensive list of publications that were launched in the period under study,[22] a representative number have been selected for an in-depth examination of the issue at hand from a theoretical standpoint: what dialogue could or even should modern art establish with past artistic traditions and, in particular, with medieval art. The magazines included in this survey

[20] Pérez-Oramas, 28.

[21] Pérez-Oramas, 29.

[22] These are all available online at https://arca.bnc.cat/arcabib_pro/ca/inicio/inicio.do

have been selected on the basis of their clear commitment to modernity, so as to avoid the risk of reporting the discussion on this issue from conservative or backward-looking media (also in circulation at the time), which would defeat the purpose of the thesis. In this regard, the magazine selection criteria for this exercise have taken into account three editorial presentations in which the editors describe their respective publications as only one participant in a common modernising effort; as such, they recognise the place of other magazines, extinct or still in circulation, in a collective endeavour to foster modern art in Catalonia.

The first of these presentations comes from the launch issue of *Revista Nova*, in April 1914. In it, the editor asserts the magazine's "pride in affiliating itself" to four previous titles, *L'Avenç*, *Catalonia*, *Joventut*, *Correo de las Letras y de las Artes*, which are referred to as "heroic press."[23] Like many modernist publications of its time, Revista Nova had a short life, publishing its last issue in November of the same year. A few months later a new editorial venture, *Vell i Nou*, took up its task. Its opening issue, in March 1915, came with a heartfelt dedication "to the memory of all those new periodicals that have now aged and that in life were called *Quatre Gats*, *Pèl i Ploma*, *Picarol*, *La Cantonada* and *Revista Nova* and that from the other side will do all they can to encourage our readers."[24] Yet a third one, dated August 1918, is entitled "That magazine" and serves as the presentation for the second volume of *L'Instant*, now transferred to Barcelona, on account of the war, after eight issues published in Paris. The magazine's editor[25] pledges to bring always new ideas and encourage renovation, but without forgetting it occupies a place in a long lineage of magazines equally concerned with modern art:

[23] [Unsigned], 'Salutació', *Revista Nova*, 11 April 1914.

[24] From the Catalan "I ara per cloure no ens falta més que escriure la dedicatoria de Vell i Nou a la memoria de tots aquells periòdics nous que ja s'han fet vells i que en vida se anomenaren IV Gat, Pel i Ploma, Picarol, La Cantonada i Revista Nova que des de l'altre barri farán tot lo que podrán per animar als nostres llegidors." Joaquim Folch i Torres et al., 'Introducció', *Vell i Nou*, 13 March 1915. The introduction is actually only signed 'The Editors'. Mercè Vidal i Jansà identifies these as Joaquim Folch i Torres, Romà Jori, Xavier Nogués, Francesc Pujols and Miquel Utrillo. Mercè Vidal i Jansà, *Teoria i Crítica En El Noucentisme: Joaquim Folch i Torres* (Barcelona: Publicacions de l' Abadia de Montserrat, 1991), 455.

[25] Josep Maria Millàs-Raurell (1896-1971) was the editor-in-chief of *L'Instant* for the second phase of the magazine, that is for the five issues published in Barcelona from August 1915.

> "How many names, aren't there? How many memories, how many efforts! *L'Avenç*, *Joventut*, *Catalunya*, *Catalónia*, *Empori*, *Pèl i Ploma*, *Forma*, *Picarol*, *Revista Nova*… Those familiar [with the period's editorial scene] might be surprised to see all these names together; they may remember the small divergences, the anecdotal incompatibilities, the inevitable changes as time and generations went by. But to the eyes of the [outsider], as, maybe, to the eyes of future scholarship, all of these individual attempts, each of a specific time, make up a single continuous attempt, all of these magazines are a single magazine: 'That one'…"[26]

Through these editorials, three modernist publications from the mid-1910s express their solidarity to each other and associate themselves to a long lineage of art and literature magazines begun in the early 1880s with *L'Avenç*, the initial editorial vehicle of Catalan Modernisme. These editorials express an awareness of belonging to a collective modernising effort comprised of many different voices, often contradictory, as attested to by the vitality of the artistic debate documented in these magazines. Contrary to the historiographical compartmentalization of the art of that period, they bring together what is usually identified as Modernisme, Noucentisme and Avant-garde into a single, continuous modernising drive. Of the titles mentioned in these three editorials as spearheads of such a modernisation drive, the survey in Part II, Chapter 1, encompasses those more clearly devoted to the visual arts: *L'Avenç* (founded in 1881)[27], *Pèl i Ploma* (1899), *Quatre Gats* (1899), *Forma* (1904), *Revista Nova* (1914), *Vell i Nou* (1916) and *L'Instant* (1918).[28] Other publications included in the analysis are *Futurisme* (1907) and two avant-garde magazines launched shortly before *L'Instant*, *Trossos* (1916)

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[26] From the Catalan: "Quants de noms, oi, quants de records, quants d'esforços! *L'Avenç, Joventut, Catalunya, Catalónia, Empori, Pél i Ploma, Forma, Picarol, Revista Nova...*—Als intims potser els sobtarà de veure aquests noms junts; potser ells recordaran les petites divergéncies, les anecdòtiques incompatibilitats, els canvís inevitables portats pel pas del temps i de les promocions. Mes als ulls del distret del Caire, com tal volta, un dia, als ulls de la estudiosa posteritat, totes aquestes temptatives d'un moment fan una sola temptativa continuada, totes aquestes revistes són una revista única:— 'Aquella'...". "Aquella revista", in *L'Instant*, Year 2, 1 (15 August 1919).

[27] The title's spelling was changed from *L'Avens* to *L'Avenç* from the 1 January 1891 issue, as part of the magazine's campaign to help standardize written Catalan.

[28] Other titles mentioned in the editorials, such as *Catalonia* (1898), *Joventut* (1900) and *Catalunya* (1903), were more focused on politics and/or literature, while *Picarol*, was a satirical magazine. All the publications mentioned here are available for consultation online at http://www.bnc.cat/digital/arca/

and *Un enemic del poble* (1917). These magazines offered critique on exhibitions and literary works both at home and abroad through contributions not only by critics but also by artists and writers themselves, including Joaquín Torres-García, a prolific contributor to several of these titles in the 1910s. Finally, this corpus of publications is complemented with *Pàgina Artística* (1909), a weekly supplement devoted to art in *La Veu de Catalunya*, the most widely-read daily newspaper in Catalonia at the time. The supplement was edited between 1910 and 1920 by Joaquim Folch i Torres, a key theorist of Noucentisme and a founder of *Vell i Nou* magazine. *Pàgina Artística* published regular contributions from Eugeni d'Ors, a founding figure and main theorist of Noucentisme, as well as more occasional ones from Torres-García himself, and was thus also a key platform for the discussion of modern art. The survey, in sum, encompasses the titles identified in the three editorials mentioned above (from the launching issues of *Revista Nova, Vell i Nou* and *L'Instant*), as well as a number of other titles, as a diverse body representing modernist thinking on art in the period in question. (The survey, ultimately, also fulfils the prediction of *L'Instant*'s editor, whose foresight anticipated the value of these publications to "future scholarship" on modernity.)

A few final points of method

The term 'cathedral' will be used freely throughout this study. Strictly speaking, cathedral refers only to the church that is the seat of a bishop in any given diocese. Technically, therefore, it can be as small or as large as that diocese can afford in any architectural style it chooses. That is, not all large gothic churches are cathedrals, neither are all cathedrals buildings of the gothic period. Yet, the word 'cathedral' continues to evoke, as it did in the period under study, the image of a large gothic church, more often than not with colourful stained glass windows. As that precise image, it has also come to represent the period in which it was built ("the glorious era of the cathedrals" as referred to by Walter Gropius). It will be to designate both the physical gothic building and its various symbolic meanings that the term 'cathedral' will be used here.

Throughout the text, quotes from primary sources in Catalan, Spanish or French are provided translated into English in the body of the text and in the original language in the corresponding footnote. From an acute awareness of the pitfalls of translation,

this is meant to ensure the reader can follow the argument according to the exact wording of the original source.

Wherever possible, art works by Torres-García are identified with a CR reference taken from the artist's online Catalogue Raisonné at http://torresgarcia.com/

Torres-García's aesthetic theory is referred to throughout in English, Constructive Universalism. Whenever it appears in Spanish, in italics, *Universalismo Constructivo*, it refers to Torres-García's book, published in 1944, where he formulated this theory in written form.

Literature review

Scholarship on the place of the medieval in Torres-García's oeuvre is scarce. Nicolás Arocena has drawn attention to Torres-García's participation in the 1903 restoration project of the Palma de Majorca Cathedral and argued that it left a profound mark on the artist.[29] Arocena refers specifically to the notion of geometric composition and to the figurative–symbolic repertoire that is characteristic of Torres-García's constructive works – the sun, the moon, the star, the fountain, the orchard, the temple – and relates both aspects to the disposition and symbolism of the sculpted ornamentation of the cathedral, in particular around its main door (as it happens, the only element of the building which is, in fact, not medieval but Renaissance).[30]

Still on the subject of the sources of Torres-García's multi-referential primitivism, Margit Rowell has described a sort of 'discovery' by Torres-García of both medieval symbolism and primitive cultures upon his arrival in Paris in 1926.[31] According to this account, he visited medieval churches in Paris with the Spanish artist Luis Fernández who "deciphered for him the iconography of the sculpted motifs" and "revealed the hidden arithmetic laws that governed their location and relations."[32] The mention of Torres-García's visits to medieval churches while in Paris fits into the argument of this thesis and is quoted in Part II, Chapter 2; the claim that he 'discovered' medieval symbolism in the process is countered by the discussion in the same chapter, which shows that his introduction to it was propitiated by Antoni Gaudí over twenty years earlier. In any case, while of interest, the sources (medieval or otherwise) of Torres-García's iconographic repertoire fall beyond the scope of this thesis and will not be dealt with here.

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[29] Nicolás Arocena, 'Torres-García - Pitágoras - Platão: Um Diálogo Geométrico Ou a Visão Da Alma', in *A Intuição e a Estrutura: De Torres-García a Vieira Da Silva, 1929-1949* (Lisbon: Museo Colecção Berardo, 2008), 80.

[30] Other, equally plausible sources have been posited for Torres-García's repertoire of ideograms, among them primitive and pre-Columbian art. Barbara Braun, 'Joaquín Torres-García: The Alchemical Grid', in *Pre-Columbian Art and the Post-Columbian World: Ancient American Sources of Modern Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Publishers, 1993), 253.

[31] Margit Rowell, 'Ordre i símbol: les fonts europees i americanes del constructivisme de Torres-García', in *Torres-García: estructura-dibuix-símbol: París - Montevideo 1924-1944*, ed. Fundació Joan Miró (Barcelona: Fundació Joan Miró, 1986), 15.

[32] Rowell, 15.

Arocena's interpretation of Torres-García's experience in Majorca nevertheless relates the orthogonal arrangement of pictograms in Torres-García's Constructive Universalism to an architectonic element of a cathedral's façade, which fits in with the artist's later designation of his compositional idiom as a "cathedral style". In any case, here the discussion on the Majorca project will focus instead on the opportunity it provided Torres-García to explore first-hand the constructive and compositional logic of stained glass, as a potential contributor to the notions of structure and construction that would become so central to his entire oeuvre.

A more recent work on Torres-García by Luís Pérez-Oramas explores the way in which the artist incorporated the past into his modern practice.[33] Entitled *Torres-García the Arcadian Modern*, it deals mostly with his stance towards the ancient past and does not explore the medieval in his practice. However, it introduces the useful notion of "time compression" to explain the simultaneous exploration of Neoplasticism and primitivism in Torres-García's late 1920s work, as an expression of his understanding of modernity. That is, in Pérez-Oramas interpretation, Torres-García viewed modernity as a "compressed temporality […] comprised of various contradictory time periods, condensing the archaic and the modern."[34] The discussion on Torres-García in this thesis will look at how the medieval was also incorporated into this compressed temporality of modernity.

The place of the medieval cathedral in the modern period is the object of a recent volume edited by Stephanie Glaser. [35] Under the title *The idea of the gothic cathedral*, the book examines how a re-evaluation of the Middle Ages in the 18th and 19th centuries and a renewed interest in its artifacts resulted in the appropriation of the cathedral into a variety of discourses that endowed it with as many meanings. As a result of this process, Glaser notes, the medieval edifice became a number of different things: a realm of collective memory, a space sacralized for national interests, a touristic site and one of aesthetic pilgrimage, an encyclopedia of religious doctrines, as well as a manifestation

[33] Pérez-Oramas, *Joaquín Torres-García: The Arcadian Modern*.

[34] Pérez-Oramas, 'The Anonymous Rule: Joaquín Torres-García, the Schematic Impulse, and Arcadian Modernity', 30–31.

[35] Stephanie A. Glaser, ed., *The Idea of the Gothic Cathedral: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Meaning of the Medieval Edifice in the Modern Period* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018).

of medieval and modern spirituality.[36] Under the gaze of authors such as Eugène-Emanuel Viollet-le-Duc (1814-1879) and Augustus Pugin (1812-1852) the cathedral also became a commensurate artistic work, while social thinkers like John Ruskin (1819-1900) and William Morris (1834-1896) turned it into a symbol of co-operative, anonymous labour, of devoted craftmanship, the work of a society toward a common good.[37] Celebrated thus for its artistic value and as embodiment of progressive values, the cathedral became a legitimate motif in the work of a number of modernist practitioners.

This form of appropriation of the medieval in modernism has been the object of several scholarly works. Mark Antliff[38] has explored the left-wing celebration of France's celtic and gothic roots within cubo-symbolist circles in the early 1910s as the true expression of French culture in opposition to the Latin legacy championed by the conservative Action Française. From a position anchored in France's revolutionary tradition, Albert Gleizes and the critic Roger Allard rejected intellectualism, Cartesianism, logic and the legacy of the Greco-Roman culture as foreign to a French Celtic *esprit*. In its place, they advocated the cubist expression of a Bergsonian intutitive, collective *durée* of the French people that they saw embodied in the country's gothic heritage.

A similar exploration is conducted by Robert L. Herbert[39] with regard to Monet's *Rouen Cathedral* series. For this author, Monet's choice of motif was not arbitrary; the cathedral was chosen as embodiment of a number of values that were dear to the Impressionists: "the social origins of gothic architecture, the presumed freedom of the individual artisan to develop his own motifs as he helped decorate the building; the source in nature of these decorations, and the resultant rich and irregular profusion of

[36] Glaser, 'Introduction: The Medieval Edifice in the Modern Period', 1.

[37] Glaser, 'Introduction: The Medieval Edifice in the Modern Period'.

[38] Mark Antliff, 'Cubism, Celtism, and the Body Politic', *The Art Bulletin* 74, no. 4 (December 1992): 655–68. This argument is further explored in Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighten, *Cubism and Culture* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2001), in particular 119-129.

[39] Robert L. Herbert, 'The Decorative and the Natural in Monet's Cathedrals', in *From Millet to Léger: Essays in Social Art History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 79–90.

forms, rather than the despised regularity of Renaissance and neo-classical architecture."[40]

A further work, by Robyn Roslak,[41] looks at the significance of France's urban gothic in the work of neo-impressionist artists of anarchist conviction. Roslak draws attention to how in the 19th century the cathedral was appropriated in France by sections of the entire political spectrum – from the religious right to liberal republicans and anarchists – as a national symbol capable of inspiring a modern society. Against this background, the author examines the presence of the urban gothic in the works of Maximilien Luce, as representing the diversity and unity of the urban population, as well as the views of Mont Saint-Michel in the work of Paul Signac from a Ruskinian conception of the gothic as thoroughly grounded in nature yet not imitative of it.

Beyond its symbolic value as the embodiment of progressive values, the cathedral constituted also an object of formal interest for modernist artists. As posited in this thesis, the medieval edifice and its stained glass windows were of particular interest for practitioners whose pictorial enquiries were concerned with the constructive. However, the significance of the medieval as a constructive referent for modernism in general has remained largely unexplored. In *Constructivism: Origins and Evolution* Georges Rickey enumerates a number of "prototypes of the Constructivist image," some of them medieval, such as stained glass patterns, Celtic interlaces and heraldic checks and quarterings,[42] but does not develop the subject any further.

What follows is an overview of scholarship on the six artists in Part I touching on their appropriation of medieval referents.

The presence of gothic architecture and stained glass in the practice of František Kupka in the early 1910s and immediately after the First World War, has long been acknowledged in art historiography. In the catalogue to the 1975 Kupka retrospective exhibition, Meda Mladek gave an insightful, if concise, account of the artist's familiarity

[40] Herbert, 87.

[41] Robyn Roslak, *Neo-Impressionism and Anarchism in Fin-de-Siècle France : Painting, Politics and Landscape*, 1st ed. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

[42] George Rickey, *Constructivism: Origins and Evolution*, 2nd ed. (New York: George Braziller, 1995), 8.

with French cathedrals and his interest in their stained glass windows.[43] In the same catalogue, Margit Rowell pointed out various instances where Kupka's work is known, or believed, to have been informed by these experiences.[44]

Having become thus established in 1975, the presence of these medieval referents in Kupka's work is often mentioned in museum descriptions of his paintings,[45] yet has received little historiographical attention since Mladek's and Rowell's original observations.[46] For its part, a paper by Vojtěch Lahoda on Kupka and Čiurlionis,[47] while not specifically focused on the gothic, offers valuable insights into the relevance of architecture in Kupka's thinking on art, as manifested in his theoretical work *La création dans les arts plastiques*. The above readings suggest that, while acknowledged, the formal implications of Kupka's engagement with the gothic have not been explored in full and in light of his writings. Moreover, there appears to have been no discussion on the significance of such an engagement, what it implies about Kupka's stance as a modern artist towards the past, and his position with regard to the ideological discourses surrounding the gothic at the time.

Robert Delaunay's relationship with the gothic has been the object of limited historiographical attention. The 2003 exhibition *Robert y Sonia Delaunay 1905-1941*[48]

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[43] Meda Mladek, 'Central European Influences', in *František Kupka, 1871-1957 : A Retrospective*, by Meda Mladek and Margit Rowell (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1975), 13–37.

[44] Margit Rowell, 'Catalogue of the Exhibition', in *František Kupka, 1871-1957 : A Retrospective*, by Meda Mladek and Margit Rowell (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1975), 81–304.

[45] Cathedrals and/or stained glass are routinely mentioned in museums' descriptions of Kupka's works. See, for instance, MoMA, https://www.moma.org/collection/works/84662; the Art Institute of Chicago, https://www.artic.edu/artworks/109529/reminiscence-of-a-cathedral; or the Met https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/480900.

[46] A more recent, and brief, contribution to this question by Barbara Larson essentially takes as its point of departure a summary of Mladek's findings and Rowell's interpretations mentioned above in order to argue the importance of the cathedral and its stained glass windows to Kupka's "embodied vision" of art within a "sacred architectural" setting. Barbara Larson, 'Through Stained Glass. Abstraction and Embodiment in Early Twentieth Century Avant-Garde Circles', in *Habitus in Habitat I: Emotion and Motion*, ed. Sabine Flach, Daniel Margulies, and Jan Söffner (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), 229–30. While in Larson's text the claim to the artist's embodied vision is argued with recourse to a passage of Kupka's *La création*, the idea of the 'sacrality' of the cathedral is posited without further supporting evidence, and in fact seems counterintuitive in the light of Kupka's known stance against religions generally and against the Catholic church in particular. See Patricia Leighten, *The Liberation of Painting* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 174.

[47] Vojtěch Lahoda, 'Kupka and Čiurlionis', *Acta Academiae Artium Vilnensis. Dailė* 64 (2012): 65–75.

[48] Tomàs Llorens, Brigitte Léal, and Pascal Rousseau, *Robert y Sonia Delaunay, 1905-1941* (Madrid: Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, 2003).

included a section that broached specifically this question. Entitled "Gothic Architectures, the Eiffel Tower, the City" it proposed the notion of the gothic to explain a specific period in Delaunay's oeuvre, between 1909 and 1912, just before the *Simultaneous Windows* series, that covered the *Saint-Séverin* series and several distorted views of Paris. Its author Tomàs Llorens posited a 'gothic key' to interpret this period as an alternative to a historiographical convention that has generally presented it as Delaunay's tentative approximation to Cubism[49] before his move towards the Orphism for which he would become best known.

The author placed Delaunay's attraction to the gothic within the context of the nationalist debate on France's cultural identity. Llorens further claimed that the *Saint-Séverin* series and the distorted views of Paris series marked a sort of parenthesis, devoted to form, in his study of simultaneous colour contrasts that would cultimate in the *Simultaneous Windows* series. These interpretations raise several problems that I will examine here under a logic of deconstruction/construction for the respective periods identified by Llorens. My analysis will also consider the formal aspects of Delaunay's appropriation of the gothic as well as its possible identitary implications.

Otto Freundlich presents a singular case among the artists surveyed here. From the outset, his inclusion in this research project seemed warranted on account of the ostensible epiphany he experienced while working in the restoration of stained glass at Chartres Cathedral in 1914, an experience that, as will be discussed in Part I, he claimed had "changed him forever". In 2017, halfway through my research project, the first monographic exhibition devoted to the artist in forty years was staged at Ludwig Museum of Cologne.[50] Under the title *Otto Freundlich: Cosmic Communism*, and curated by Julia Friedrich, it produced a catalogue where Freundlich's engagement with the medieval was explored in depth and from every angle.[51]

I realised I would have very little to add to the thorough scholarship produced by Friedrich and other contributors to the catalogue. Still, I felt that Freundlich's inclusion

[49] Tomàs Llorens, 'La ubicuidad como utopia', in *Robert and Sonia Delaunay 1905-1941* (Madrid: Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, 2003), 17.

[50] The exhibition subsequently travelled to Kunstmuseum Basel.

[51] Julia Friedrich, ed., *Otto Freundlich: Cosmic Communism* (Munich ; London ; New York: Prestel, 2017). In particular

in this thesis was nonetheless justified; his case constitutes a particularly relevant example of how an avant-garde communist artist of Jewish German origin, engages unproblematically with a French national monument from a Christian medieval past, and does so on the eve of the First World War, as well as immediately after. His inclusion in this thesis was warranted, moreover, on account of his association with Torres-García in late 1920s Paris. Thus, given the thoroughness and novelty of this recent scholarship, the discussion on Freundlich in Part I is only a necessarily abbreviated discussion of its findings as they relate to the issues at hand here, with a modest contribution of my own regarding Freundlich's pursuit of motif-less painting.

Mondrian's well-known 1914 *Façades* series is based on the gothic church of Domburg. While the series features recurrently in scholarship on the motif deconstruction processes the artist was immersed in at the time, the fact that it takes a gothic building as an object of avant-garde pictorial research has merited little discussion. Y.-A. Bois has taken up the subject and concluded that in an iconoclastic, evolutionist artist like Mondrian, the gradual elimination of references to gothic architecture in the series marks a deliberate rejection of the historical period that such architecture stands for.[52] Georges Roque has challenged this interpretation, pointing out the legitimacy of the cathedral as a motif for other avant-garde artists, and suggesting that in Mondrian's case Domburg was largely an arbitrary choice, perhaps conditioned by the numerous representations of cathedrals (by Delaunay and Gleizes, among others) that the Dutch artist must have seen during his stay in Paris between 1911 and 1914.[53]

Here, I take Roque's view on the legitimacy of the gothic building for avant-garde pictorial research, but nuance his claim as to the arbitrariness of the motif. To this end, my examination of Mondrian's engagement with gothic architecture is not limited to the *Façade* series, but encompasses also works pre-dating his stay in Paris.

[52] Yve-Alain Bois, 'The Iconoclast', in *Piet Mondrian, (1872-1944)*, ed. Angelica Zander Rudenstine (Boston [etc.]: Bulfinch Press, Little, Brown and Company, 1995), 336.

[53] Georges Roque, 'La façade comme surface, de Monnet à l'art abstrait', in *L'Imaginaire moderne de la cathédrale*, ed. Georges Roque (Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'orient; Jean Maisonrouge, 2012), 126.

Existing scholarship by Karel Blotkamp,[54] Henk Engel,[55] and Gladys Fabre[56] on van Doesburg has established the centrality of stained glass, as a modern medium, to his formal research in painting. This scholarship, however, has not delved into the medieval sources of van Doesburg's initial acquaintance with stained glass, in 1916. These are documented in the artist's catalogue raisonné, edited by Els Hoek,[57] and are used here as evidence for a reflection on the artist's stance towards medieval art and its potential value to a modern practice.

Josef Albers' glass works were the object of a dedicated 1994 exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum which sought to give visibility to this part of the artist's oeuvre, often eclipsed by his better-known abstract geometric paintings, in particular, the *Homage to the Square*. The exhibition catalogue, by Fred Licht and Nicholas Fox Weber,[58] covers certain aspects of this artist's stance towards the medieval – not least his appreciation for handcraft as part of the Bauhaus culture – and bring his Catholic background to bear on his lifelong concern with the symbolic value of light in art. Building on this thorough scholarship, I delve further on Albers' experience of the cathedral and its manifestation in his work, as well as the constructive links that exist between medieval stained glass and his 1920s 'glass pictures'. Finally, the discussion also considers his views on the value of the art of the past for a modern practice, as expressed in his role as a teacher at the Bauhaus, and later on in the US.

[54] Carel Blotkamp, 'Theo van Doesburg', in *De Stijl: The Formative Years 1917-1922*, ed. Carel Blotkamp (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1986), 13–14.

[55] Henk Engel, 'Theo van Doesburg & the Destruction of Architectural Theory', in *Van Doesburg and the International Avant-Garde: Constructing a New World*, ed. Gladys C. Fabre and Doris Wintgens Hötte (London: Tate Publishing, 2009), 38.

[56] Gladys C. Fabre, 'Towards a Spatio-Temporality in Painting', in *Van Doesburg and the International Avant-Garde: Constructing a New World*, ed. Gladys C. Fabre and Doris Wintgens Hötte (London: Tate Publishing, 2009), 58–67.

[57] Els Hoek, ed., *Theo van Doesburg: oeuvre catalogue* (Utrecht; Otterlo: Centraal Museum; Kröller Müller Museum, 2000).

[58] Fred Licht, 'Albers: Glass, Color, and Light', in *Josef Albers: Glass, Color, and Light*, ed. Guggenheim Museum (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1994), 15–25; Nicholas Fox Weber, 'A New Light: Josef Albers's Work in Glass', in *Josef Albers: Glass, Color, and Light*, ed. Guggenheim Museum (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1994), 9–13.

One final work by Barbara Larson, [59] has looked at the place of cathedrals and stained glass in the work of three of the artists under study here, Kupka, Delaunay and Mondrian, as well as Kandinsky. Larson approaches the problem from a spiritual perspective and considers the significance of the cathedral to these artists as a familiar ritual space. The spiritual dimension of art was, in effect, a central concern of early abstraction. However, given the constructive, rather than abstractionist, focus of this thesis, the question of the spiritual will only be brought into the discussion as relevant when referred to by the artists' themselves.

[59] Larson, 'Through Stained Glass. Abstraction and Embodiment in Early Twentieth Century Avant-Garde Circles'.

Part I – Cathedrals, stained glass, and the European pictorial avant-garde

Introduction

The 19th century nationalist re-evaluation of the Middle Ages and its concomitant interest in medieval artefacts found in the gothic cathedral an emblematic object on which to project a variety of ideologically-charged discourses. This was particularly the case in France and Germany where the cathedral acquired a mythical status closely entwined with national identity. In both of these countries particularly, but also elsewhere in Europe, the arts participated of this ideological celebration of the cathedral, greatly contributing to establishing the medieval edifice as a pervasive cultural referent in modern European societies.

After centuries of classicist disregard for gothic architecture, its artistic value was legitimated by theorists such as Eugène-Emanuel Viollet-le-Duc, Augustus Pugin and John Ruskin.[60] The cathedral was glorified in literature – in a trend initiated by Victor Hugo's vindication of gothic architecture in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1831) – and also became a recurrent motif in paintings.[61] Ruskin's writings, as well as those of William Morris further portrayed it as a symbol of collective, anonymous endeavour and devoted craftsmanship. As a result of these representations, what was in effect a religious edifice and a symbol of Church power in a remote medieval past acquired modern currency as a referent for avant-garde artists committed to the idea of social progress.

In the early 20th century, the cathedral gained new relevance for the artistic avant-garde, now as an object of formal enquiry, as a result of Wilhelm Worringer's (1881-1965) theorisation of gothic architecture. His highly influential 1906 *Abstraction*

[60] Glaser, 'Introduction: The Medieval Edifice in the Modern Period', 5.

[61] The appropriation of the Gothic Cathedral in French and German art and literature in the long 19th century was the subject of two twin exhibitions *Cathédrales 1789-1914: Un Mythe Moderne* (Paris: Somogy éditions d'art, 2014). And *Die Kathedrale: Romantik - Impressionismus - Moderne* (Munich: Hirmer Verlag, 2014). In France, the cathedral became a recurrent motif in the work of Claude Monet, Camille Pissarro, Maximilien Luce, Paul Signac, Henri Matisse and Maurice Utrillo. See Roslak, *Neo-Impressionism and Anarchism in Fin-de-Siècle France : Painting, Politics and Landscape*, 173–96; Glaser, *The Idea of the Gothic Cathedral: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Meaning of the Medieval Edifice in the Modern Period*, 23, 36–37.

and Empathy[62] thesis on the psychology of style was based on the premise that 'style' was conditioned by the geographic and ethnographic factors of any given region.

First published as a book in 1908, *Abstraction and Empathy* devoted a chapter to "Northern Pre-Renaissance Art" that traced the genealogy of gothic architecture and celebrated the expressive force of its 'abstract' forms. In highly summarized form, Worringer first identified a primitive "Northern Celto-Germanic"[63] form of art based on abstract, linear, geometric ornamentation. He attributed this to a "distinct and peculiar artistic volition" of the "Northern" peoples, whose necessary isolation from a hostile Nature had historically turned them to inorganic (that is, geometric) abstract forms.

Worringer then posited this indigenous 'Northern artistic volition' towards the abstract against a supposed Greek volition towards organic natural forms that stemmed from the Greeks' peaceful coexistence with a benign Nature. Always according to Worringer, a powerful Northern restlessness and inner need for expression then took these inorganic forms into architecture and endowed them with vigorous movement in order to heighten their expressive dimension. Thus, the "indigenous artistic volition" that had first manifested itself in Northern ornamental art came to "fulfilment and apotheosis" in the gothic cathedral.[64] The putative expressive power of these inorganic forms in gothic architecture was thus described in contrast with tranquil Greek organicity:

"Gripped by the frenzy of these mechanical forces that thrust out at all their terminations and aspire toward heaven in a mighty crescendo of orchestral music, [Northern man] feels himself compulsively drawn aloft in blissful vertigo, raised high above himself into the infinite. How remote he is from the harmonious Greeks, for whom all happiness was to be sought in the balanced tranquillity of gentle organic movement, which is alien to all ecstasy."[65]

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[62] Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style*, trans. Michael Bullock (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1997). The thesis was first published in German in 1908.

[63] In which he includes "the ornament of the Scandinavian and Irish North, the style of the Migration of the Peoples and Merovingian art." Worringer, 106.

[64] Worringer, 112.

[65] Worringer, 113.

As stressed by Hilton Kramer, Worringer's *Abstraction and Empathy* was not a theoretical work on modernism, but a thesis on the art of the European past.[66] Yet, the art historian's reflections on primitive art and abstraction struck a chord with sections of the German avant-garde that were exploring those same notions at the time.[67] By 1910 the book was in its third printing (by 1912 in its third edition) and Worringer's ideas about abstraction in art were the subject of intense discussion in the Munich-based *Der Blaue Reiter* circle of Franz Marc and Vasily Kandinsky.[68]

While Worringer's theories were not meant for an audience of modernist practitioners, they touched on a number of questions of interest to artists at the time that are also of relevance to this thesis. Firstly, Worringer stated that the Greek artistic volition towards the organic form found its maximum expression in the Renaissance, which he called "the great period of bourgeois naturalness [when] all unnaturalness – the hallmark of all artistic creation determined by the urge to abstraction – disappears."[69] In other words, by identifying Renaissance 'naturalness' (illusionistic representation) with the bourgeois, in opposition to gothic 'unnaturalness' (the urge to abstraction), he was implicitly positing the latter as the anti-bourgeois. In so doing, he was contributing to a socially progressive perception of the gothic cathedral among artists that added to its already celebrated status as an embodiment of collective, anonymous work.

Secondly, Worringer claimed that the gothic marked the moment when architecture became the "sovereign" form of art, to which all other forms became secondary.[70] Architecture, he argued, offered the "maximum exploitation of constructional possibilities to no other purpose than the attainment of an intensity of movement that surpassed organic life and swept the spectator away with it."[71] By identifying the architectural-constructive approach as the most effective path to

[66] Kramer, 'Introduction', VIII.

[67] Worringer wrote Abstraction and Empathy in 1906 as a doctoral thesis, at the age of twenty-five, when he claimed to have been unaware of developments in avant-garde art at the time, a claim that Kramer disputes. Kramer, IX.

[68] Kramer, VII.

[69] Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy*, 120.

[70] Worringer, 115.

[71] Worringer, 113.

expressive abstraction and celebrating the gothic as its best exponent, he was effectively presenting the cathedral as an ideal object of formal artistic enquiry into abstraction in other artistic mediums too.

Worringer's theories, in sum, unwittingly (or not) legitimised a medieval religious building in the eyes of a 20th century artistic avant-garde as an anti-bourgeois, architectural object of formal enquiry into abstraction through constructive means. This legitimisation, however, was not devoid of identitary notions that must be taken into account when analysing artists' engagement with the gothic. Worringer had stated that in asserting the artistic value of the gothic, his thesis aimed to question "the one-sidedness and European-Classical prejudice of our customary historical conception and valuation of art."[72] As such, his thesis was ostensibly a vindication of the art of a 'gothic North' which he felt had historically been undervalued in favour of the artistic traditions originating in the Greco-Latin South.

The identitary implications of *Abstraction and Empathy*, however, went beyond the Gothic North – Classical South construction. By identifying the gothic as a style common to the whole of North-West Europe, Worringer was apparently de-nationalizing the gothic, diluting any national claim to it into a regional North-Western European identity. With this regionalisation Worringer appeared to overcome the longstanding dispute between France and Germany over the 'ownership' of the gothic. This dispute, stemming from the 19th century academic controversy on the precise historical origins of gothic architecture, had ultimately been decided in favour of France.[73]

In *Abstraction and Empathy*, Worringer circumvented this dispute by effectively proposing a transnational identity for gothic architecture that, it would be safe to assume, must only have added to the appeal of the cathedral as a referent for avant-garde artists. However, the emphasis on the transnational character of the gothic that we see in the 1906 *Abstraction and Empathy*, took on an explicitly nationalist, imperialist

[72] As quoted in Kramer, 'Introduction', VIII.

[73] For a detailed discussion on the nationalist appropriation of the gothic, in particular by France, Germany and Great Britain, during the 19th century and up to the First World War, see Glaser, 'Introduction: The Medieval Edifice in the Modern Period', 7–17.

and racist tone in Worringer's follow up *Form Problems of the Gothic*,[74] published in 1911. This work further elaborated the fundamental tenets of *Abstraction and Empathy*, including the constructive route to abstraction and the association of the Renaissance to the bourgeois and, by implication, the gothic to the anti-bourgeois.[75]

Yet, *Form Problems of the Gothic* also showed that Worringer's conception of the gothic was still evidently marked by the underlying nationalist conflict with France over its 'ownership'. The cultural rivalry with France, and the underlying nationalist tensions in the build up to the First World War, transpires in Worringer's choice of demonyms in *Form Problems of the Gothic*. Whereas in *Abstraction and Empathy* he had attributed the gothic to a broad North-Western European region, and claimed it had originated from "Northern Celto-Germanic" ornamental traditions – both of which denominations included France – in *Form Problems of the Gothic* he was writing emphatically, and imperially, of a "Germanic North" that excluded France. Moreover, racially-charged mentions of the Teutons, absent from his 1906 thesis, now abounded in the 1911 sequel,[76] to mark a distinction with the Celts (French). His argumentation as to the origins and true identity of the gothic now unfolded as follows:

"The disposition toward Gothic is found only where Teutonic blood mingles with that of other European races. Teutons are, accordingly, not the exclusive promoters of the Gothic and not is sole creators; Celts and Latins have equally important share in the Gothic development. Teutons, however, are probably the condition *sine qua non* of the Gothic."[77]

> "It is always western Europe, dominated by Latin elements, that overthrows the law of northern sluggishness and in a great effervescence of its energies pronounces the word the Teutonic north has had on the tip of its tongue. In the heart of France, where Germanic and Latin elements interpenetrate most intimately, there the liberating deed was enacted, there the cue with which the Gothic proper commences was given. Latin enthusiasm, which can reach the

[74] Wilhelm Worringer, *Form Problems of the Gothic* (New York : G.E. Stechert & Co, 1920). First published in German as *Formprobleme der Gotik* in 1911.

[75] Worringer, 136.

[76] Worringer, 45, 70, 90, 106, 112, 146.

[77] Worringer, 45.

highest pitch without losing its clarity, discovered the clear formulation for the unclear northern volition. In other words, it created the Gothic system. In spite of this, France cannot be called the real mother country of the Gothic: the Gothic did not originate in France, only the Gothic system. For the Latin elements in the population, which endowed France with this power of initiative and this power of clear formulation, were what, on the other hand, also kept alive the connection with the antique tradition and its organically colored artistic will. After the first enthusiasm had died out, after the Latin elements had by a great exertion, by a mighty achievement decisive for the whole Gothic, responded to the provocation which the Germanic north gave for the clear formulation of the Gothic train of ideas, their mission was, so to speak, fulfilled, and there set in a state of self-consciousness, during which Classical artistic feeling, which had been temporarily totally eclipsed by the great medieval task, loudly announced itself once more. Precisely in this land of happy miscigenation there was no permanent home for Gothic one-sidedness. The Latin joy in decorative finish, in sensous clarity, and in organic harmony kept down too much the Germanic need of exaggeration and excess. Thus, it happens that an unmistakable air of organically clarified Renaissance feeling hovers over even the most beautiful and most mature Gothic buildings in France. Full verticality is never reached, horizontal accents always keep the balance. Thus, one can say, of course, that France has created the most beautiful, most living Gothic buildings, but not the purest. The land of the unadulterated Gothic is the Germanic north."[78]

In other words, according to Worringer, the gothic "system" may have been 'invented' in France thanks to the Latin ability to clearly formulate what was in fact a Germanic artistic volition. Inevitably, however, that same Latin-ness, and the pleasure it took in the organic, would ultimately impede the full development of the gothic in France. Still in Worringer's interpretation, as the expression of an essentially Germanic volition, the gothic could only have reached its full, unadulterated potential in a land equally unadulterated by Latin culture. It is worth noting, still, that while Worringer posits that the gothic of the "Germanic North" is ultimately the "purest", he also

[78] Worringer, 112–13.

concedes that as a result of its mixed heritage, France has "the most beautiful, most living Gothic buildings." All of these identitary considerations around the gothic (French/German, Celt/Teuton, Northern/Greco-Latin) were factors at play in its appropriation by artists, especially in the pre-war years, and will be considered, as relevant, for the cases under study in this thesis.

In addition to the expressive forms of its architecture, the cathedral offered in its stained glass windows an additional focus of research for painters invested in a constructive approach to art. Despite their prominent place in the cathedral, and their effective contribution to its sensorial experience, stained glass windows did not feature in Worringer's reflections. Yet, as a flat coloured image literally built out of glass fragments integrated into the fabric of a building, a stained glass window constituted in effect a kind of constructed painting of considerable expressive force too. By somehow conflating architecture and painting into a single medium, stained glass offered potentially useful lessons for artists exploring the sensorial dimension of colour from a constructive pictorial approach.

The study of stained glass, moreover, was now made easier thanks to ambitious conservation and restoration programmes of Europe's cathedrals and their long neglected stained glass windows. Following its medieval heyday, stained glass as an art form had entered a period of decline around the 16th century which turned into near oblivion in the following centuries. A renewed interest in this medium now flourished as a result of conservation and restoration initiatives which in turn encouraged the study of this art form from a historical, artistic and technical perspective. [79] Stained glass thus became an object of fascination for collectors,[80] a research subject for both craft artists and the industry, and a source of inspiration for literature.[81]

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[79] Virginia Chieffo Raguin, *The History of Stained Glass: The Art of Light Medieval to Contemporary* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2003), 196, 210.

[80] Raguin, 196.

[81] Such as Goethe's *Gedichte sind...* likening poems to stained glass windows and Flaubert's short story *Saint Julien l'Hospitalier* (of his 1877 *Trois Contes*) inspired by a stained glass window in Rouen Cathedral. The idea of stained glass as mesmerising, genuine and full of religious power is conveyed in the works of many writers at the time, including Stéphane Mallarmé, Laurent Tailhade, Emile Zola and Gaston Paris. See Elizabeth Emery and Laura Morowitz, *Consuming the Past ; the Medieval Revival in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 135.

The reception of medieval stained glass and its implications on 19th century art and culture have been thoroughly researched and discussed by Emery and Horowitz for the case of France.[82] These authors stress that a key development in this phenomenon was the musealisation and exhibition of stained glass specimens.[83] While stained glass displays had remained visible through the centuries (albeit in varying states of decay) in the numerous churches and cathedrals that had kept them *in situ*, now for the first time they were being removed from their original religious context and brought close to the viewer in lay spaces specially designed for artistic contemplation.

One such venue, among many others, was the Musée du Vitrail, established in Paris in 1885 with the specific aim to inspire the contemporary artist while promoting and giving visibility to French national heritage.[84] Its publicised purpose of bringing together "works of the first order [from] the oldest periods of art [to] provide a permanent teaching workshop for modern art"[85] was primarily directed at stained glass artists. The strategy proved to be effective and the medium entered a period of rapid development in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, in France as elsewhere in Europe and the US; movements such as Art Nouveau, Arts and Crafts, Liberty and Catalan *Modernisme* engaged in a fruitful dialogue with a medieval art form in order to produce contemporary stained glass displays incorporating the latest technological developments in glass manufacture.[86]

The renewed interest that stained glass arose among artists was not limited to master glaziers, as the medium also attracted the attention of painters. In the early 19th century the Nazarenes in Germany had explored ways of translating their particular

[82] Emery and Morowitz, 120–29.

[83] Emery and Morowitz, 121.

[84] The Musée du Vitrail was inaugurated in 1885 with the specimens that had been displayed at the 8th Exhibition of the Union Centrale des Arts Décoratifs the year before. Stained glass displays had also been shown at the Parisian fairs of 1855, 1867, 1878 and 1889, with a retrospective specifically devoted to this medium in the 1890 *Exposition Universelle*. Additionally, viewers could see stained glass exhibited at the Musée de Cluny, exhibiting illuminated specimens such as 13th century fragments from the Sainte-Chapelle. Emery and Morowitz, 121.

[85] Lucien Magne, 'Le Musée Du Vitrail', *Gazette Des Beaux-Arts*, October 1886, 299, quoted in Emery and Morowitz 2003, 121; as quoted in Emery and Morowitz, *Consuming the Past ; the Medieval Revival in Fin-de-Siècle France*, 121.

[86] Raguin, *The History of Stained Glass*, 224–51.

painting style onto glass through the use of sophisticated enamel colours.[87] Towards the end of the century, with Impressionism and Post-impressionism shifting the focus of painting towards colour and light, their depiction and fragmentation, stained glass offered new possibilities of pictorial research. Rather than transposing painting onto glass, as the Nazarenes had done, artists began to explore how certain aesthetic and structural features of stained glass could be incorporated into painting. A key development in this process was cloisonism. This style of painting, defined by bold dark contouring of flat colour shapes, emerged in the late 1880s[88] inspired, in part, by medieval stained glass.[89] Cloisonism was devised by Émile Bernard (1868-1941) and Louis Anquetin (1861-1932) as a way to overcome what they perceived to be an excessive indistinctness of form in post-impressionist divisionism, such as in the pointillism of Signac and Seurat. Inspired by medieval stained glass, enamels, tapestries and woodcut prints, as well as Japanese prints, Bernard and Anquetin began constructing their paintings as increasingly flat planes of saturated colour enclosed by firmly defined dark outlines, such as in *La Moisson* (*The Harvest*) (Fig. 1).

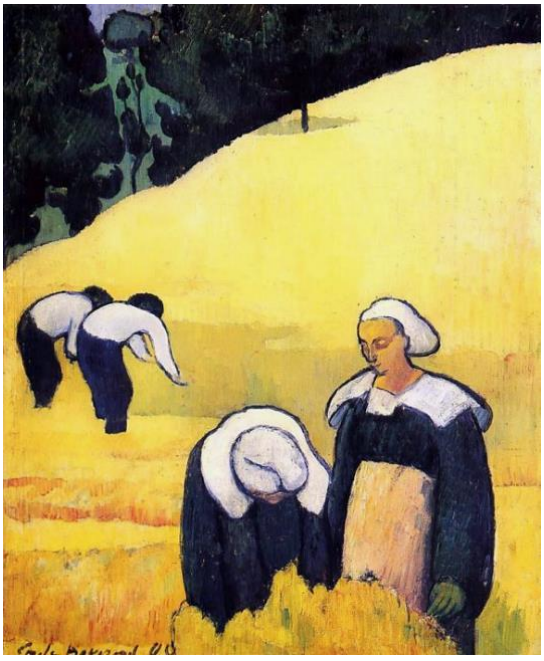

Fig. 1 Émile Bernard, *La moisson (The Harvest)*, 1888, oil on panel, 55 x 46 cm. Paris: Musée d'Orsay.

[87] Raguin, 200.

[88] On the origins of Cloisonism, see Bogomila Welsh-Ovcharov, *Vincent Van Gogh and the Birth of Cloisonism* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario Musee des Beaux-Arts de L'ontario, 1981).

[89] On the indebtedness of Cloisonism to stained glass and to other forms of medieval art, as well as Japanese prints, see Emery and Morowitz, *Consuming the Past ; the Medieval Revival in Fin-de-Siècle France*, 134–35.

The new style of decorative, anti-naturalistic painting was dubbed *cloisonisme* by French critic Edouard Dujardin who based it on the term *cloison*, the raised partition that encloses each pool of colour in enamel work. As such, cloisonism effectively meant something akin to 'painting by compartments'. While Dujardin named the new style of painting after an enamelling technique, other critics noticed, too, its indebtedness to stained glass. Writing on Bernard's works, Félix Fénéon observed: "The thick lines with which Bernard surrounds the features of the land and the people are the lead network of a stained glass window."[90]

Cloisonism became a major post-impressionist trend, adhered to by Paul Gauguin, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Vincent van Gogh, as well as other artists associated with the Pont-Aven school.[91] Its impact on painting would remain long after post-impressionism. Writing on the works of Anquetin, Dujardin had noted their "deliberate [...], reasoned [...], intellectual [...] and systematic construction."[92] This carefully thought-out, constructive approach to painting in cloisonism, with the emphasis on discontinuity of colour and bold outlining of forms, would inform the practice of successive artists such as Cézanne and Picasso.[93]

Painterly interest in stained glass continued in the 20th century, be it as a source of inspiration or as a medium in itself, in the oeuvre of a considerable number of modern artists.[94] Among them were those who, as already mentioned, engaged with stained glass and the cathedrals that housed it as objects of study into the constructive

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[90] From the French: "Les larges traits dont M. Bernard cerne les accidents de terrain et des êtres sont le réseau de plomb d'un vitrail." Félix Fénéon, 'Autre Groupe Impressioniste', *La Cravache*, 6 July 1889; as quoted in Emery and Morowitz, *Consuming the Past ; the Medieval Revival in Fin-de-Siècle France*, 255.

[91] Welsh-Ovcharov, *Vincent Van Gogh and the Birth of Cloisonism*, 20.

[92] Edouard Dujardin, 'Aux XX et Aux Indépendants - Le Cloisonisme', *La Revue Indépendante*, March 1888, 489; as translated and quoted in Welsh-Ovcharov, *Vincent Van Gogh and the Birth of Cloisonism*, 23.

[93] With regard to the latter, for example, it has been noted how his 1901 output, with its use of bright fields of colour separated by sharp outlines, was heavily indebted to both Gauguin and Van Gogh. Lael Wertenbaker, *The World of Picasso, 1881-1973*, Library of Art (New York: Time-Life, 1977), 28. A contemporary critic, Félicien Fagus, wrote about two of these works, *Arlequin assis* and *Arlequin et sa compagne* that they conveyed the impression of stained glass. Félicien Fagus, "Gazette d'art: les Espagnols", *La Revue blanche*, 1 September 1902, quoted in Claire Bernardi, 'Journal 1901', in *Picasso Bleu et Rose (Ex. Cat.)*, ed. Laurent Le Bon et al. (Paris: Musée d'Orsay; Hazan, 2018), 75.

[94] Aside from the artists discussed in this thesis, those who also worked with stained glass at some point in their career include Fernand Léger, Georges Braque, Marc Chagall, Sophie Taeuber-Arp and Paul Klee, among others. Andrew Moor, *Contemporary Stained Glass: A Guide to the Potential of Modern Stained Glass in Architecture* (London: Mitchell Beazley, 1989), 19; Raguin, *The History of Stained Glass*, 260.

dimension of painting. The following chapters explore the significance of these interrelated forms of medieval art in the practice of František Kupka, Robert Delaunay, Otto Freundlich, Piet Mondrian, Theo van Doesburg and Josef Albers.

1 František Kupka -
Vertical rhythms and prismatic colour kinesis in French cathedrals

This chapter draws on Meda Mladek and Margit Rowell's pioneering scholarship on the presence of the medieval in František Kupka's work, in order to explore more fully the formal implications of his engagement with the gothic and propose an interpretation of its ideological significance. It does so by furthering the analysis of works from two specific periods in Kupka's practice where the impact of his observation of cathedrals and stained glass seems to manifest itself more clearly, in the early 1910s and in the early 1920s. The discussion also considers the identitary implications of Kupka's engagement with the gothic taking into account William Worringer's theories discussed in the introduction to this Part I. The analysis of Kupka's work is done in the light of relevant passages from his major theoretical work, *La création dans les arts plastiques*,[95] the dating of which coincides with these two periods. Kupka wrote *La création* in French, approximately between 1907 and 1913,[96] at a critical time in his practice when it was transitioning towards the nonobjective pictorial language that would define the rest of his oeuvre.[97] *La création* then remained in manuscript form until it was translated into Czech in 1920 and published in Prague in 1923.[98]

Gothic referents in Kupka's early 1910s production

Kupka's arrival in Paris in 1896, at the age of twenty-five, coincided with a period of nationalist exaltation of France's medieval heritage that shone a particularly bright light on the country's gothic cathedrals.[99] Even as an anarchist foreigner who viewed all religions as superstitious and corrupted and reserved his fiercest criticism for the

[95] František Kupka, *La création dans les arts plastiques* (Paris: Cercle d'Art, 1989).

[96] The precise dating of the various manuscripts that would make up *La création* seems unclear. In the 1989 French edition of this work, the manuscripts are said to have been written between 1911 and 1913 (Karl Flinker in Avant-Propos), between 1910 and 1913 (Philippe Dagen in Préface), and between 1907 and 1913 (in Note explicative).

[97] Margit Rowell, 'František Kupka: A Metaphysics of Abstraction', in *František Kupka, 1871-1957 : A Retrospective*, by Meda Mladek and Margit Rowell (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1975), 47.

[98] František Kupka, *Tvoření v Umění Výtvarném* (Prague: Triáda, 1999). Originally published in 1923.

[99] Emery and Morowitz, *Consuming the Past ; the Medieval Revival in Fin-de-Siècle France*.

Catholic Church,[100] he found in the capital's medieval churches an object of keen interest for his enquiries into the artistic expression of the mystical through rhythm and colour. While Kupka's concern with these issues has led to his work being generally presented as 'abstract' art with a strong spiritual motivation, his work does not fit into the notion of self-referential autonomy that is often attributed to modernist abstraction. As discussed by Patricia Leighten, Kupka was, on the contrary, committed to the idea of socially critical nonobjective art "designed to transform the political and spiritual consciousness of his audience."[101]

As part of his artistic research, Kupka often visited Notre Dame cathedral and the church of Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois to contemplate their architecture and windows. He was intensely interested in stained glass as a way to study colour penetrated by light.[102] His writings at the time show that he was familiar with Huysmans' *La cathédrale*,[103] a novel that dealt with the medieval notion of *lux nova,* or light capable of touching the soul after its passage through the stained glass of a cathedral.

Kupka was acquainted with stained glass from before his move to Paris, when he had worked on cartoons for Bohemian churches. In Mladek's view this would have made him "familiar with the mosaic-like process of assembling stained glass compositions out of geometric elements, a process which encouraged an abstract, ornamental style and tended to resist any attempt to render a three-dimensional effect."[104] The mosaic-like process of glass assemblage referred to by Mladek would also have encouraged a constructive approach to his practice that he would equally explore through his engagement with architecture. Now, from the French capital, he took his students to Chartres, where they would climb a ladder in order to study the leaded windows up close.[105] As recalled by his students, Kupka "loved the mystical, continuous light of stained glass and used to show them the uselessness of the details added in black on

[100] On Kupka's political stance, see Leighten, *The Liberation of Painting*, 145–76.

[101]." Leighten, 145.

[102] Mladek, 'Central European Influences', 32.

[103] Huysman's *La cathédrale* is mentioned in Kupka, *La création dans les arts plastiques*, 140.

[104] Mladek, 'Central European Influences', 32.

[105] Mladek, 32.

the glass surface."[106] In 1906 he had a stained glass window installed in the corner of his Parisian studio, which remained in place until his death in 1957.[107] His visits to gothic churches also afforded him the opportunity to explore their architectural forms and their expressive potential. He included the gothic pointed arch in his study of curved lines in *La Création*[108] and expressed appreciation for the mathematical thinking behind the building of cathedrals.[109]

Medieval art – including also Celtic ornamentation, "which enchanted him and which he studied during numerous trips to Brittany"[110] – was only one of the many visual referents to which Kupka was drawn. Among others, these also encompassed Czech folk art, the ornamental in Greek and Islamic art, Nazarene painting, Czech and Viennese Secession, photography and cinematography,[111] which attest to Kupka's openness to the visual culture of his time as to artistic traditions both in the recent and more remote past. As pointed out by Mladek, Kupka had no objection to finding inspiration in existing works or art, whether his own or those of other artists.[112] Or, in the artist's own words: "Impressions from a work of art are normally stronger than those from nature. In art the last word is never pronounced. A work of art is in fact created only to inspire another work of art."[113]

One of these referents from a remote past, that of Greek art, was according to Mladek, "Kupka's guide in Paris when he decided to abandon completely what he saw

[106] Information furnished by Kupka's Parisian students in conversations with Meda Mladek, Prague 1967, as quoted in Mladek, 32.

[107] Mladek, 32.

[108] In the manuscript version of *La création*, the section devoted to 'Line' includes Kupka's drawings of various curved lines, each ascribed to a style or period such as 'eighteen century', 'gothic' and 'Art Nouveau', among others. Rowell, 'Catalogue of the Exhibition', 202. These drawings have been omitted from the 1989 French edition of La création.

[109] In a letter to his friend Arthur Roessler, Kupka observed that "the builders of Gothic cathedrals were men of feeling only to a certain degree, but they were above all mathematicians." Letter to Arthur Roessler, dated 18 February 1913, as translated and quoted in Mladek, 'Central European Influences', 32.

[110] Mladek, 28.

[111] For a thorough account of the various artistic, intellectual and scientific sources that informed Kupka's art, in particular during his formative years in Prague and Vienna, see Mladek, 'Central European Influences'. For a discussion of his interest in cinematography as part of his research in the pictorial depiction of motion, see Rowell, 'František Kupka: A Metaphysics of Abstraction'.

[112] Mladek, 'Central European Influences', 30.

[113] Kupka, *Tvoření v Umění Výtvarném*, 158, 173. As translated in Mladek, 'Central European Influences', 30.

and paint again only what he felt."[114] Mladek supports this claim with Kupka's own recollection of that specific time in his artistic development: "It was in 1911, I created my own uniquely 'abstract' way of painting, orphism, disregarding all other cultural systems except that of Greece."[115] It is worth noting that this statement by Kupka is part of an interview he gave in 1936, twenty five years after the events. His writings in *La création* and his own works around 1911 suggest, to the contrary, that other non-Greek sources, namely medieval art, were also behind Kupka's own approach to nonobjective painting. Puzzlingly, it is also Mladek who, without questioning Kupka's claim to the 'Greek cultural system' as the only source for his orphism, goes on to introduce the possibility that stained glass was, in fact, a key referent for it too. Mladek points out that the "Czech critic [B. S. Urban] after discussing orphism with Kupka [in 1928], stated that the two stained glass windows in Notre Dame were the probable inspiration for Kupka's first Orphic experiments in 1911."[116] What follows is an examination of these claims.

What Kupka's called his "own unique way of 'abstract' painting, orphism[117]" is a complex, multifaceted, pictorial language informed by a diversity of sources in its aim to respond to various aesthetic, scientific, spiritual and intellectual concerns. Rowell identifies some of its basic premises in the rejection of volume and perspective, the priority for the perceptual over the conceptual, a combination of the metaphysical and the scientific, an understanding of motion and light as the only two forces which can penetrate and dissolve matter, and a reference to a cosmic order.[118] Of the various paths of pictorial enquiry taken by Kupka in the early 1910s in order to respond to these concerns, there are two – vertical rhythms and prismatic colour kinesis – in which, I

[114] Mladek, 'Central European Influences', 31.

[115] 'Kupka in Prague: Interview', *Svetozor*, 1 September 1936; as quoted in Mladek, 'Central European Influences', 31.

[116] B. S. Urban, 'Kupkuv Orphismus', *Cesta*, 28 January 1928; as quoted in Mladek, 'Central European Influences', 32.

[117] While Kupka called it 'Orphism' in the quote above, Rowell points out that he was actually "never satisfied with the Orphic designation" as defined by Apollinaire for Orphic Cubism. Rowell, 'František Kupka: A Metaphysics of Abstraction', 79.

[118] Rowell, 80. In this regard, the author draws attention to the common ground Kupka's art shares with a variety of movements and artists, from Cubism and Futurism to Seurat, Mondrian and Kandinsky, while standing apart from all of them.

would argue, his experience of gothic architecture and stained glass proved particularly fertile.

Vertical rhythms and gothic architecture

The theme of the vertical is a recurrent one in Kupka's oeuvre. He used verticals as an expression of upward thrust[119] and, in repeated form, as an exploration of rhythm, an overriding concern in his pictorial enquiries.[120] Vertical cadences were already visible in semi-figurative works such as the 1909 *Piano Keys* and the 1909-1910 *Woman Picking Flowers* series. By 1910-1911, they had become an object of study in their own right in a series of drawings and paintings with titles such as *Arrangement of Verticals in Yellow* (Fig. 2), *Arrangement of Verticals* (Fig. 3), or *Study for the Language of Verticals*, among others. In *La Création*, Kupka explained the significance of the vertical to him:

> "There is in the vertical all the majesty of the static. It contains at once top and bottom, bringing them together, but dividing space *horizontally*. Reproduced as a series of parallels, the vertical becomes a tense and silent expectation that spreads horizontally. [...] Solemn, the vertical is the backbone of life in space, the axis of all construction; it monumentalizes the most basic orthogonal sketch."[121]

[119] Rowell, 'Catalogue of the Exhibition', 240.

[120] Rowell, 'František Kupka: A Metaphysics of Abstraction', 72.

[121] From the French: "Il y a, dans la verticale, toute la majesté de la statique. Elle contient à la fois le haut et le bas, les réunit, mais divise l'espace horizontalement. Reproduite en une série de parallèles, la verticale devient une attente angoissante et muette qui se répand à *l'horizontale*. [...] Solennelle, la verticale est l'échine de la vie dans l'espace, l'axe de toute construction; elle monumentalise le moindre croquis mis au carreau. Kupka, *La création dans les arts plastiques*, 168–69.

Fig. 2 František Kupka, *Arrangement of Verticals in Yellow* (*Ordonnance sur verticales en jaune*), 1911[122], oil on canvas, 70 x 70. Paris: Centre Pompidou. © Philippe Migeat - Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI /Dist. RMN-GP © Adagp, Paris

Fig. 3 František Kupka, *Arrangement of Verticals (Ordonnance sur verticales),* 1911-20, oil on canvas, 58 x 72 cm. Paris: Centre Pompidou. © Bertrand Prévost - Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI /Dist. RMN-GP © Adagp, Paris

Kupka understood the vertical plane as "fundamentally architectural".[123] His reference here to the vertical as "the axis of all construction" ties in with his interest in architecture generally and his constructive understanding of painting in particular.[124] Elsewhere in *La Création* he uses the analogy of the painted work of art as a building, structured as a network of lines that supports what the artist wishes to express.[125] Such a built structure must possess rhythm, a notion he also discussed at length in *La Création*[126] by relating it, predictably, to music but also, crucially, to the "symmetrical periodicity" of architecture.[127]

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[122] This painting is signed and dated to 1913, which is the date shown in the Pompidou catalogue. Rowell, however, points out that Kupka rarely dated works at the time of their execution and that most of his dates were given retrospectively at the time of his 1946 Prague Exhibition. Based on exhibition histories, the artist's notes and letters, and stylistic considerations (not least, presumably, its closesness to Arrangements of Verticals, Rowell does not The 1975 catalogue offers dates that may differ from those in museums, including 1910-11 for this work does not accept Kupka's dating and places this work instead in 1911. Rowell, 'Catalogue of the Exhibition', 81.

[123] Rowell, 250.

[124] On the importance of architecture to Kupka's art, see Lahoda, 'Kupka and Čiurlionis'.

[125] "Pour être, sinon cohérente, du moins organique, cette extériorisation doit s'apuyer sur un réseau de lignes correspondant à la charpente de l'edifice qu'est l'oeuvre." Kupka, *La création dans les arts plastiques*, 163.

[126] Kupka devotes a section of *La création* specifically to the question of rhythm. Kupka, 195–202.

[127] Kupka, 196. For a discussion of the interrelatedness of music and architecture in Kupka, see Lahoda, 'Kupka and Čiurlionis'.

Kupka's regular study visits to gothic churches afforded him the opportunity to reflect on all of the above notions. The lofty interiors of Notre Dame, Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois and Chartres, with their long rows of columns, were a particularly apt setting to experience the attributes he ascribes to the vertical: its static, monumental majesty, coupled with the "tense and silent expectation" of its parallel repetition. It seems likely that these experiences indeed inform the linear rhythms that Kupka set out to capture in the *Verticals* series. Such is certainly Rowell's view, who sees in these paintings Kupka's attempt to translate into pictorial terms his perceptual experience of the cathedral through "a stringently regulated abstract composition [where] the thin vertical planes which scan the surface may refer to the closely massed columns of a church interior through which the stained glass windows flicker like shards of purple light".[128]

Prismatic colour kinesis and stained glass

The flickering effect of stained glass to which Rowell refers in these paintings is generated by the fragmentation of the blue and red bands into 'purple' patches combining small vertical strokes of both colours. This chromatic exercise was part of Kupka's enquiries into the pictorial expression of motion through colour, which constituted a key concern in the development of his orphism.[129]

Kupka's experimentation with colour kinesis during the critical years between 1910 and 1913 was based on a fundamentally prismatic (as opposed to pigmentary) understanding of colour; "colour as a quantity and quality of light, planes of colour generating their own optical vibration."[130] This vibration, he observed repeatedly, created among others the optical effect that red and warm colours advanced while blue and cool colours receded in space.[131] The interaction between blue and red thus became a key concern in Kupka's enquiry into colour kinesis throughout this period. Early

[128] Rowell, 'Catalogue of the Exhibition', 158, 240.

[129] Rowell, 'František Kupka: A Metaphysics of Abstraction', 67–75.

[130] Rowell, 70.

[131] Rowell, 68, 69.

experiments with the illusion of motion through colour can bee seen in *Prometheus, Blue and Red* (1908-09) and *Family Portrait* (1909-10). As noted by Rowell, in these paintings Kupka attempted to animate large figures by reversing his own axiom on the usual roles of these two colours so that blue is reserved for what would normally be sunstruck planes, whereas red is used for what would be expected to be shaded areas.[132]

His enquiries into the kinetic implications of blue and red interaction intensified from 1910 with the *Verticals* paintings, followed by others such as *Compenetrations*, 1910-11, and *Amorpha, Warm Chromatics*, 1911-12 (Fig. 4), as well as the series of studies (Fig. 5) that would lead to his 'manifesto' painting *Amorpha, Fugue in Two Colours*. In line with Kupka's thinking that the pictorial surface can be animated through the contrast between "the most imposing mass of cyclopean planes [and] the most subtle flickering of smaller planes,"[133] all of these works explore the idea of motion by means of fragmented fields of blue and red in contrast with larger planes of the same or other colours. The broad variety of devices that can be seen in these works – as in the numerous studies related to them[134] – for the fragmented combination of blue and red, attests to the centrality of the specific interaction of these two colours in his exploration of chromatic motion.

[132] Rowell, 69.

[133] Kupka, *La création dans les arts plastiques*. (Page 45 of manuscript II) As translated and quoted in Rowell, 'Catalogue of the Exhibition', 134.

[134] See, for example, variations on blue and red fragmentation in the studies held at MoMA and Centre Pompidou for *Fugue in Two Colours:*
https://www.moma.org/collection/works/85258?artist_id=3302&locale=en&page=1&sov_referrer=artist;
https://www.moma.org/collection/works/85259?artist_id=3302&locale=en&page=1&sov_referrer=artist;
https://www.moma.org/collection/works/85269?artist_id=3302&locale=en&page=1&sov_referrer=artist;
https://www.moma.org/collection/works/85272?artist_id=3302&locale=en&page=1&sov_referrer=artist;
https://www.moma.org/collection/works/85280?artist_id=3302&locale=en&page=1&sov_referrer=artist;
https://www.centrepompidou.fr/cpv/ressource.action?param.id=FR_R-60615d78d4da5a4f0672eeb9aced8ee&param.idSource=FR_O-dbb9bfd6c679e2f5d5187757e317c98

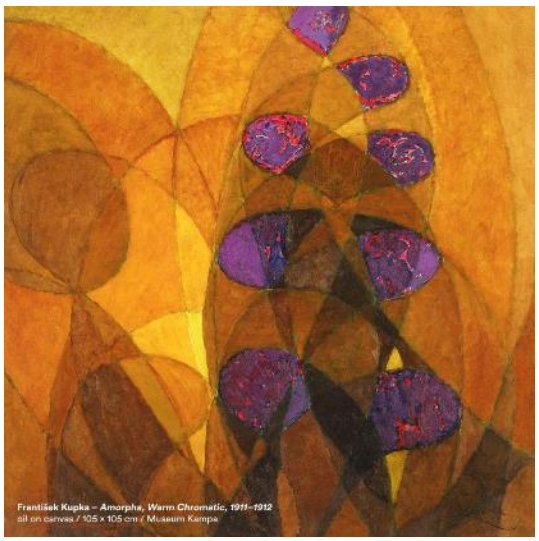

Fig. 4 František Kupka, *Amorpha, Warm Chromatics* (*Amorpha, chromatique chaude*), 1911-12, oil on canvas, 105 x 105. Prague: Museum Kampa

Fig. 5 František Kupka, study for *Fugue in Two Colours,* 1912, gouache and ink on paper, 21.6 x 22.9 cm. New York: Museum of Modern Art.

Taking into account Kupka's focus on prismatic colour, his paramount preoccupation with light reflection and refraction, Rowell has already noted the importance of stained glass to his enquiries at this time.[135] In effect, in *La Création*, Kupka observed how colour, understood as light (and he was referring to blues and reds again here), was better studied through stained glass than reflected from an opaque surface.[136] According to Rowell, while Kupka claimed at one point that *Amorpha, Fugue in Two Colours* owed to the reds and blues of *Family Portrait* (1909-10), on other occasions he attributed its inspiration to stained glass windows.[137] Blue and red happen to be, by and large, the most common colours in gothic stained glass. Notwithstanding any other sources he may have explored for their interaction, Kupka's own writings in *La Création* strongly suggest that his observation of stained glass within gothic churches played a key part in these enquiries. On his visits to Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois, for example, he noted:

[135] Rowell, 'Catalogue of the Exhibition', 184.

[136] "La transparence des verres colorés, interposés entre l'oeil et la source lumineuse, permet de saisir les différents états de lumière avec plus d'intensité que le reflet renvoyé par une surface opaque." Kupka, *La création dans les arts plastiques*, 153.

[137] Rowell, 'Catalogue of the Exhibition', 184.

"When dealing with purples, one must take into account the propagation speed of vibrations, which differs for red and blue. The three stained glass windows behind the main altar at the church of Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois are bordered by blue and red meanders, both colours taking up sections of exactly equal length. From up close, blue dominates. From a distance, if one stands by the main entrance, these borders are not purple, as would be expected, but red. The blue remains somewhere along the way."[138]

One of the basic principles in Kupka's colour theory, that concerning the advancing and receding optical effect of red and blue, respectively, was therefore either confirmed or perhaps even originally noted through his observation of stained glass. He also found inspiration, it transpires in *La Création*, in the blues and reds of Notre Dame cathedral, which suggested to him the sort of music-like 'chords' or 'harmonies' that he sought to convey in painting:

"As for purples, go see the wonderful red and blue rose window in the right-hand apse in Notre Dame. We would need clear carmines and even purer cobalts in order to hear even an echo of the vertiginous heights of this music."[139]

Mladek has posited that it was "Kupka's desire to capture the vertiginous musicality and spirituality he had experienced in stained glass" that led him to create *The Cathedral* (1913) (Fig. 6).[140] As suggested by the title, *The Cathedral* evokes the dark interior of a gothic church lit through stained glass windows. The work brings together the two themes discussed above as informed by Kupka's experience of gothic churches

[138] From the French: "En jouant des violets, il faut tenir compte de la vitesse de propagation des vibrations, différente pour le rouge et pour le bleu. Les trois vitraux qu'on voit derrière le maître-autel de l'église Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois sont ourlés des méandres bleus et rouges, les deux couleurs occupant des étendues parfaitement égales. De près, le bleu domine. De loin, si l'on s'adosse à la porte d'entrée, ces bordures ne sont pas violettes, comme s'y attendrait, mais rouges. Le bleu reste en chemin." Kupka, *La création dans les arts plastiques*, 154. The stained glass windows to which Kupka refers here are not original but a 19th century creation mimicking the design and colours of gothic windows. See https://saintgermainlauxerrois.fr/?page_id=252.

[139] From the French: "Et les violets? Allez voir l'admirable rose rouge et bleue de l'abside droite de Notre-Dame de Paris. Mais il nous faudrait des carmins limpides, des cobalts plus purs encore, pour entendre ne serait-ce qu'un écho des sommets vertigineux de cette musique." Kupka, 153. A slightly different version of this quote, perhaps translated from Czech, appears in Lahoda, 'Kupka and Čiurlionis', 68.

[140] Mladek, 'Central European Influences', 32.

– vertical rhythms and the flickering effect of fragmented blues and reds in contrast with solid colour planes.

Fig. 6 František Kupka, *The Cathedral*, 1913, oil on canvas, 180 x 150 cm. Prague: Museum Kampa.

The Cathedral is part of the *Vertical and Diagonal Planes* series (1913-1914) in which Kupka added diagonals to the vertical arrangements he had been exploring since 1911 in order to emphasise the sense of motion. From his perception of how diagonals can stress the ascending or descending movement of a vertical line, as he wrote in *La Création*,[141] Kupka could hardly have failed to notice their presence and significance alongside verticals in gothic architecture. On his numerous visits to Notre-Dame, Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois and Chartres he would plausibly have perceived how diagonal elements such as flying buttresses, pinnacles, steeped roofs and gabled portals accentuate the feeling of upward thrust deliberately created by the overall verticality of the building.

The Cathedral thus encapsulates a number of key themes that Kupka was able to experience in gothic churches and also sought to express in his painting practice:

[141] Kupka, *La création dans les arts plastiques*, 169.

verticality and rhythm in an architectural structure that, while materially static, was visually set in motion by diagonal lines and vibrating coloured light. Ultimately, Kupka's choice of title for this work suggests that alongside the Greek cultural system he so admired, gothic architecture and stained glass had also been important sources in the development of his orphism. Yet, in his account of that period, he made a point of describing how he "created" his "uniquely 'abstract' way of painting" in 1911 by "disregarding all other cultural systems except that of Greece."[142] The explicit exclusion of all other possible sources, and in particular the gothic that so clearly informs his painting at the time, may owe to identitary factors that merit examination in the light of Kupka's own writings and Worringer's theories.

Identitary considerations in Kupka's engagement with the gothic

Kupka had been born in 1971 in Bohemia, at the time part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and had trained as an artist in Prague and Vienna. Upon his move to Paris in 1896, at the age of 25, he appears to have fully embraced the language and culture of his adoptive country, where he chose to live until his death in 1957. According to Karl Flinker, he showed a preference for the French language over his native Czech, and wrote *La création* in French despite not having fully mastered the language.[143] His identification with France (and more specifically a France of Latin heritage) transpires in subtle ways in *La création*, where for example he refers to French art as "our art" and places its sources in the Mediterranean.[144]

La creátion also evidences, conversely, in more or less veiled terms, an antipathy toward Germany, whose artistic culture it derides. For example, when discussing the use

[142] See quote above, note 115.

[143] Flinker relates how "Kupka, non sans un certain dédain pour sa langue maternelle tchèque, tenait à s'exprimer en français" though his French was "souvent défaillant". Karl Flinker, 'Avant-propos', in *La création dans les arts plastiques*, by František Kupka (Paris: Cercle d'Art, 1989), 7.

[144] From the French "Pour comprendre ce qu'il en est réellement, il faut remonter aux débuts mêmes de l'art pictural. Les peintres dites 'préhistoriques' du sud-ouest de la France, pour la plupart des représentations d'animaux, sont faites de contours délimitant des surfaces colorées. Celles des *rivages de la Méditerranée – la principale source à laquelle notre art a puisé* – présentent un fond lisse qui est comme un intervalle entre les contours des formes et les limites du format." My italics, from Kupka, *La création dans les arts plastiques*, 158.

of the line in various artistic traditions, Kupka mocks what he calls German linear art while extolling French mastery of the line, from its "bewitching subtlety" in the 18th century to Ingres' feeling for the line "in all its Latinness."[145] Yet another passage reveals in more unequivocal terms his ill-feeling towards the Germans and his disdain for their artistic accomplishments:

> "[Compared with the Gauls], the Ruges, Vandals, Heruli and Lombards, collectively named the Goths, show instead little disposition for the fine arts. Too bellicose, like the Germans of today, they are averse to the restraint and perseverance that are required for artistic creation."[146]

In the First World War that would break out not long after he wrote these lines, Kupka, already in his 40s, enlisted as a volunteer with the French army,[147] which further suggests a genuine attachment to his adoptive country now under German threat.

Of relevance to this thesis, the above passage in *La création* deploring a supposed Goth-German lack of restraint and perseverance required for artistic creation, is part of a section where Kupka deals with the genealogy of French cathedrals. The views Kupka expresses in this passage suggest that his pictorial engagement with gothic architecture was informed by his anti-German feeling, and may thus help explain his reluctance to acknowledge the gothic as a source for his orphism. The passage in question reads thus:

> "Anyone studying the remarkable effervescence of the visual arts in France in the 12th, 13th and 14th centuries, the era of the cathedrals, will see that this period simply carries and pushes further the Roman style and spirit. The Gauls, for sure, presented beautiful qualities of their own. Without them, they would not have

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[145] "L'Egypte a introduit dans l'art la grande ligne majestueuse, l'Attique l'a reconvertie à une sensuelle souplesse, le XVIIIe siècle français l'a dotée d'une subtilité ensorcelante, David l'a à nouveau allongée, tandis qu'Ingres sent la ligne dans toute sa latinité. Mais il y a eu aussi un art linéaire allemand... Ah, bonsoir!" Kupka, 163–64.

[146] "Les Ruges, les Vandales, les Hérules et les Lombards, à qui l'on donne le nom collectif de Goths, montrent en revanche peu de dispositions pour les beaux-arts. Trop guerriers, comme les Allemands d'aujourd'hui, ils répugnent à la contention et à la persévérance qu'exige la création artistique." Kupka, 70.

[147] Kupka fought alongside Blaise Cendrars at La Somme front. Meda Mladek and Margit Rowell, 'Chronology', in *František Kupka, 1871-1957 : A Retrospective*, by Meda Mladek and Margit Rowell (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1975), 311.

been able to produce the wonders of an art so fertile that even the ubiquitous ogive cannot aspire to define in its entirety. [...] While the Gallic people had not had any artistic activity worthy of note before coming into effective contact with the spirit and the visual discourse of the current of thought arrived, via Rome, from Egypt and Mesopotamia, we can assume it endowed with a moral culture characterised by a highly developed sensibility. [...] It is worth noting that the greatest development of the cathedrals, towns and profane art generally, coincided with the Crusades, as if taking advantage of the absence of the 'lords' and the warriors."[148]

This excerpt covers several notions requiring closer attention. Firstly, it confirms, once more, Kupka's genuine admiration for (French) gothic art – its cathedrals but also its "profane" expression – which he calls a "fertile" art of "wonders" resulting from a period of "remarkable artistic effervescence" in France. Secondly, it ascribes the emergence of this art to a combination of Gallic (Celt) artistic sensibility and Roman spirit and visual discourse. In so doing, Kupka takes a singular position in the complex debate over national cultural identity going on in France on the eve of the First World War.

Two main positions in this debate sought to ascribe France's cultural identity to either gothic-Celtic or classical-Mediterranean roots.[149] While the classicist position was championed by the right-wing monarchist Action Française of Charles Maurras, the Celtist position was based on the anti-royalist, anarcho-syndicalist racial ideology of an organization called the Celtic League, founded in 1911.[150] According to the latter, gothic

[148] "Celui qui étudie de près la remarquable effervescence des arts plastiques en France aux XIIe, XIIIe et XIVe siècles, à l'ère des cathédrales, verra que cette période elle aussi ne fait que porter et pousser plus loin le style et l'esprit romains. Les Gaulois montrent, certes, des qualités fort belles qui leur appartiennent en propre. Sans cela, ils n'auraient pu réaliser les merveilles d'un art si fertile que même l'omniprésente ogive ne peut prétendre le définir dans son ensemble. [...] Quoique le peuple gaulois n'ait eu aucune activité artistique digne de remarque avant d'entrer effectivement en contact avez l'esprit et le discours plastique du courant de pensée venu, via Rome, d'Egypte et de Mésopotamie, on peut le supposer porteur d'une culture morale caractérisée par une sensibilité très dévelopée. [...] Il n'est pas sant intérêt de noter que le plus grand épanouissement des cathédrales, des villes et de l'art profane en général coincide avec les croisades, comme en profitant de l'absence des 'seigneurs' et des guerriers." Kupka, *La création dans les arts plastiques*, 70.

[149] This is a simplification of a far more complex identitary and ideological debate with direct repercussions in the arts, as discussed with regard to gothic architecture and Cubism in Antliff, 'Cubism, Celtism, and the Body Politic'.

[150] Antliff, 655.

art had originated with Abbot Suger in medieval France's Celtic (Gallic) 'proletarian' population, which lived under the domination of a Frankish ruling class of foreign (Germanic) origin. In other words, according to the Celtic League, gothic art was truly French on account of its exclusively Celtic (Gallic) origin, and it flourished despite the Gauls' domination by the Franks (Germans) who had ostensibly had no part in its development. Kupka's position in this discussion adds yet a further layer of complexity to this identitary and ideological debate. On the one hand, he seems to subscribe to the Celtic League interpretation of the gothic by celebrating the artistic sensibility of the Gauls and positing that the period of greatest development of the cathedrals owes to the fact that their (Frankish, i.e. Germanic) lords were away busy fighting the Crusades. On the other hand, however, he seems also to concede somewhat to Action Française's tenets as to an essentially Latin identity of French culture when he declares that the great period of the cathedrals "only carries and pushes further the Roman style and spirit," and that the Gallic people had "no artistic activity worthy of note" until they came into contact with the spirit and the visual discourse of Egypt and Mesopotamia channelled through Rome. The affinities of Kupka's perception of the cathedral with those of both the anarchist Celtic League and the monarchist Action Française only highlights the complexity of the modern ideological appropriations of this medieval object.

Beyond Kupka's singular position in the French cultural identity debate, his excerpt above should also be read in the light of Worringer's theories on the genealogy of gothic art, with which Kupka was well acquainted not least through his close association with members of *Der Blaue Reiter*. In effect, in somehow managing to establish both a Gallic and Latin lineage for French cathedrals, to the exclusion of any Germanic Frankish input, Kupka's position seems to respond directly to Worringer's theories on the subject of the gothic and its purported Germanic essence.

Worringer, as discussed in the introduction to Part I, had first declared the gothic an art of North-Western Europe, and subsequently of a more restrictive Germanic North. In Worringer's view, this particular form of architecture had resulted from a Northern/Germanic artistic volition to give "heightened expression" to "an inorganic [i.e. abstract] fundament" that came to "fulfilment and apotheosis" in the gothic

cathedral.[151] In Worringer's racial interpretation of gothic, moreover, the only 'true' gothic was that of the Germanic North, "unadulterated" as it was by any Latin influences. For their part, French cathedrals, while unsurpassed in beauty, were lacking in "purity" having been built in the "land of happy [Celt, Latin and Teuton] miscegenation" that was France.[152] Kupka's position on the genealogy of the gothic appears to take Worringer's theories at face value but simultaneously turn the tables on his judgement of the purported mixed heritage of French cathedrals. That is, Kupka indeed accepts Worringer's thesis of a mixed heritage for French gothic – a mix that in Kupka's view includes only Gauls and Latins, and tellingly omits Teutons – but celebrates precisely this miscegenation and gives particular relevance to the Latin element within it. In so doing, Kupka seems to be undermining Worringer's entire argument on gothic art which, as discussed in the introduction to Part I, aimed at vindicating its value as a Northern-abstract form of art by opposition to a Greco-Latin-organic artistic tradition. Kupka's celebration of the Latin in French gothic art (its adulterating organic element according to Worringer's argument), expressed only theoretically in his pre-war writings in *La création*, would come to manifest itself formally, I will argue, in his post-war production.

Cathedrals and stained glass in Kupka's post-war work

Following the parenthesis imposed by the First World War, Kupka resumed his artistic practice in 1919 upon his return to Paris. As discussed by Rowell, most of his post-war work displays a strong organic inspiration, exploring interpretations of biological growth and vitality in series such as *Tale of Pistils and Stamens*, *Essay*, *Vigour* and *Vigorous Brushwork*.[153] These gave continuity to a line of enquiry into the organic that had already been central to Kupka's production before the war. Alongside these, however, Kupka worked on a further series, entitled *Gothic Contrasts*, which also gave continuity to his pre-war study of gothic architecture, but now expressed it through more organic forms. The first painting in this series, titled *Gothic Contrasts* (c. 1920) (Fig. 7) appears to depict the interior of a church, with rows of columns on either side of a large blue and red arrangement of indefinite shape. Unlike his linear, geometric pre-war

[151] Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy*, 112.

[152] See full quote above, note 78.

[153] Rowell, 'Catalogue of the Exhibition', 224.

compositions inspired by gothic interiors, this one shows heavily distorted vertical lines flanking amorphous growth-like shapes in the centre of the field.[154] The second painting, also titled *Gothic Contrasts* (c. 1920-21) [155] (Fig. 8) is suggestive of a stained glass window: an architecture of rhythmically repeated and twisted lines framing a luminous centre that no longer represents stained glass as geometric shards, but as a multicolour cloud-like formation.

Fig. 7 František Kupka, *Gothic Contrasts (Contrastes Gothiques)*, c. 1920, oil on canvas, 66 x 71 cm. Private collection.

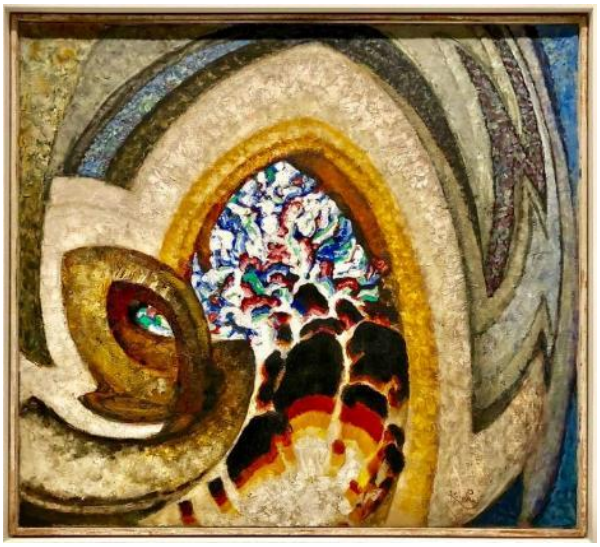

Fig. 8 František Kupka, *Gothic Contrasts (Contrastes Gothiques)*, c. 1920-21, oil on canvas, 72 x 80 cm. Paris: Centre Pompidou.

It is worth considering the re-emergence of gothic referents at this point in Kupka's career in light of the 1923 publication of the Czech version of *La création dans les arts plastiques*.[156] Having remained in its original manuscript form in French, Kupka's theoretical work was being translated into Czech between late 1919 and 1920, in a

[154] Noticing similarities with the distorted architecture of Delaunay's Saint-Séverin series of 1909-10 (discussed in the next chapter), Rowell states that it would be tempting to place this painting in the pre-war corpus of Kupka's oeuvre, or perhaps even attribute it to an earlier figurative period as a study of a gothic interior. However, based on the painting's facture, she concludes that it must be part of Kupka's post-war experimental paintings in which he returned briefly to "figurative themes" in order to work out problems of colour and form. Rowell, 218.

[155] Centre Pompidou lists also the title *Crépuscule et lumière* for this work, without specifics as to the origin of this title. Kupka retrospectively dated this painting to 1925, but Rowell places it in 1920-21. There is also a similar *Study for Gothic Contrasts* currently at Rhode Island School of Design Museum, Providence.

[156] The Czech version of *La création* was published in Prague in 1923 with the title *Tvoření v Umění Výtvarném*.

process that he supervised personally.[157] This effectively means that, at the time, Kupka was re-reading all his pre-war writings, carefully going over the translation of his own theories on a variety of aesthetic issues, recalling his many sources for this, which would include his observations in gothic buildings. The possibility must be considered that this re-encounter with his own writings prompted Kupka to revisit some of these sites and reflect on his own experience of them. This could have been the case at least with Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois, whose early 1910s description in *La création* – the meandering blues and reds of the three stained glass windows behind the main altar as seen from the entrance[158] – is remarkably close to what Kupka painted in the 1920 *Gothic Contrasts* and to the reality of the church itself (Fig. 9).[159]

Fig. 9 Church of Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois, Paris.

Fig. 7 František Kupka, *Gothic Contrasts (Contrastes Gothiques)*, c. 1920, oil on canvas, 66 x 71 cm. Private collection.

Whether reinforced by the translation process of *La Création* or not, Kupka's appreciation for gothic architecture appears to have remained undiminished after the war, judging from his frequent 1920 visits to Chartres and to Brittany, where he also studied Celtic art.[160] French medieval heritage must still have been a relevant referent

[157] Mladek and Rowell, 'Chronology', 311–12.

[158] See quote above, note 138.

[159] Aside from the above description of the three windows behind the altar as seen from the entrance, I would also venture the possibility that the dark brown shape placed diagonally at the bottom of the painting could somehow be based on the actual pulpit at Saint-Germain, its steps wrapping around a column and breaking the vertical rhythm of the church's architecture.

[160] Mladek and Rowell, 'Chronology', 312.

to him when in 1922 he was appointed professor of the Prague Academy in Paris, with the job of introducing Czech students to French culture. As part of this assignment, in 1923 Kupka was taking his students to French museums and monuments, among them Chartres and Notre-Dame.[161]

Against this background, it is not surprising to see gothic-inspired motifs and themes resurface in Kupka's work after the war. What is more intriguing, perhaps, is their new formal rendition, the rigid geometric lines of their pre-war treatment now distorted, softened or merged with forms of organic inspiration. This post-war combination of organic forms and gothic architectural elements could simply be read as a further formal development in Kupka's pictorial practice, one where he merged what had hitherto been two separate lines of enquiry. However, taking into account Kupka's commitment to what Leighten has called "a politics of form,"[162] an alternative explanation for this merging of the organic and the architectural might be found, still, in dialogue with Worringer's theories.

Worringer had celebrated the inorganic forms of gothic architecture as the highest point of a powerfully expressive abstract volition of the 'Germanic North'. As part of the same argument, he had dismissed what he understood to be a Greco-Latin artistic volition incapable of such abstraction given its permanent search for "the balanced tranquillity of gentle organic movement."[163] In developing so much of his abstraction through unequivocally organic forms, Kupka might have been challenging the idea of the supremacy of geometric abstraction implicit in Worringer's theory.

The organic in Kupka, however, did not consist of the pleasing naturalist rendition of reality that Worringer had associated with the bourgeois. The organic for Kupka was structural: "Art expresses itself in composing its own organism. The work of art possesses a specific organic structure, entirely different from that which is found in nature."[164] That is, just as he conceived of a painting as a building, structured as a

[161] Mladek and Rowell, 313.

[162] Leighten, *The Liberation of Painting*, 177.

[163] See quote above, note 65.

[164] As quoted in Leighten, *The Liberation of Painting*, 164.

network of lines that supported what the artist wished to express,[165] he also conceived of a painting as an organism, equally built according to its own organic structure. A painting was for Kupka a construction, whose structure could take its forms from architecture as it could from nature. The organic-natural/inorganic-abstract opposition posited by Worringer did not work for Kupka. A way to annul this divide was through organic depictions of the very gothic architecture that Worringer had exalted as the Germanic apotheosis of expressive abstract forms unadulterated by Greco-Latin organicity. Thus, challenging Worringer's reductive racialised notion of a 'pure' geometric gothic abstraction may have been what Kupka aimed at in *Gothic Contrasts* and perhaps even more explicitly in *Reminiscence of a Cathedral* (1920-23) (Fig. 10).

Fig. 10 František Kupka, *Reminiscence of a Cathedral,* 1920-23, oil on canvas, 149.8 x 94 cm. Chicago: Art Institute. © 2018 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.

As the title suggests, this painting revisits the *Cathedral* Kupka painted in 1913 (Fig. 6 above). The post-war version still conveys the same sense of upward thrust through vertical rhythms and diagonal lines, and of movement through the prismatic effect of blues and reds. Here however, the strict geometric forms of the 1913 *Cathedral* are 'adulterated' by organic forms that purposely bring in the "organically coloured Latin

[165] See quote above, note 125.

artistic will, the Latin joy in decorative finish, sensuous clarity and organic harmony" that according to Worringer's theory had made 'pure Gothic' impossible in France.

Rowell describes Kupka's practice as an attempt to capture, in a highly personal manner, the sense and structure of a cosmic order that he understood as a "kaleidoscope of changing light, colour, forms and space."[166] This subjective interpretation of cosmic forces required the use of objective means, a repertory of forms and colours capable of evoking universally legible concepts, instincts and rhythms.[167] Kupka found in nature, which he considered a great 'dictionary' for artists,[168] a major source of such forms and colours. The recurrence of gothic-inspired motifs in his work suggests that, as a privileged space for the observation of constructive forms under changing light and colours, the cathedrals he so often visited, both before and after the war, provided an equally fertile source for his personal repertory.

The question remains, then, as to why he claimed that in 1911 he had developed "his own uniquely 'abstract' way of painting, orphism, disregarding all other cultural systems except that of Greece." That is, why would he imply that the gothic, contrary to all the evidence discussed above, had actually not been a part of this development? Such a claim might perhaps make more sense in the context of what seems to have been Kupka's critical reception of Worringer's theories, as well as his anti-German feeling, especially considering the claim was made in 1936, in a new build-up of tensions with Germany. In *La création* Kupka had already asserted a strong Latin element to French cathedrals by affirming that they simply "carried and pushed further the Roman style and spirit." In his post-war paintings he expressed such 'Latinness' (as per Worringer's definition) in organic renditions of gothic architecture that challenged Germanic notions of gothic purity. From his anti-German position and on the eve of the Second World War, I would argue that with his 'nothing but the Greek' assertion Kupka was not actually trying to deny the place of the gothic in the development of his orphism. French cathedrals had clearly been a part of his research, yet he gladly accepted that theirs was such an 'adulterated', organic gothic, that they could not have been part of the Germanic

[166] Rowell, 'František Kupka: A Metaphysics of Abstraction', 49.

[167] Rowell, 48.

[168] In this, Kupka quoted Delacroix: "For the artist, nature is only a dictionary." Rowell, 'Catalogue of the Exhibition', 209.

tradition posited by Worringer. On the contrary, Kupka celebrated the organicity of French cathedrals and, still according to Worringer's reductive opposition of terms, may have been claiming them instead as part of the "Greek cultural system" he recognised as the only source for his orphic abstraction.

2 Robert Delaunay –
"Destruction" and "construction" in the Saint-Séverin and Windows series

Robert Delaunay's interest in gothic architecture becomes apparent in the *Saint-Séverin* series he produced between 1909 and 1910 (and then reworked, in at least one case, in 1915).[169] These paintings, along with his subsequent production of distorted views of Paris dated 1911-1912, have been examined by Tomàs Llorens with regard to the idea of the gothic. Bringing these works together under the category "Gothic Architectures, the Eiffel Tower, the City"[170] he proposes the notion of the gothic to explain this specific period in Delaunay's oeuvre, between 1909 and 1912, just before the *Simultaneous Windows* series.

The 'gothic key' to interpret this production is posited by Llorens as an alternative to a historiographical convention that has generally presented it as Delaunay's tentative approximation to Cubism before his move towards the orphism for which he would become best known. Llorens places Delaunay's attraction to the gothic within the context of the nationalist debate, already discussed for Kupka, which sought to ascribe France's cultural identity to either gothic-northern or renaissance-Mediterranean roots.[171] In Llorens' view, in the period under study Delaunay was drawn to the gothic because he adhered to the art critical current that, within this debate, celebrated 'gothic-northern' aesthetics as 'modern', while objecting to 'renaissance-Mediterranean' aesthetics as 'classical'.[172]

From these premises, Llorens posits that the gothic key to interpreting this period of Delaunay's oeuvre is to be found, firstly, in the iconography and, secondly, in the formal language of the works in question. These include the well-known *Saint-Séverin* series and a number of views of Paris dominated by either the spire of Notre-

[169] Gordon Hughes, *Resisting Abstraction: Robert Delaunay and Vision in the Face of Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 133. The significance of this reworking is discussed at the end of this chapter.

[170] Llorens, 'La ubicuidad como utopia', 17.

[171] For an in-depth discussion of the nationalist debate on the essence of French culture and its manifestations in avant-garde circles, see Antliff, 'Cubism, Celtism, and the Body Politic'.

[172] The use of inverted commas around all of these terms is meant to signal the vagueness and instability of their meanings as appropriated by opposing camps in the nationalist debate.

Dame or the Eiffel Tower, as well as views of Laon Cathedral, among others.[173] Within the *Saint-Séverin* series Llorens selects painting number 3 (Fig. 11) to illustrate how Delaunay took pleasure in the geometric play of "light fragmenting against the vault ribs and the faceted pillars of a gothic church, before spreading like liquid on the floor".[174]

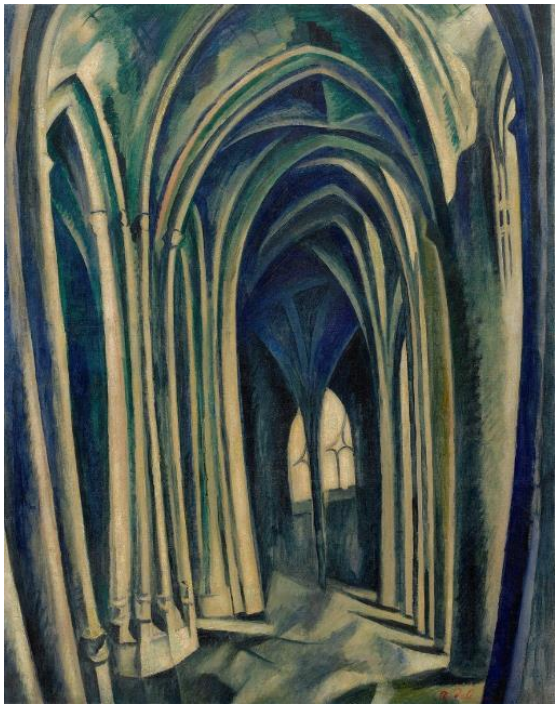

Fig. 11 Robert Delaunay, *Saint-Séverin 3*, 1909-1910, oil on canvas, 113.8 x 89.5 cm. New York: Guggenheim Museum.

For Llorens this kind of exercise in the study of light links Delaunay's practice at the time with that of Neefs and Saenredam in the 17th century, the German Romantics from Schinkel onwards and the Nordic symbolists. Delaunay's concerns in the *Saint-Séverin* church were not limited to the exploration of light. Llorens points out that in the series the artist was also examining "architecture as a paradigm of pictorial space", and that it is in this regard that his enquiries here might be linked to those of the cubists.[175] Still, in Llorens' view, what distances the *Saint-Séverin* paintings from Cubism is precisely

[173] The paintings featured in the catalogue for this section of the exhibition were *La fléche de Notre-Dame* (1909); *La fléche de Notre-Dame* (*Vue de Paris, Notre-Dame*) (1909-1915); *Les tours de Laon* (1912); *Tour, Premiére étude* (1909); *Tour Eiffel aux arbres* (1910); *La Tour aux rideaux* (1909-1911); *Les Trois Grâces* (1912); *Les trois Grâces* (1909); *La ville* (1911).

[174] Llorens, 'La ubicuidad como utopia', 17.

[175] Llorens, 17.

the fact that they depict gothic architecture and, as such, they represent a "space animated by the nostalgia of infinity" rather than the rational and measurable Cartesian space of Cubism.[176] For Llorens, it is precisely the "organic, dynamic and irrational character" of the *Saint-Séverin* series that sustains the "analogy that Delaunay establishes implicitly between the experience of the gothic temple and the spatial experience of the modern city."[177] Such an experience is, in this author's view, what Delaunay then seeks to express in his subsequent views of Paris, such as *Eiffel Tower with Curtains* and *Eiffel Tower with Trees* (Fig. 12 and 13), which he saw as a continuation of the work he had initiated at Saint-Séverin.[178] In Llorens' interpretation, the French capital, though modern, was still in the artist's eyes "the gothicist and late-romantic Paris of Victor Hugo."[179]

Fig. 12 Robert Delaunay, *Tour Eiffel aux rideaux* (*Eiffel Tower with Curtains*), 1910-1911, oil on canvas, 116 x 97 cm. Dusseldorf: Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen

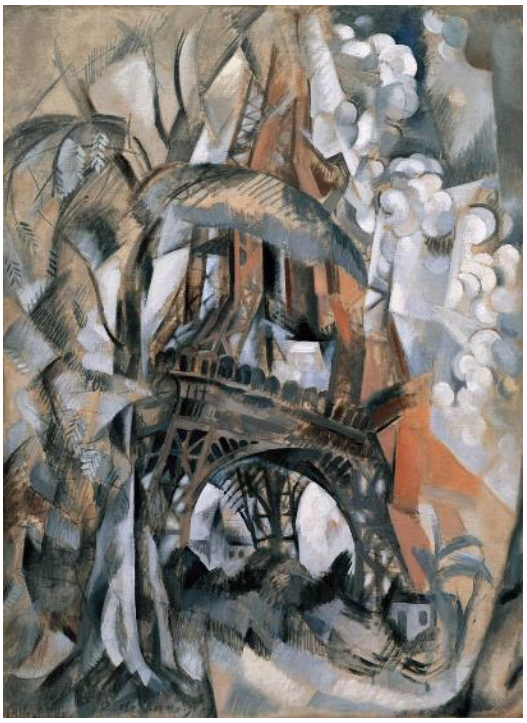

Fig. 13 Robert Delaunay*, Tour Eiffel aux arbres (Eiffel Tower with Trees)*, 1910, oil on canvas 126.4 x 92.8 cm, New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection

[176] Llorens, 17.

[177] Llorens, 17.

[178] Llorens, 18.

[179] Llorens, 17.

Llorens' argumentation summarised above assumes that the gothic, in its "irrationality", was incompatible with Cubism's Cartesian logic. In fact, as shown by Mark Antliff, there was actually a current within cubo-symbolist circles at the time that celebrated the country's Celtic roots and gothic culture as "truly French"[180] and therefore sought to incorporate them into their cubist practice. This ideological strain of Cubism was spearheaded by Albert Gleizes (of the Puteaux group of artists in which both Kupka and Delaunay were involved) and art critic Roger Allard. From a position anchored in France's revolutionary tradition, they rejected intellectualism, Cartesianism, logic and the heritage of the Greco-Roman culture as foreign to a French Celtic *esprit*, advocating instead the cubist expression of a Bergsonian intuitive, collective *durée* of the French people.[181]

Any formal closeness between Delaunay's *Saint-Séverin* series and Cubism could therefore actually be argued, as Llorens does, because *despite* its 'irrational gothicism' the series explores architecture as pictorial space; or, conversely, because *on account* of its 'irrational gothicism' the series expresses the French intuitive, collective *durée* discussed by Antliff. Ultimately, however, the question of whether the series should be seen as Cubism at all is one that falls beyond the scope of this thesis.

Of greater relevance but also more problematic in Llorens' discussion of the gothic in Delaunay's oeuvre, is his claim that the *Saint-Séverin* series marks a sort of parenthesis within the gradual process of "colour epiphany" that would culminate in the *Windows* series.[182] According to this claim, in 1906-1907 Delaunay would have begun his study of simultaneous colour contrasts with *Paysage au disque solaire*. Around 1909, coinciding with the *Saint-Séverin* series, he would have switched to resolving problems

[180] Antliff, 'Cubism, Celtism, and the Body Politic', 657.

[181] This was part of a concerted effort to oppose the right-wing Action Française's definition of national identity based on greco-latin culture. Further complicating terminological matters for art historians, Gleize's and Allard's position also maintained that France's true 'classical' legacy resided in its gothic and romantic eras. Antliff, 656–57. Charles W. Haxthausen describes a similar association of the gothic with Cubism that was later also theorised in Germany by critic Adolf Behne. Behne identified Cubism with 'architectonic painting' in opposition to expressionist 'lyricism' and designated Paul Klee and Lionel Feininger as its leading exponents. In a similar vein to Gleize and Allard, Behne saw in Cubism a "rebirth of the spirit that had inspired the gothic and 19th century romanticism." Charles W. Haxthausen, 'Walter Gropius and Lyonel Feininger: Bauhaus Manifesto,1919', in *Bauhaus 1919-1933: Workshops for Modernity*, ed. Barry Bergdoll and Leah Dickerman (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2009), 64.

[182] Llorens, 'La ubicuidad como utopia', 17.

of form (hence the supposed proximity to Cubism in this period). Finally, in 1912, with the *Simultaneous Windows* series, he would have resumed the enquiries into colour that ultimately led to his celebrated and influential orphic discs.[183] Llorens justifies the idea of the 1909-1912 period as a "parenthesis" by the fact that Delaunay himself (retrospectively) described these years as an "analytical" or "destructive" period in his "evolution".[184]

Missing from Llorens' argumentation, however, is the fact that Delaunay also said that the *Simultaneous Windows* series then marked the beginning of a "constructive"[185] phase in his enquiries. This suggests that, in Delaunay's understanding, the 1909-1912 period that he devoted to the Saint-Séverin church and the distorted views of Paris, was not so much the parenthesis posited by Llorens, but rather the first of a two-phase, destructive/constructive, process of enquiry. A process that, I will argue, engaged with the gothic in both phases.

Llorens does nuance nonetheless his own chronological compartmentalization, by pointing out the existence of certain continuities between the work produced by the artist in the "destructive" 1909-1912 period and that of the [constructive] *Simultaneous Windows* series that followed it. Llorens acknowledges, specifically, the presence of the "gothicist" motif of the Eiffel Tower both in pre-1912 works such as the two shown above and in works of the *Windows* series (Fig. 14). Further, Llorens also establishes a link between them by drawing attention to the emblematic character of what he calls the "rectangular" grid of the *Windows* paintings as a "reminiscence of the metropolitan experience" of the pre-*Windows* views of Paris.[186]

[183] Llorens, 14, 17.

[184] Llorens, 17.

[185] Jennifer Blessing, 'Robert Delaunay', in *Guggenheim Museum A to Z*, by Nancy Spector (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1992), 74.

[186] Llorens, 'La ubicuidad como utopia', 18.

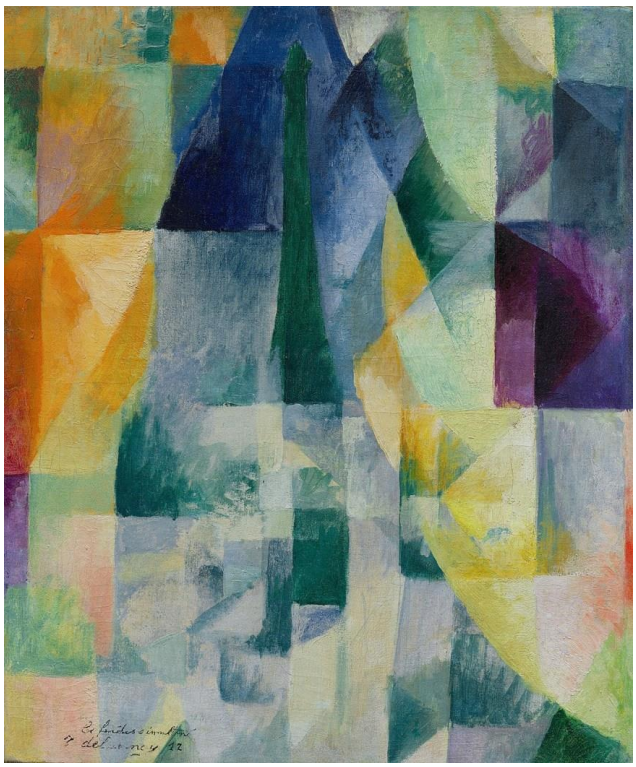

Fig. 14 Robert Delaunay, *Simultaneous Windows (2nd motif, 1st part)* (*Les fenêtres simultanées (2e motif, 1re partie)*), 1912, oil on canvas, 55.2 x 46.7 cm. New York: Guggenheim Museum

Llorens' identification of continuities between these periods leaves out a further aspect that I would argue connects not only the *Simultaneous Windows* series with the pre-1912 views of Paris, but also with the *Saint-Séverin* series: the very notion of window and its presence in the form of stained glass in the Parisian church. In effect, Delaunay's experience of stained glass during his 'destructive' phase at Saint-Séverin appears to have had perceptible effects during his 'constructive' *Windows* phase and beyond.

The basic concept behind the paintings of the *Simultaneous Windows* – that of a cityscape seen through a window – does not appear abruptly with this series. Rather, it is something Delaunay had already been exploring in several of his pre-1912 views of Paris such as *Eiffel Tower with Curtains* (Fig. 12 above).[187] What does change clearly from the pre-1912 views of Paris to the *Simultaneous Windows* series is the kind of window trough which the city is viewed. The view of Paris in *Eiffel Tower with Curtains* feels as if seen through the clear glass of an apartment window which, in its unevenness, fragments and distorts the subject matter in a manner similar to Cubism. In the

[187] Blessing, 'Robert Delaunay', 74. Jennifer Blessing has suggested that the artist's attraction to windows and window views can be related with the Symbolists' use of "glass panes as metaphores for the transition from internal to external states."

Simultaneous Windows series, on the other hand, we are looking at Paris through multi-coloured geometrical shapes. These, organised in a more or less regular grid can indeed be a "reminiscence of the metropolitan experience of the city", as claimed by Llorens.[188] However, the juxtaposed geometrical shapes in these paintings can also suggest the shards that make up a stained glass window, especially in those instances in which their arrangement is noticeably less orthogonal, such as in *Simultaneous Windows (2nd Motif, 1st Part)* (Fig. 14 above) or *Three Windows, Tower and Wheel* (Fig. 18, further below).

This brings us back to Saint-Séverin. As already discussed, it is Llorens' argument that the *Saint-Séverin* series shows Delaunay's temporarily shifting focus to issues of form, through the study of architecture, and it therefore marks a parenthesis in his enquiries into colour. In fact, several of the paintings in the series suggest otherwise. *Saint-Séverin 1* and *Saint-Séverin* (no number) (Fig. 15 and 16, below) show that Delaunay was not just exploring the perceptual distortion of the architectural space around him, but that in an ongoing study of colour, he was also trying to capture the refraction of coloured light filtered through the glass of stained windows and its fragmented projection onto the vault and the floor of the ambulatory.

[188] The interpretation of Delaunay's grid in the Windows Series as inspired by the city is also supported by Gordon Hughes' study of the same series, the lines of which he relates to the aerial photographs of Paris by André Schelcher and Albert Omer-Décugis, published in 1909. See Hughes, *Resisting Abstraction: Robert Delaunay and Vision in the Face of Modernism*, 49.

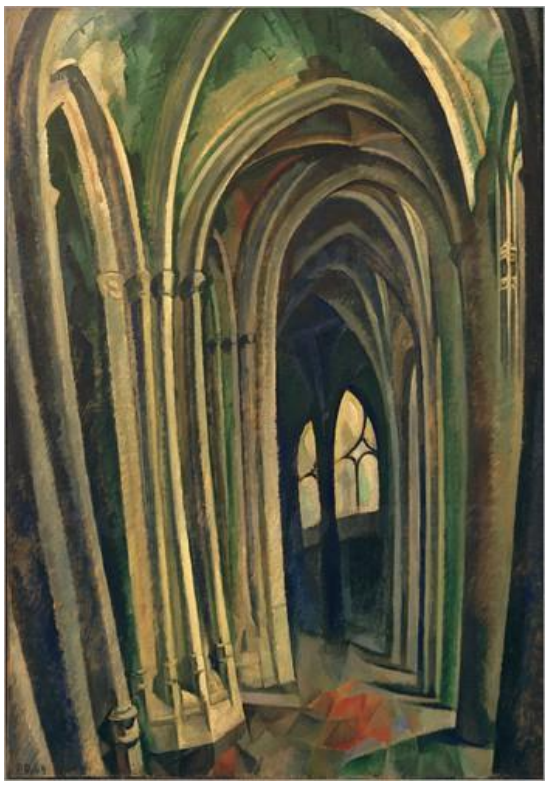

Fig. 15 Robert Delaunay, *Saint-Séverin 1*, 1909, oil on canvas, 117 x 83 cm. Private collection.

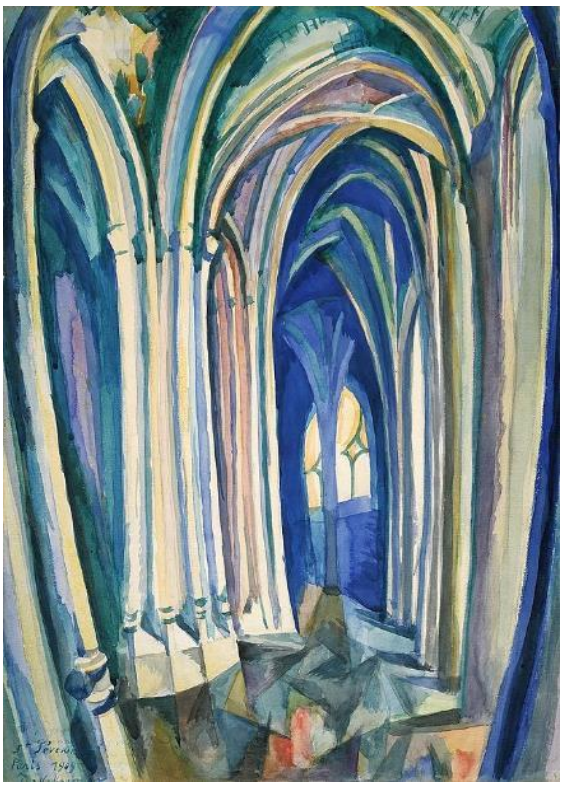

Fig. 16 Robert Delaunay, *Saint-Séverin,* 1909, watercolour, 47.8 x 34 cm. Boston: Museum of Fine Arts. Bequest of Betty Bartlett McAndrew.

The possible connection between Delaunay's observation of stained glass at Saint-Séverin and the *Simultaneous Windows* series has been noted by Barbara Larson. This author describes Delaunay as an enthusiast of Gothic cathedrals and stained glass who, with his wife Sonia, would often visit the Parisian church of St.-Germain-l'Auxerrois[189] (incidentally, the same church often visited by Kupka). Larson draws attention to the *Saint-Séverin* paintings as Delaunay's first serial study of shape and colour distortion through refracted light and claims that his observation of stained glass there informed his subsequent enquiries into the use of the semi-transparent colour patches that characterise the *Simultaneous Windows*.[190] According to Delaunay these paintings illustrated the interaction between light, colour and space,[191] which is actually

[189] Sherry Buckberrough, ed., *Sonia Delaunay: A Retrospective* (Buffalo, NY: Albright Knox Gallery, 1980), 23; as quoted in Larson, 'Through Stained Glass. Abstraction and Embodiment in Early Twentieth Century Avant-Garde Circles', 228.

[190] Larson, 'Through Stained Glass. Abstraction and Embodiment in Early Twentieth Century Avant-Garde Circles', 228.

[191] Llorens, 'La ubicuidad como utopia', 21.

a similar line of enquiry to the one he had pursued while at *Saint-Séverin*. In a letter to Kandinsky about his work on this series, Delaunay detailed how it was based on a "window motif" and on the use of "transparent colours, comparable to musical notes, which have led me to the movement of colour."[192] It is worth noting Delaunay's musical analogy of colour, and his mention of its movement, as concerns he shared with Kupka who, as discussed in the previous chapter, explored these notions, at least in part, through his observation of stained glass in Parisian gothic churches.

Of greater relevance to this thesis, still, is Delaunay's description of the basis for this series being a window motif created with transparent colours, which is conceptually very close to the idea of a stained glass window. It is perhaps fitting, therefore, that Delaunay's first tentative exercise with this particular approach took as its motif not the modern city but the gothic cathedral of Laon (Fig. 17), which he also painted serially shortly before the *Simultaneous Windows* series.[193]

Fig. 17 Robert Delaunay, *Les Tours de Laon* (*Towers of Laon*), 1912, oil on canvas, 162 x 130 cm. Paris: Centre Pompidou.

[192] Peter-Klaus Schuster, ed., *Delaunay Und Deutschland* (Cologne: DuMont Verlag, 1986), 492; as quoted in William Sherwin Simmons, 'Abstraction and Empathy on the Eve of World War I', *Konturen*, no. 5 (26 June 2013): 3–30, https://doi.org/10.5399/uo/konturen.5.0.3246.

[193] Larson, 'Through Stained Glass. Abstraction and Embodiment in Early Twentieth Century Avant-Garde Circles', 228.

The idea of a stained glass window, only vaguely suggested in the Laon series, appears more explicitly evoked in the *Simultaneous Windows* series (Fig. 18) which according to Delaunay constituted his "constructive" phase. In these paintings, Delaunay seems in fact to build an imaginary stained glass window out of translucent geometric shapes in vivid colours. Entirely taken up by this framework of coloured shards, the canvas effectively turns into a window through which we get to see views of Paris now distorted by glass refraction and colour.

Fig. 18 Robert Delaunay, *Three Windows, Tower and Wheel*, 1912, oil on canvas, 130.2 x 195.6 cm. New York: MoMA.

Finally, Larson further posits that gothic stained glass informed Delaunay's enquiries into colour not only in the *Simultaneous Windows* but also in the *Circular Forms* that followed them. She grounds this claim on a further 1912 work painted by Delaunay while at Laon: a copy of a circular stained glass panel from the cathedral – a 13th century depiction of Mary's Visitation – on the verso of which a year later he painted one of his *Formes circulaires* in similar colours,[194] thus establishing a visual

[194] Sophie Bowness, 'The Presence of the Past: Art in France in the 1930s, with Special Reference to Le Corbusier, Léger and Braque' (PhD Thesis, Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, 1995), 168, Courtauld Institute of Art. This particular double work can be seen at Kunstmuseum Bern. It is also mentioned in Larson, 'Through Stained Glass. Abstraction and Embodiment in Early Twentieth Century Avant-Garde Circles', 228.

correspondence between the two. In fact, the possibility that Delaunay's orphic discs are somehow indebted to his early observation of light and colour through stained glass windows seems reinforced by the artist's reworking of one of the *Saint-Séverin* paintings, no. 7 (Fig. 19). It is difficult to ascertain the exact extent of his 1915 intervention in a 1910 work, but it surely included the concentric rings of colour on the lower right-hand corner,[195] a trademark of delaunayan orphism that he only began to develop from 1913. Thus, five years after completing the painting, Delaunay revisited it in order to place this disk on the same spot of the church floor where in other paintings of the series (see Fig. 15 and 16 above) he had rendered in angular shapes the projection of light refracted by the church's stained glass windows. In so doing, I would argue, he knowingly established a direct connection between his early observation of light and colour fragmentation through stained glass, and their subsequent 'reassemblage' in the shape of an orphic disk.

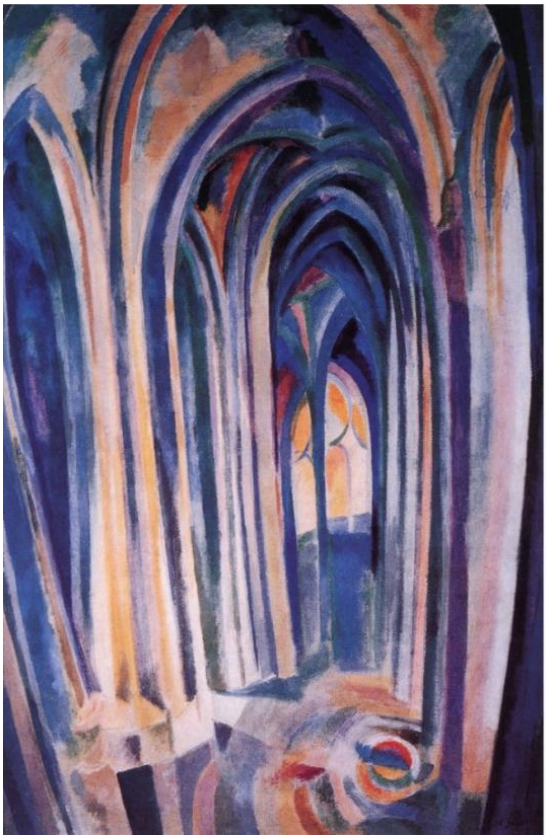

Fig. 19 Robert Delaunay, *St.-Séverin no. 7*, 1909-1910/1915. Private collection.

[195] This retrospective intervention in the painting – with no details as to its extent – is dated as 1915 in Hughes, *Resisting Abstraction: Robert Delaunay and Vision in the Face of Modernism*, 133.

3 Otto Freundlich – 'Lead-less stained glass' as an analogy for socialism

Otto Freundlich had a pioneering role in the development of nonobjective art in the early 1910s in Paris and enjoyed the recognition of his fellow avant-garde practitioners.[196] Yet, his work has remained less well-known than that of other artists surveyed here.[197] The 2017 exhibition *Otto Freundlich: Cosmic Communism* contributed to redress this relative obscurity by offering the first comprehensive view of this artist's work for almost forty years.[198] This exhibition paid special attention to Freundlich's work beyond painting and sculpture, discussing in detail his concomitant dedication to mosaic and stained glass. Of particular relevance to this thesis, it also related aspects of his oeuvre with their medieval sources. The latter were discussed in the light of previously unpublished writings by Freundlich that under the title "Confessions of a Revolutionary Painter"[199] provide a framework of his aesthetic theories and their grounding on the artist's socialist beliefs. Given the thoroughness and novelty of this recent scholarship, and in particular the essays by Julia Friedrich on Freundlich's relationship with the medieval,[200] what follows is only a necessarily abbreviated discussion of this author's findings as they relate to the issues at hand here.

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[196] Freundlich was introduced to the Paris avant-garde from 1908 but did not fully subscribe to any of its movements, and specifically rejected Cubism. Lena Schrage, '"Nothing Is There Simply for Its Own Sake": Paintings, Drawings, and Watercolors in Otto Freundlich's Early Period', in *Otto Freundlich: Cosmic Communism*, ed. Julia Friedrich (Munich ; London ; New York: Prestel, 2017), 41. While always remaining a bit of an outsider, he was appreciated by fellow avant-garde artists, many of whom signed a joint appeal in 1938 to buy one of Freundlich's works at a time when he was going through serious financial hardship. Julia Friedrich, ed., 'Biography and Exhibitions', in *Otto Freundlich: Cosmic Communism* (Munich ; London ; New York: Prestel, 2017), 313.

[197] This is partly due to the fact that key pieces of his oeuvre were lost or destroyed as a result of his persecution by the Nazi regime, both as a 'degenerate artist' and as a Jew. The 1937 Degenerate Art exhibition included fourteen artworks by Freundlich confiscated from German museums and collections, of which thirteen have been lost. After his detention in Southern France in 1943, he was taken to the extermination camp of Sobibor where he died.

[198] Friedrich, *Otto Freundlich*. The previous monographic exhibition was *Otto Freundlich (1878-1943): Retrospektive*, Rheinishches Landesmuseum, Bonn, 19 December 1978 to 4 February 1979; Kunstverein Braunschweig, 16 Februrary to 25 March 1979; Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, Berlin 4 to 18 April 1979.

[199] Written in 1935 in Paris, this text had previously only been available in abbreviated form. The complete text was newly transcribed and translated into English for the exhibition catalogue Otto Freundlich, 'Confessions of a Revolutionary Painter', in *Otto Freundlich: Cosmic Communism*, ed. Julia Friedrich (Munich ; London ; New York: Prestel, 2017), 4–16.

[200] Julia Friedrich, 'Abstraction as Opening Up: An Introduction to Otto Freundlich's Aesthetics', in *Otto Freundlich: Cosmic Communism*, ed. Julia Friedrich (Munich ; London ; New York: Prestel, 2017), 28–39; Julia Friedrich, 'The Chartres Experience: Otto Freundlich's Stained Glass Paintings and Pastels from the

Looking back on his career in 1924, Freundlich once stated: "I never aspired to money, power and fame. When fifteen years ago I began my career as an artist I created according to my inner conviction, which demanded that I depart from tradition."[201] Coming from an avant-garde artist committed to social progress, a self-styled 'revolutionary painter', this quote could be construed as expressing a modernist desire to break with the past. Yet, the "tradition" from which Freundlich wished to distance himself did not encompass the past generally but referred instead specifically to the practice of illusionistic representation,[202] a "Renaissance ideal" that he "abjured".[203] Before that time, however, other periods in history, and the Middle Ages in particular, offered art forms and modes of production of great interest to him. Chief among these was the idea of the artisans' guild.

As noted by Friedrich, Freundlich regarded medieval guilds highly because, in his understanding, they pursued "an art tailored to practical ends, which at that time was still innocent about property and the bourgeoisie, and thus of the dualism between subject and object, owner and possessions, and often had a broad cosmological horizon."[204] The same author stresses that this look back to the Middle Ages was not a nostalgic one. The period appeared to Freundlich to anticipate a time when privilege and private property would have been surmounted.[205] That is, from his socialist understanding of art, Freundlich saw in these guilds "already a part of the anonymous collective he was working towards."[206]

1920s', in *Otto Freundlich: Cosmic Communism*, ed. Julia Friedrich (Munich ; London ; New York: Prestel, 2017), 122–78.

[201] Otto Freundlich, 'Bekenntisse eines Intellektuellen' [1924] 132-134 in Uli Bohnen, ed., *Otto Freundlich: Schriften. Ein Wegbereiter Der Gegenstandslosen Kunst* (Cologne: DuMont Verlag, 1982), 132. As translated and quoted in Schrage, '"Nothing Is There Simply for Its Own Sake": Paintings, Drawings, and Watercolors in Otto Freundlich's Early Period', 40. I have altered Schrage's translation in one word only, but a key one: "tradition", which Schrager translates freely in the plural: "[...] which demanded that I depart from the traditions" when it is actually in singular form in the original "[...] die verlangte, von der Tradition abzugehen."

[202] Friedrich, 'Abstraction as Opening Up: An Introduction to Otto Freundlich's Aesthetics', 33.

[203] Freundlich, 'Confessions of a Revolutionary Painter', 13.

[204] Friedrich, 'Abstraction as Opening Up: An Introduction to Otto Freundlich's Aesthetics', 32.

[205] Friedrich, 32.

[206] Friedrich, 32.

This idealisation of medieval guilds and craftsmanship is something Freundlich had in common with the Bauhaus, as was his constructive approach to art and his belief that the consolidation of the arts would bring about a new society.[207] This closeness to the Bauhaus ideals and its commitment to the Weimar Republic led Walter Gropius to try, unsuccessfully, to secure a teaching position for him at the school.[208]

As will be discussed for the case of the Bauhaus further below, beyond the idea of the guild, medieval art itself also offered models, not least in stained glass, for an avant-garde artist like Freundlich concerned with the ideas of construction and planarism. Freundlich became acquainted with this medium during a long stay in Chartres Cathedral on the eve of the First World War. He would recall the experience as a transformative one, as he wrote to a friend in 1917: "For about five months I fell under the spell of the world of Chartres and as I left I was marked for life."[209] He was referring to the time he spent at a studio in the north tower of the cathedral between March and July 1914 where he studied medieval stained glass and took part in the restoration work of the cathedral.[210]

Having gone to Chartres on the probable advice of the Portuguese artist Amadeo de Souza Cardoso,[211] Freundlich wrote to him towards the end of his stay with a significant insight he had gained during his time at the cathedral:[212]

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[207] Geneviève Debien, 'The Sound and Colour of Cosmic Architecture', in *Otto Freundlich: Cosmic Communism*, ed. Julia Friedrich (Munich ; London ; New York: Prestel, 2017), 116.

[208] Edda Maillet, *Otto Freundlich* (Paris: Franka Berndt Bastille, 1990), n.p.

[209] Letter from Freundlich to Heinersdorff, 22 December, 1917, Archiv Puhl & Wagner – Gottfried Heinersdorff (APWGH), as translated and quoted in Friedrich, 'The Chartres Experience: Otto Freundlich's Stained Glass Paintings and Pastels from the 1920s', 122. The importance of Freundlich's stay in Chartres had already been pointed out, though not elaborated on, in Christophe Duvivier, ed., *Otto Freundlich, 1878-1943* (Paris: Somogy éditions d'art, 2009), 115. This author attributes a very similar quote to Freundlich but in a letter to his friend the artist Schmidt-Rottluff (1884-1976).

[210] Friedrich, 'Biography and Exhibitions', 304.

[211] Schrage, '"Nothing Is There Simply for Its Own Sake": Paintings, Drawings, and Watercolors in Otto Freundlich's Early Period', 42. Freundlich and de Souza Cardoso had become acquainted in 1911 in Paris. De Souza Cardoso was also interested in medieval art and had spent the summer of 1912 in Pont-l'Abbé, Brittany, creating an avant-garde illuminated manuscript of *La légende de St. Julien l'Hospitalier*, a 19th century Flaubert story inspired by a stained glass window in Rouen Cathedral. The manuscript is kept at Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, who have produced a facsimile version: Gustave Flaubert and Amadeu de Souza Cardoso, *La légende de Saint Julien l'hospitalier* (Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian. Centro de Arte Moderna José de Azeredo Perdigão, 2006).

[212] Schrage, '"Nothing Is There Simply for Its Own Sake": Paintings, Drawings, and Watercolors in Otto Freundlich's Early Period', 42.

> "I feel it is important in this context to study the tendency in composition and the tendency of life itself and its beauty. A life of energy comes from the power of decomposition, which means: spiritualizing so that life becomes an eternal flow that streams towards its dissolution [négation], but this dissolution must be wished for and cheerful. Congratulate me on this discovery, which is as follows: Decomposition is far more mysterious than composition."[213]

Freundlich does not elaborate further on the notion of 'decomposition', nor its precise sources here. However, given the kind of work that occupied him at Chartres, it is likely that his thinking on the notion of 'decomposition' was informed to some extent by his hands-on experience of stained glass restoration. His observation of the cathedral's windows would have allowed him to see their motifs deconstructed into single-colour fragments of glass, and the light coming in through those windows decomposed into a multicolour projection on the cathedral's walls, columns and floor.

At any rate, as pointed out by Friedrich, while the impact of the Chartres experience would still take some years to manifest itself fully in Freundlich's painting,[214] it was immediate in his newfound passion for mosaic and stained glass as mediums in their own right.[215] From his understanding of art as an architecture of colour juxtaposition,[216] both stained glass and mosaic offered ideal means for artistic enquiry. His referent for both remained medieval art. In contrast with the illusion of volume that had accompanied the "ego of the Renaissance"[217] Freundlich admired "the old murals done in mosaics, the stained glass windows in the old cathedrals up until the thirteenth century, [...] all composed in a planar manner."[218] His preference for earlier gothic

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[213] Postcard from Freundlich to de Souza-Cardoso, July 6, 1914, in Coleção Amadeo de Souza-Cardoso, I ASC 13/29; ASC 13/30; ASC 13/31 I FCG-BA, Biblioteca de Arte, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon, as translated in Schrage, 42. This and another two postcards of Chartres cathedral from Freundlich to de Souza Cardoso are available on http://baimages.gulbenkian.pt/images/winlibimg.aspx?skey=&doc=170040&img=24602

[214] Friedrich, 'The Chartres Experience: Otto Freundlich's Stained Glass Paintings and Pastels from the 1920s', 122.

[215] Friedrich, 'Abstraction as Opening Up: An Introduction to Otto Freundlich's Aesthetics', 32.

[216] Debien, 'The Sound and Colour of Cosmic Architecture', 116.

[217] Friedrich, 'Abstraction as Opening Up: An Introduction to Otto Freundlich's Aesthetics', 33.

[218] Otto Freundlich, 'Ideen Und Bilder: Aufzeichnungen Eines Malers (Auszug) [1940/1942]', in *Otto Freundlich: Schriften. Ein Wegbereiter Der Gegenstandslosen Kunst*, ed. Uli Bohnen (Cologne: DuMont Verlag, 1982); as quoted in Friedrich, 'Abstraction as Opening Up: An Introduction to Otto Freundlich's Aesthetics', 33.

stained glass, "up until the thirteenth century," owes to the fact that this used less, or none, of the enamels that were applied over glass in later specimens, and particularly from the Renaissance onward, in order to create volumetric effects. His constructive approach to art meant that, like Kupka, he rejected the use of enamels on glass; compositions had to be built out of glass, not painted over it. In this, he found the right partner for his stained glass projects in Gottfried Heinersdorff, a glass construction manufacturer who set out to replace "painting on glass" by "painting with glass".[219] With him, too, he would go on to devise a constructive technique to create mixed colours by overlapping pieces of glass in various shades.[220]

While still at Chartres he created his first stained glass design, a *Study for a Glass Window (Mary)* (1914).[221] The memory of his stay at the cathedral was still vivid two years later, when he wrote to his friend Friedja Schugt-Maus about "the glorious cathedral at Chartres [where] the pure blue of the heavens is to be found in the ancient stained glass."[222] Schugt-Maus was also the recipient of a window design (Fig. 20) that Friedrich posits may have been inspired by the cathedral's rosette.[223]

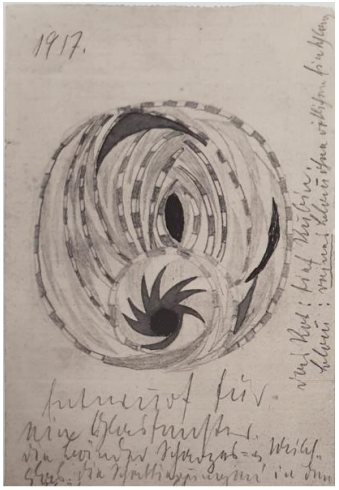

Fig. 20 Otto Freundlich, *Design for a Stained Glass Window*, 1917, pencil and watercolour on paper, 15.2 x 10.2. Private collection. As reproduced in Friedrich 2017, 154.

[219] Friedrich, 'The Chartres Experience: Otto Freundlich's Stained Glass Paintings and Pastels from the 1920s', 123.

[220] Friedrich, 125.

[221] This was exhibited at the Fritz Gurlitt's Gallery in Berlin and was subsequently lost. Friedrich, 122.

[222] Letter from Freundlich to Schugt-Maus, 2 January 1916, in Joachim Heusinger von Waldegg, *Otto Freundlich Und Die Rheinische Kunstzene Mit Briefen an Herwarth Walden Und Wilhelm Niemeyer* (Bonn: Verein August Macke Haus, n.d.), 252; as translated and quoted in Friedrich, 'The Chartres Experience: Otto Freundlich's Stained Glass Paintings and Pastels from the 1920s', 126.

[223] Friedrich, 'The Chartres Experience: Otto Freundlich's Stained Glass Paintings and Pastels from the 1920s', 122.

That same year he drew a *Blossoming Branch of Chartres*, now lost, for the art historian Wilhelm Niemeyer,[224] while writing to him that he "sighed" for opportunities to work with stained glass and mosaic, convinced of how much he would have to say in both mediums.[225] He received a commission for the mosaic the *Birth of Man* (1919),[226] and upon his move back to Paris in 1924, where he registered with the job title 'stained glass artist',[227] he designed a limited number of glass compositions, such as *Reclining Woman* (1924) (Fig. 21) and *Composition I* and *II* (Fig. 22 and 23).

Fig. 21 Otto Freundlich, *Reclining Woman*, 1924, watercolour on paper, 5.3 x 39.5 cm, and stained glass, 24 x 163 cm. Pontoise: Donation Freundlich - Musées de Pontoise.

Fig. 22 Otto Freundlich, *Composition I (Stained Glass Window Design)*, 1929, gouache on paper, 30.5 x 23 cm. Private collection. As reproduced in Friedrich 2017, 148.

Fig. 23 Otto Freundlich, *Composition II (Stained Glass Window Design)*, 1929, gouache on paper, 30.5 x 23 cm. Private collection. As reproduced in Friedrich 2017, 149.

[224] Friedrich, 122.

[225] Letter from Freundlich to Niemeyer, Cologne (after 17 July 1916) as quoted in Debien, 'The Sound and Colour of Cosmic Architecture', 116.

[226] The mosaic is currently displayed at Cologne Theatre Debien, 'The Sound and Colour of Cosmic Architecture'.

[227] Friedrich, 'The Chartres Experience: Otto Freundlich's Stained Glass Paintings and Pastels from the 1920s', 125.

Stained glass remained a lifelong concern in Freundlich's practice[228] with Chartres always a referent. In 1926 he would once more write to Heinersdorff after yet another visit to the cathedral:

> "As I entered [...] the afternoon sun flooded through the west window. This golden yellow was ablaze and dominated the other colours. A yellow like egg yolk, without the slightest trace of green or brown!! What a summation of boldness and beauty in these windows. If only we had the assignments we could simply lavish out our treasures."[229]

Freundlich's longstanding fascination with Chartres suggests in his case a perception of the gothic devoid of nationalist considerations. As a German artist concerned with abstraction, and a participant of the Munich art scene until 1910,[230] he was likely aware of Worringer's theories on the subject of abstraction, and his exemplification of it in the gothic, that were being eagerly discussed at the time among *Der Blaue Reiter*'s practitioners. If nothing else, Freundlich's perception of the Middle Ages as pre-bourgeois does chime in with the German art historian's ideological interpretation of the gothic/Renaissance dichotomy. Yet, Freundlich's decision to work on the restoration of not just any cathedral, but a French national symbol such as Chartres, on the eve of the First World War, and his continued admiration for it after the conflict, indicates he was not swayed by Worringer's identitary exaltation of the Germanic gothic over the French. Or then again, perhaps he just agreed with the part of Worringer's theory that nevertheless conceded a superior beauty to the latter.

As inspired as Freundlich was by Chartres, however, the assignments in stained glass that he longed for on his visits there were not as forthcoming as he wished. By the mid-1920s he had to turn his focus to painting, though his approach to the medium was now marked by his experience with stained glass. Friedrich has already noted that colour, which had always been the most striking element in Freundlich's painting before

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[228] For a complete detail of all known and surviving works by Freundlich in stained glass, see Friedrich, 'The Chartres Experience: Otto Freundlich's Stained Glass Paintings and Pastels from the 1920s'.

[229] Letter from Freundlich to Heinersdorff, December 1926, APWGH, Berlinische Galerie, as quoted in Friedrich, 125.

[230] Friedrich, 'Biography and Exhibitions', 302–3.

his stay at Chartres, gained further importance afterwards.[231] His exposure to stained glass at the cathedral had only heightened in Freundlich the "life-affirming, optimistic chromatic euphoria of Orphism" to which the artist was already sensitive, not least through his closeness to the Delaunays.[232] Beyond colour, however, it was above all the planar constructed nature of stained glass that would have a profound impact on Freundlich's painting, as transpires from his *Confessions of a Revolutionary Painter*:

> "We see the glass painters of the XII and XIII centuries build up and organize their large coloured windows by the means of the surface. The corporeal aspect of the forms is alluded to discretely, but if fully aligns itself with and obeys the planar law that determines the power, beauty, and consistency of these windows. Thus the validity of the relief-like effect in painting and drawing is by no means as universal as it seems to us heirs to the Renaissance and photography."[233]

The same text shows that it was while designing for stained glass, moreover, that Freundlich came upon solutions for his painterly problems in pictorial field construction and colour interaction:

> "When I made a window [in 1922] with coloured panes and my design was to be produced in a small studio for stained glass painting, the master glazer taught me that a planar curve cannot be cut out of the glass in one piece. So the curved surface had to be cut out in numerous pieces, which were then separated from one another by the lead but, viewed against the light, still retained their unity. But not all of the surfaces from this first design were curved. Instinctively, and wiser from my studies of ancient stained glass from the XII + XIII century, I had also painted trapezoidal surfaces in my design, and these could easily be cut from the glass with a diamond. This experience was of great importance to me when I designed a second window, but it was to be of even greater importance for my further artistic development, although at that time I did not yet realize as much. But when I painted my second design for a stained glass window measuring 1 meter wide and 2 meters high, I did not paint in the lead glass with narrow black

[231] Friedrich, 'Abstraction as Opening Up: An Introduction to Otto Freundlich's Aesthetics', 33.

[232] Friedrich, 33.

[233] Freundlich, 'Confessions of a Revolutionary Painter', 13.

surfaces, but instead placed the coloured trapezoidal shapes directly next to each other. While painting these coloured trapezoidal surfaces directly next to one another I was beset by an excitement as if by a new kind of life in painting. Not until many years later was I taken thither to where this new life was fully revealed to me. The intimate connection between all the surfaces on one picture, in which like a cell in an organism each passes the energy on to the next cell until there is but an unbroken circulation of these energies throughout the entire organism, this could first be realized by the accumulation of all colours in one picture. And this was the one goal that I strived to attain, because it tallied with my social convictions: with Socialism."[234]

The constructive solution described here by Freundlich effectively involves building the painting as if it were a stained glass composition in which the lead strips have been removed so as to allow what he calls the "unbroken circulation" of colour energies throughout the "entire organism" of the painting. His socialist analogy of such circulation and of the resulting "accumulation of all colours in one picture" is once again illustrative, as was the case with Kupka, of what Leighten has called a "politics of form" in abstract art.[235] It is a politicisation of form that makes it possible for a Jewish communist avant-garde artist to reconcile his utopian socialist beliefs with his conceptual and formal appropriation of an art form inextricably associated with Europe's Christian medieval past.

From a formal point of view, this 1922 realisation effected a change in Freundlich's practice around the mid-1920s, in clear contrast with his previous work.[236] Friedrich notes how his pre-war production had been marked by a certain expressionism and symbolism,[237] as in *Composition* and *Composition with Figure*, (both 1911) (Fig. 24 and 25), while his work (mostly pastels) immediately after the war had a visible orphic element to them, as in *Composition with Ship* (1918-19) (Fig. 26).

[234] Freundlich, 9.

[235] Leighten, *The Liberation of Painting*, 177–80.

[236] Friedrich, 'The Chartres Experience: Otto Freundlich's Stained Glass Paintings and Pastels from the 1920s', 122.

[237] Friedrich, 122.

Fig. 24 Otto Freundlich, *Composition*, 1911, oil on canvas, 200 x 200 cm. Paris: Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris.

Fig. 25 Otto Freundlich, *Composition with Figure*, 1911, oil on canvas, 54 x 65 cm. Pontoise: Donation Freundlich - Musées de Pontoise.

Fig. 26 Otto Freundlich, *Composition with Ship*, ca. 1918-19, chalk pastel on wove paper, 34.5 x 45.7 cm. Private collection. As reproduced in Friedrich 2017, 151.

Fig. 27 Otto Freundlich, *Composition*, 1924, pastel on paperboard, 74.7 x 53.8. Cleveland: The Cleveland Museum of Art. As reproduced in Friedrich 2017, 141.

Then, from the mid-1902s onwards his works grew increasingly partitioned, as in *Composition* (1924) (Fig. 27 above), and ultimately became what Friedrich has termed a "prismatically split-up abstraction,"[238] as in *View from the Window* (ca. 1924-25) and *Fragments of Figures in a Context of Planes* (1927) (Fig. 28 and 29). In these paintings, indeed suggestive of lead-less stained glass, Freundlich developed a highly recognisable personal idiom, characterized by the juxtaposition of the coloured "trapezoidal surfaces" alluded to in his *Confessions*, that, with variations, would mark the rest of his oeuvre.

[238] Friedrich, 122.

Fig. 28 Otto Freundlich, *View from the Window*, ca. 1924-25, pastel on paper, 50 x 65 cm. Private collection.

Fig. 29 Otto Freundlich, *Fragments of Figures in a Context of Planes* (*Fragments de figure à l'ensemble des plans*), 1927, oil on canvas, 55 x 46 cm. Private collection.

Still in *Confessions*, Freundlich went on to state that "the picture that I was able to paint in this ['lead-less stained glass'] manner was like a fine line for me, dividing the past from the future. Everything resembling a motif was overcome."[239] Again, we come across the kind of statement from a modernist artist that implies a point of rupture, a clean break with the past. Indeed, from that point onwards no recognisable motifs appear in Freundlich's paintings. By the 1930s external references tend to disappear from the titles too, which now mostly just revolve around the term *Composition*. When titles do refer to anything outside of the painting itself it is to largely nonconcrete concepts such as *My Sky is Red* (1933), *Forces* (1934), or *Autumnal Vision* (1935). Except, that is, in two cases where the title given by Freundlich designates a concrete object: *Rosette* (1938) and *Rosette II* (1941) (Fig. 30 and 31).

Contradicting Freundlich's claim to a dividing line between the past and an ostensibly motif-less future, in both of these works his trademark trapezoids are organized in a vaguely circular kaleidoscopic arrangement deliberately meant to evoke the effect of a stained glass rose window. In the case of the second one, the composition

[239] Freundlich, 'Confessions of a Revolutionary Painter', 9.

was actually intended to be executed in glass "on the scale of a rosette in a cathedral," as he described in a letter to Picasso.[240]

Fig. 30 Otto Freundlich, *Rosette (La Rosace)*, 1938, gouache on paper, mounted on canvas, 208 x 202 cm. Pontoise: Musées de Pontoise – Donation Freundlich. As reproduced in Friedrich 2017, 279.

Fig. 31 Otto Freundlich, *Rosette II* (*La Rosace II),* 1941, gouache on paper, sizes and location not given. As reproduced in Friedrich 2017, 280.

With these paintings Freundlich brings together the formal and ideological threads discussed above. Conceived as 'lead-less stained-glass' paintings, the medieval art form at the origin of these compositions dissipates with the omission of the black contours that would mimic its characteristic lead strips. In its place Freundlich creates an interconnected collective of coloured surfaces, an "unbroken circulation of energy" that conveys his socialist convictions. Still, in the purportedly motif-less future that this formula had opened up for him, Freundlich uses his trademark juxtaposition of trapezoidal surfaces to create, in *Rosette* and *Rosette II*, recognisable motifs that speak unequivocally to his appreciation for the medieval art form underlying so much of his practice.

[240] "I have worked on a design for a glass piece which is intended to be done on the scale of a rosette in a cathedral". Unsent letter from Freundlich to Picasso, undated, but written in the Pyrenees, and thus after June 1940. Archive AAJOF, IMEC, FRN 9.1, as quoted in Friedrich, 'The Chartres Experience: Otto Freundlich's Stained Glass Paintings and Pastels from the 1920s', 127.

4 Piet Mondrian –
Gothic architecture as the expression of verticality

Piet Mondrian provides yet another example of the complex relationship modernism could maintain with the past. His work also illustrates that the appeal that gothic architecture held for avant-garde artists living in Paris in the early 1910s extended beyond the much celebrated French monuments. In *Mondrian: the Art of Destruction*, Carel Blotkamp discusses the artist's spiritual understanding of art and his deep-seated belief in a Theosophical notion of evolution, which required the destruction of the old to make room for the new, in life, in society and in art.[241] In painting, argues Blotkamp, the destruction operated by Mondrian was directed at representation and form in a process that would ultimately lead to abstraction.[242]

Blotkamp takes the well-known *Façade* series of 1914-1915 as illustrative of this process of destruction. The series includes seven drawings in which Mondrian progressively deconstructed a view of the Domburg church, in the Netherlands.[243] The motif, a 14th century building, undergoes a process of decomposition that gradually erases the elements that made it recognisable as a Gothic church: the windows, slanted roof and buttresses that can be seen in *Church Façade 1* (Fig. 32) disappear almost entirely into a system of vertical and horizontal lines with pointed arches barely hinted at in *Church Façade 4* (Fig. 33).[244]

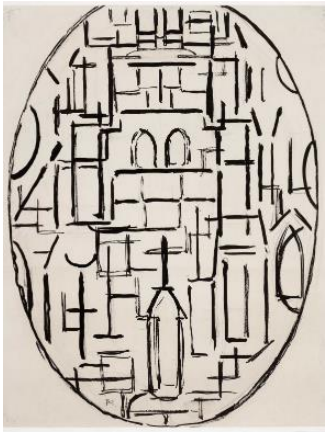

Fig. 32
Piet Mondrian, *Church Façade 1*, 1914, pencil, charcoal and ink on paper, 63 x 50.3 cm. The Hague: Gemeentemuseum

Fig. 33
Piet Mondrian, *Church Façade 4*, 1914, charcoal on paper on board, 76.8 x 49.5 cm. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Art Museum.

[241] Carel Blotkamp, *Mondrian: The Art of Destruction* (Reaktion Books, 2001).

[242] Blotkamp, 15.

[243] Joop M. Joosten, ed., *Piet Mondrian: Catalogue Raisonné of the Work of 1911-1944* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998), 240–48.

[244] Blotkamp, *Mondrian*, 88.

For Y.-A. Bois, the gradual elimination of the clear references to gothic architecture after the first drawing is not just an exercise in the destruction of form and representation, as posited by Blotkamp, but rather a deliberate rejection of the historical period that such architecture stands for. In "The Iconoclast", Bois writes:

> "the arches and flying buttresses of medieval architecture have nothing to do with modernity. To celebrate these emblems of a bygone era is, for the evolutionist Mondrian, to display a culpable attachment. [After the first drawing] he very rapidly abandons his latest Parisian mode and returns to the technique of 1912-1913, which I call digitalization, the progressive transformation of a motif into a network of horizontal and vertical dashes".[245]

In Bois' interpretation, therefore, Mondrian, an evolutionist iconoclast, realized his own attachment to forms that embodied the medieval, anti-modern past, and quickly corrected the course, resuming for the rest of the series the stricter deconstruction into vertical and horizontal lines.

Roque has objected to Bois' interpretation, to his understanding as modern and medieval as opposites, by pointing out that many artists at the time appreciated elements of modernity in the gothic cathedral.[246] Roque further suggests that the choice of this particular motif by Mondrian is largely arbitrary, probably conditioned by the many representations of cathedrals (by Delaunay and Gleizes, among others) that the Dutch artist must have seen during his stay in Paris between 1911 and 1914.[247]

Finally, he contends that the gradual stylisation of the motif in *Church Façade* does not obey to Mondrian's desire to rid himself of any "culpable attachment" to a "bygone era" but rather to his wish to eliminate the particular in pursuit of the universal.[248] I agree with Roque that what Mondrian is trying to distance himself from along the series is indeed representation in general, rather than the medieval subject-matter in particular. I would posit, however, that the choice of subject is not arbitrary – a random motif, as argued by Roque - but rather deliberate. In fact, Mondrian's own

[245] Bois, 'The Iconoclast', 336.

[246] Roque, 'La façade comme surface, de Monnet à l'art abstrait', 126.

[247] Roque, 126.

[248] Roque, 126.

observations about the *Façade* series drawings, which will be discussed further below, suggest that he chose the gothic façade because it allowed him to explore a theme that was central to his research at the time: the spiritual expression of verticality. A clue to the association that Mondrian traces between the gothic and verticality[249] in his early work is provided by his observations in a 1943 interview:

> "The first aim in a painting should be universal expression. What is needed in a picture to realize this is an equivalent of vertical and horizontal expressions. This I feel today I did not accomplish in such early works as my 1911 'Tree' paintings. In those the vertical emphasis predominated. A 'gothic' expression was the result."[250]

It would be reasonable to assume that Mondrian was referring here to his 1912 *Tree* paintings, rather than the 1911 series where the horizontal actually appears to dominate over the vertical. On the contrary, in 1912 works such as *The Trees* and *Composition Trees 1* (Fig. 34 and 35), the natural motif is rendered as a tracery of vertical lines and curves that is, indeed, strongly reminiscent of gothic architecture.[251] In *The Trees*, moreover, the thick black contouring and slightly translucent effect of the colours it encloses, in particular towards the top of the painting, evoke the effect of a stained glass window, as was noted by critics at the time of its 1912 exhibition in Amsterdam.[252] While ostensibly depicting trees, the lines and light treatment of this painting can actually be seen to create the overall effect of a cathedral interior, with muted light filtered by stained glass, a perception that has led Blotkamp to describe this work as expressing the spirituality associated with gothic forms.[253]

Blotkamp points out the recurrence of gothic architecture, portrayed with "a certain symbolic intent," in Mondrian's paintings from the outset of his career.[254] An

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[249] See Roque, 124–28.

[250] Mondrian interview with James Johnson Sweeney, reproduced in Piet Mondrian, *The New Art, the New Life: The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian*, ed. Harry Holtzman and Martin S. James (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987), 356. Also quoted in Georges Roque, ed., *L'Imaginaire moderne de la cathédrale* (Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'orient; Jean Maisonrouge, 2012), 126.

[251] Blotkamp, *Mondrian*, 70.

[252] Blotkamp, 70.

[253] Blotkamp, 70.

[254] Blotkamp, 70.

early example of this would be *Village Church* (1898) (Fig.36) in which a village dominated by a gothic church is seen through the bare branches of trees in the foreground. The main elements in this painting – trees and church – would become two key motifs in Mondrian's deconstruction efforts in the 1910s. In *The Trees* and *Composition Trees 1* the natural and the man-made motifs appear in effect to have somehow merged, fitting in with the common trope of the cathedral as a forest of stone.[255]

Fig. 34 Piet Mondrian, *The Trees*, 1912, oil on canvas, 94 x 69.8 cm. Pittsburgh: Carnegie Museum of Art.

Fig.35 Piet Mondrian, *Composition Trees 1* (unfinished), 1912, oil on canvas, 81 x 62 cm. The Hague: Gemeentemuseum

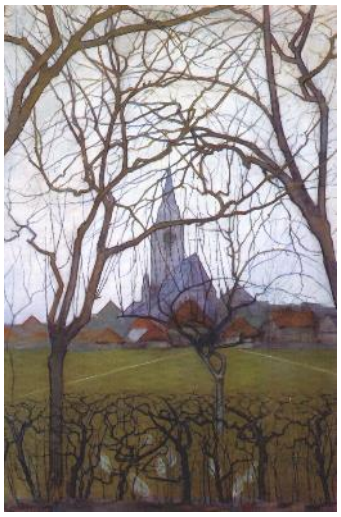

Fig. 36 Piet Mondrian, *Village Church* (St. Jacob's Church), c. 1898, gouache on paper, 75 x 50 cm. Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum

The depiction of gothic architecture intensifies in Mondrian's works between 1909 and 1915, namely in his views of Zeeland churches and the Westkapelle Lighthouse. During his Paris years, 1911 to 1914, he also became aware of considerable cubist interest in gothic forms,[256] not least in Delaunay, as discussed above. It is worth considering for a moment the gothic edifices most often depicted by Mondrian in this period: the Domburg and Zoutelande churches as well as the Westkapelle lighthouse. The first two are relatively small temples each dominated by an imposing tower. In early

[255] On the metaphorical depiction of cathedrals as forests, vegetation and nature generally see J. Prugnard, Joëlle Prungnaud, 'Nature et Artifice: La Décadence et La Doctrine Romantique de La Cathédrale Gothique'', in *La Cathédrale*, ed. Joëlle Prungnaud (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Université Charles-de-Gaulle, 2001), 159–70; as quoted in Roque, 'La façade comme surface, de Monnet à l'art abstrait', 121.

[256] Blotkamp, *Mondrian*, 70.

versions of these paintings, dated 1908-1909, the churches are seen from various angles, showing both the nave and the tower.[257] In later versions, from late 1909 to 1911,[258] Mondrian shifts his viewpoint so that the actual body of the church is barely visible behind the imposing tower, which is shown up close from below so as to emphasize its overpowering presence (Fig. 37 and 38).

This suggests a growing interest by Mondrian less in the churches themselves than in their most pronounced vertical component. His focus on the verticality of gothic architecture from around 1909 is additionally confirmed by his depictions of the Westkapelle lighthouse (Fig. 39), itself the lone surviving tower of a late 15th century church. Following a first version in 1908, Mondrian returns to this motif on five different occasions between 1909 and 1910.[259]

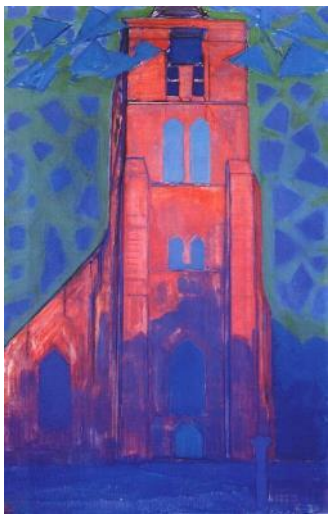

Fig. 37 Piet Mondrian, *Church Tower at Domburg*, 1911, oil on canvas, 114 x 75 cm. The Hague: Gemeentemuseum

Fig. 38 Piet Mondrian, Sun, Church in Zeeland, 1909-1910, oil on canvas, 90.7 x 62.2 cm. Private collection

Fig. 39 Piet Mondrian, Lighthouse at Westkapelle in Orange, Pink, Purple and Blue, c. 1910, oil on canvas, 135 x 75 cm. The Hague: Gemeentemuseum

The focus on these vertical motifs fits in with Mondrian's enquiry at the time into the relationship between the vertical and the horizontal, the "vertical/horizontal

[257] Joop M. Joosten, ed., *Piet Mondrian: Catalogue Raisonné of the Naturalistic Works until Early 1911* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998), 453–55. Ref. A680, A688 and A681.

[258] Joosten, 453–55. Ref. A689, A690 and A691.

[259] Joosten, 449–53. Ref. A682-A687.

opposition" that, in Bois' terms, he began digitalizing from 1912-1913.[260] Upon his return to the Netherlands in 1914, Mondrian further digitalized this opposition through three main motifs: the Domburg church (with the Façade series discussed above), the sea, and piers extending into the sea.[261] Bois posits that in the rendition of all these motifs there is always "a certain initial disequilibrium [between vertical and horizontal, that] must constantly be resolved" and that "this resolution must constantly be undone as we watch the mutual negation of the forces at work [...] so that repose is never definitive, but is perceived as a tension towards the absolute."[262] The drawings of the sea and of the piers extending into it illustrate, in Bois' view, Mondrian's search for this kind of dynamic equilibrium: having found that his sea drawings produced an overly horizontal effect Mondrian tried to combat their unidireccionality with the inclusion of the pier, rendered as a vertical element to counter the horizontality of the sea.[263]

The same principle, contends Bois, applies to the Domburg façade drawings. In them, Mondrian also encountered a problem of unidireccionality, only in this case due to an excessive verticality that in the author's view necessarily evoked "the tragic",[264] and that he therefore set out to correct in the last two drawings of the series, *Façade 6* and *Façade 7*. To this end, still in Bois' interpretation, Mondrian first reintroduced the central double arch in *Church Façade 6* (Fig. 40) which he had ended up eliminating in previous drawings of the series (see Fig. 33 above). Then, in the final drawing, *Church Façade* 7 (Fig. 41), "he strongly horizontalizes the arch so as to counterbalance all upward movement, just as in his previous works he had introduced a vertical pier in order to counterbalance the overly 'natural' horizontality of the sea."[265]

[260] Bois, 'The Iconoclast', 336.

[261] Bois, 336–39.

[262] Bois, 339.

[263] Bois, 339.

[264] Bois, 339.

[265] Bois, 'The Iconoclast'.

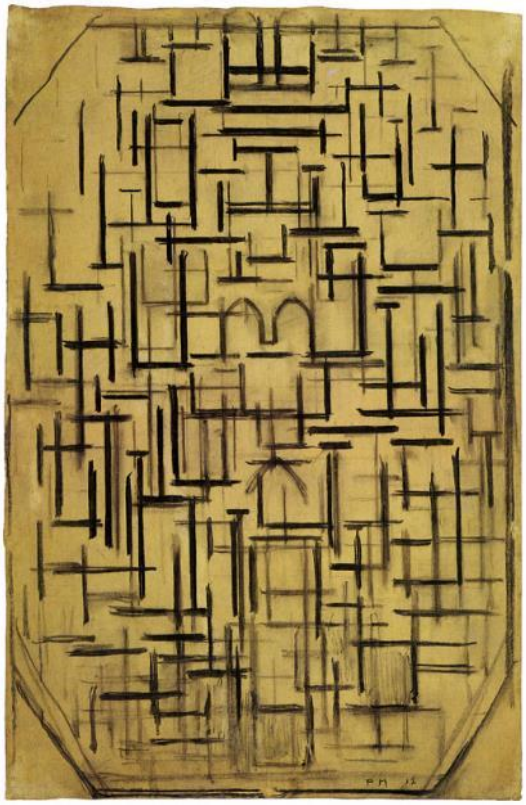

Fig. 40 Piet Mondrian, *Church Façade 6*, 1915, charcoal on paper, 99 x 63.4 cm. New York: Museum of Modern Art.

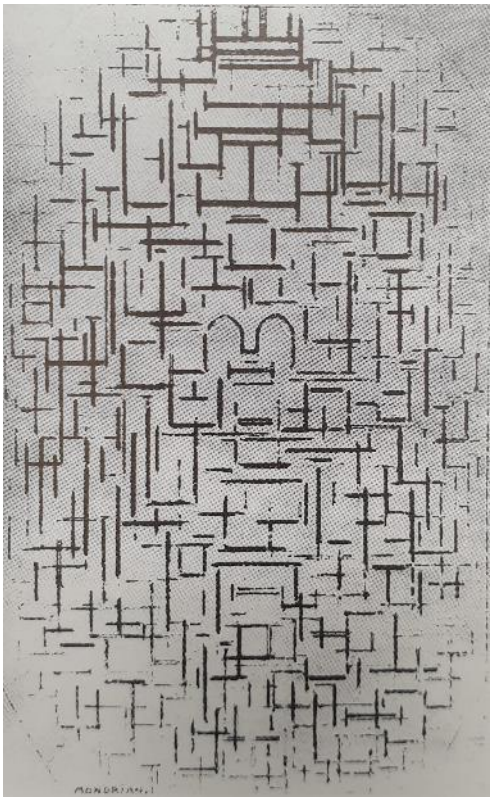

Fig. 41 Piet Mondrian, *Church Façade 7*, 1915. Whereabouts unknown

I would agree with Bois that the vertical/horizontal opposition is more balanced in *Façade 7* than in *Façade 6*. It is less clear, however, that what he describes as a strongly horizontalized arch in *Façade 7* was actually meant to "counterbalance all upward movement." In fact, Mondrian's own observations on this particular drawing suggest that a sense of upward movement was precisely what he was trying to achieve. In a letter to van Doesburg about *Façade 7* Mondrian describes it as "a composition of vertical and horizontal lines which (in an abstract way) is meant to express the idea of rising, of greatness, which was behind the building of cathedrals, for instance. I refrained from giving it a title. An abstract human mind will receive the intended impression as a matter of course."[266] In a previous letter to De Meester-Obreen, Mondrian had also declared *Church Façade 7* to be "inspired by a cathedral, though generalized into an

[266] Piet Mondrian letter to The van Doesburg, undated (October 1915) as quoted in Joosten, *Piet Mondrian: Catalogue Raisonné of the Work of 1911-1944*, 247.

impression of the essence".[267] The explicit references to the cathedral in these two letters might help explain, too, the reintroduction of the double arch window that Mondrian had omitted from previous versions of the façade. While the window has indeed been "horizontalized", made wider in order to balance the verticality of the composition, its still slightly pointed double arch renders it a recognisable reference to gothic architecture. In a painting meant to express the idea "of rising, of greatness" behind the building of cathedrals, the reintroduction of this pointed double arch could signal a deliberate decision to reinforce the association between such upwardness and the medieval building that had inspired it, a small representational concession to the cathedral whose 'essence' Mondrian wished to convey.

The motivations behind Mondrian's engagement with the gothic are difficult to pinpoint. It would be safe to assume that the significance of the gothic to him was not grounded on nationalist considerations. French-German disputes over the lineage and 'true values' of gothic architecture carried little relevance in the Netherlands. In this country, moreover, the gothic had a strong association with the Catholic faith,[268] with which Mondrian, given his Calvinist background,[269] would not have identified. Historically, too, the gothic-Catholic link had evoked a much maligned period of Spanish-Habsburg domination of the Low Countries.[270]

Thus, while it was certainly a part of the Dutch landscape, the gothic does not seem to have been particularly celebrated or endowed with nationalist values. Yet, as part of that landscape, it was an architectural object with which Mondrian engaged extensively from 1909 with his study of church towers. It is also difficult to establish

[267] Letter to De Meester-Obreen, (August 1915). Joosten, 247.

[268] Auke Van Der Woud describes how gothic forms became a central theme of the Roman Catholic revival that began in the 1850s in the Netherlands. By the 1860s, the pointed arch, that in the 1840s had also echoed modern industrial England, now became exclusively associated with the Catholic faith in a gothic revival that took medieval French architecture as its point of reference. Auke Van Der Woud, *The Art of Building: International Ideas, Dutch Debate 1840-1900* (Routledge, 2017).

[269] Mondrian had been brought up in a strongly Calvinist family. In 1893, at the age of 21, he switched from one brand of Dutch Calvinism to another, which, in Blotkamp's view "underscores the importance he attached to the norms and values of his youth during the early years of his artistic development". Blotkamp, *Mondrian*, 24.

[270] Erik Sengers, '"Although We Are Catholic, We Are Dutch": The Transition of the Dutch Catholic Church from Sect to Church as an Explanation for Its Growth and Decline', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 43, no. 1 (2004): 132.

whether this early appropriation of the gothic as an architectural object of pictorial research would have been in any way informed by Worringer's theories, as their reception in the Netherlands at this point is unclear.

Mondrian would have likely become acquainted with Worringer's thinking on the gothic during his stay in Paris, where the German art historian's ideas appear to have been in circulation at the time (as discussed above for the case of Kupka) if nothing else through the Parisian avant-garde's contacts with participants in *Der Blaue Reiter*. Whether he became aware of them or not at the time, the appropriation of the gothic among avant-garde practitioners in the French capital can only have validated his own early interest in the medieval architectural objects of his native Netherlands. It is an engagement that he would resume in earnest upon his return home with the 1914 *Façade* series of the Domburg church.

This would suggest that, at this point in his practice, his perception of the gothic cannot be reduced to that of an emblem of a bygone medieval era to be rid of in the name of theosophical evolutionism. His choice of it as a motif was deliberate; a gothic church was a particularly apt object to research the spiritual that he pursued in art because it conveyed the sense of magnitude and elevation that he wished to capture in his own work through the arrangement of vertical and horizontal lines. The gothic carried a sense of rising and greatness that Mondrian thought "abstract human minds" should be equally able to perceive from a cathedral and from his own modern art. It may well be, as the 1943 interview quoted above implies, that in later years Mondrian found the verticality of gothic to be excessive. Still, the evidence discussed here suggests that, at least until 1914, when his practice was experimenting with the orthogonality that, years later, would come to characterize Neoplasticism, the forms and proportions of gothic architecture were central to his enquiries into the expressive potential of the vertical element of the orthogonal equation.

5 Theo van Doesburg – How to "completely destroy the Middle Ages"

The idea of the cathedral also held currency for van Doesburg in relation with modernist concerns with the expressive potential of geometric forms. This was a line of enquiry that he shared with Mondrian, who, as discussed above, had been exploring it in his well-known *Façade* series. Van Doesburg dedicated to Mondrian a poem entitled *Cathedral I*, probably inspired by the drawing of the *Façade* series that Mondrian had exhibited together with the painting *Composition* (1915), which had aroused in van Doesburg a strong spiritual response.[271] Moreover, beyond this spiritual dimension, the notion of the cathedral was also being appropriated in Dutch avant-garde circles as the embodiment of a new unity of the arts under architecture. A key exponent of this idea was the architect J. J. P. Oud (1890-1963) with whom van Doesburg and Mondrian would found *De Stijl* in 1917. As discussed by Walter L. Adamson, by 1916 Oud was proposing that

> "architecture could serve as the binding element in a new 'monumental' art that would transcend the isolation of the various 'individual' arts and provide modernity with an aesthetic unity akin to what the Gothic cathedral had provided for the medieval era."[272]

That same year Oud set out to put this theory into practice with the refurbishment of a number of private residences near Leiden for which he enlisted the help of Theo van Doesburg.[273] Oud's thinking on the unity of the arts was immediately appealing to van Doesburg, who wrote enthusiastically of "a monumental-collaborative art […] wherein the different spiritual means of expression (architecture, sculpture, painting, music, and the Word) in harmony – that is, each individual one gaining by collaboration with another one – shall come to the realization of unity."[274]

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[271] Blotkamp, *Mondrian*, 95.

[272] Walter L. Adamson, *Embattled Avant-Gardes: Modernism's Resistance to Commodity Culture in Europe* (University of California Press, 2007), 200.

[273] Gladys C. Fabre and Doris Wintgens Hötte, eds., *Van Doesburg and the International Avant-Garde: Constructing a New World* (London: Tate Publishing, 2009), 10.

[274] Theo van Doesburg, 'De Nieuwe Beweging in de Schilderkunst', *De Beweging*, 1916, 234; as translated and quoted in Adamson, *Embattled Avant-Gardes*, 200.

One of Oud's projects, the house of the mayor of Broek in Waterland, provided van Doesburg's first opportunity to experiment with stained glass, a medium that exemplified the notion of visual arts built into architecture. Given van Doesburg's lack of training in stained glass, the Broek in Waterland project required him to swiftly become acquainted with this medium.[275] In this task he was possibly assisted by the Hungarian painter Vilmos Húszar (1884-1960),[276] a founding member of De Stijl with considerable experience in glass. Van Doesburg's July 1916 visit to the Van Stolk museum of medieval art, with a substantial stained glass collection, [277] and to the gothic church of Saint Bavo, both in Haarlem, have also been interpreted as part of this research.[278] Following this visit, he wrote to his friend Kok:

> "Through our last day – I mean in the medieval museum and the Saint Bavo church – I have found my task: the crystal atmosphere. I have a positive plan for creation and what I shall create now will top everything".[279]

Van Doesburg does not elaborate in this letter on the notion of "crystal atmosphere" that is to become his "task" from that point forward, but it would be safe to assume that it was to some extent inspired by the stained glass specimens exhibited at the museum and by the striking luminosity that animates Saint Bavo church through its largely clear leaded windows.[280] His aesthetic experience of stained glass that day may have been further heightened by the poem by Goethe that served as a preface to

[275] He admitted so much in a letter to his friend Antony Kok, 4 August 1916: "I have my first assignment from that architect [J.J.P. Oud], but I have to make the technique myself", as quoted in Hoek, *Theo van Doesburg*, 173.

[276] Blotkamp, 'Theo van Doesburg', 12. Blotkamp bases this claim on the two artists' close collaboration at the time and on formal parallels between the Broek in Waterland stained glass door and some of Húszar's paintings and glass works from that period.

[277] The Van Stolk museum's collection included medieval sculpture, paintings, tapestries, metalwork and a considerable assemblage of stained glass works. The (exhibited?) collection as of 1912 is detailed in *Catalogue des sculptures, tableaux, tapis, etc., formant la collection d'objets d'art du musée Van Stolk, Jansstraat 50, Harlem* (La Haye: M. Nijhoff, 1912); as quoted in Hoek, *Theo van Doesburg*, 170.

[278] Hoek, *Theo van Doesburg*, 170.

[279] van Doesburg letter to Antony Kok, 17 July 1916, as quoted in Blotkamp, 'Theo van Doesburg', 11.

[280] Saint Bavo is a former Catholic Cathedral converted to reformed church whose leaded windows, at the time of van Doesburg's visit, were entirely clear or dated mostly from the 16th century, when figures and scenes were painted over a background of clear leaded glass.

the Van Stolk museum's catalogue.[281] Entitled *Gedichte* (*Poems*), it traces an analogy between poems and stained glass as art forms that reveal themselves in all their glory only when experienced from within. The poem contrasts the dullness of stained glass seen from outdoors, with the awing of the senses and elevation of the spirit that occurs on entering a church with coloured panes. Goethe's *Gedichte* is illustrative of the kind of 19th century literary exaltation of cathedrals and stained glass mentioned in the introduction to Part I. The idealised perceptions created by such literature lingered into the 20th century – in this case, the poem was chosen as the preface of a 1912 museum catalogue – and were therefore part of the cultural context in which the artistic avant-garde developed. In this particular instance, it is of course impossible to ascertain whether van Doesburg would actually have held the catalogue and read Goethe's poem as he went about his visit of the museum. It is worth drawing attention, however, to the discernible parallel between the luminous sensorial experience described in it and van Doesburg's stated purpose of achieving "the crystal atmosphere", epiphanically declared following his visit to this museum and to the Saint Bavo church.

Beyond these spiritual considerations, as argued by Blotkamp, the constructive and compositional aspects of stained glass were to prove of particular relevance to van Doesburg's pictorial contribution to Neoplasticism.[282] At the Van Stolk museum, stained glass specimens displayed at eye level would have given van Doesburg a rare opportunity to explore up close the way their figures were constructed, a matter that he had to consider for his Broek in Waterland project. This commission involved designing a stained glass panel for a door featuring the town's coat of arms of a swan holding a bunch of golden arrows (Fig. 42).

[281] Goethe's poem prefaces the 1912 edition of the catalogue (available online at http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k62608500) which was still presumably in use four years later when van Doesburg visited the museum.

[282] Blotkamp, 'Theo van Doesburg', 13–14.

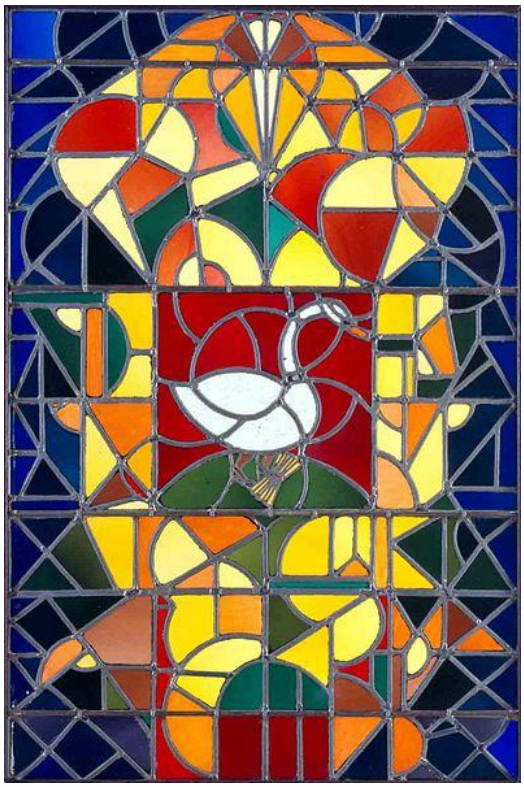


Fig. 42 Left: Theo van Doesburg, *Composition I (Broek in Waterland door panel)*, 1916-1917, leaded stained glass, 101 x 67.5cm. Leiden: Museum de Lakenhal.

Above: Coat of arms of Broek in Waterland.

The transposition of this figurative element to glass presented artistic challenges that van Doesburg related in a letter to Oud:

> "Obviously the swan has to be roughly supported as in the enclosed sketch. The background cannot be cut out of one piece of glass since this would not then be strong enough. I'll try and resolve the lead strips by incorporating them as much as possible into the motif so that they're less noticeable".[283]

That is, working with stained glass required constructing a motif and its background out of single-colour pieces of glass of the adequate shape and size to be supported by lead strips; or, conversely, effectively deconstructing both figure and background into single-colour roughly geometric shapes. This is the kind of research that van Doesburg appears to have been carrying out following his visit to the Van Stolk

[283] Van Doesburg letter to J. J. P. Oud dated 11 September 1916, translated in Hoek, *Theo van Doesburg*, 173. The design restrictions arising from the load-bearing specifications of the materials used in another commission were also attested to in a series of letters from van Doesburg to C. R. de Boer dated February and March 1922, quoted in Hoek, 300.

museum in a number of small designs for either stained glass or glass mosaic works (Fig. 43, 44 and 45) in preparation for the Broek in Waterland commission.[284]

Fig. 43 – Theo van Doesburg, *Crucifixion*, probably 1916, ink on paper, 16 x 11 cm. Utrecht: Centraal Museum

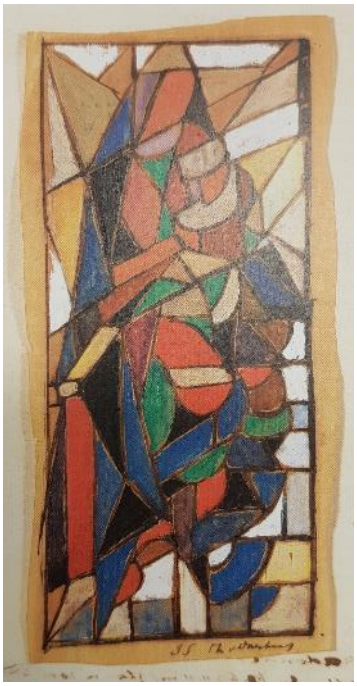


Fig. 44 – Theo van Doesburg, *Colour Design for Glass mosaic: Virgin Mary and Child*, 1916, gouache on transparent paper, 18.5 x 8.5 cm. Utrecht: Centraal Museum.

Fig. 45 – Theo van Doesburg, *Glass mosaic: Virgin Mary and Child*, 1916, coloured glass in plaster on a cigar box, 20.5 x 10.5 cm. Utrecht: Centraal Museum.

The fragmentation of figures into shard-like single-colour pieces that was necessary in a stained glass design fitted in with neoplasticist pictorial enquiries into the geometric deconstruction of the motif. The need to partition also the background, as expressed in van Doesburg's letter, raised the problem of how to create any desired distinction between it and the motif. The *Virgin Mary and Child*, above, shows van Doesburg's attempts at resolving this by playing with the colour, shape or size of the glass fragments. The background on the top half uses pieces of similar shape and size to the figure, visually merging with it except for the colour. The bottom half of the

[284] In Hoek's view, the religious theme of these two works (*Crucifixion* and *Virgin Mary with Child*), entirely unusual in van Doesburg, reinforces the argument that they were probably inspired by the artist's aforementioned visit to Haarlem's Saint Bavo church and the Van Stolk Museum of medieval art, which took place shortly before he set to work on the Broek in Waterland commission. Hoek, *Theo van Doesburg*, 170.

composition throws a contrast between the square-shaped pieces of the background and the multicolour, irregular shapes of the figure, while at the same time blurring this distinction by breaking the homogeneity of the background with two curved shapes in blue. The resolution of these issues for stained glass therefore also fed into neoplasticist issues of pictorial flatness and the relationship between motif and background. This common ground between formal problems pertaining to stained glass and those pertaining to painting was to result in a fruitful interrelatedness of these two mediums in van Doesburg's practice. An early example of this is provided by two 1916 works in which the same theme, an abstracted portrait, (Fig. 46 and 47) is treated as a painting in one case, and as a design for a glass composition in another.[285]

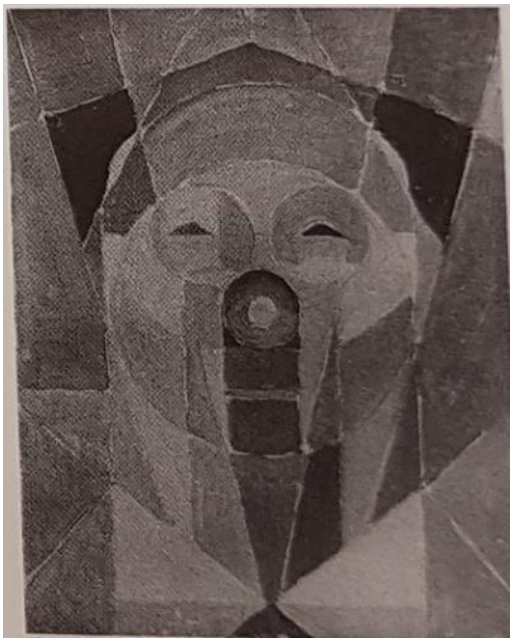


Fig. 46 – Theo van Doesburg, *Abstracted Portrait*, probably 1916, oil on unknown support, sizes unknown, location unknown. Reproduced in Hoek 2000, 169. Catalogue Raisonné no. 495.

Fig. 47 – Theo van Doesburg, *Abstracted Portrait*, probably 1916, ink and watercolour on paper, 7.5 x 6.5 cm. Utrecht: Centraal Museum.

Van Doesburg's successful first experience in stained glass at Broek in Waterland encouraged him to experiment further with the medium, not only upon commission,

[285] This painting, formally close to *Virgin Mary and Child* is identified as a design intended for stained glass or glass mosaic in Hoek, 169.

but also at his own initiative.[286] As noted by Blotkamp, these compositions often explored variations on motifs and patterns by playing with repetitions, rotations and mirror images of geometrical colour fields, in a strategy that van Doesburg applied both to stained glass and to painting, as in *Dancers*, *Dance I* and *Dance II* (Fig. 48, 49 and 50).[287]

Fig. 48 – Theo van Doesburg, *Dancers*, 1916, casein and/or oil on eternite, 51.5 x 65.5 cm. Otterlo: Kröller-Müller Museum.

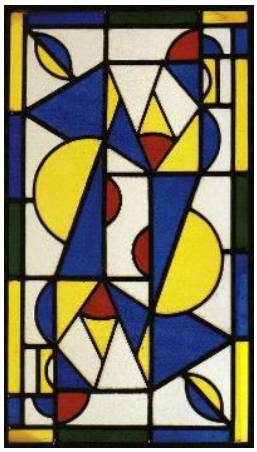


Fig. 49 – Theo van Doesburg, *Dance I*, late 1916, early 1917, stained glass, 47 x 27 cm. Otterlo: Kröller-Müller Museum.

Fig. 50 – Theo van Doesburg, *Dance II*, late 1916, early 1917, stained glass, 50.5 x 25.5 cm. Otterlo: Kröller-Müller Museum.

The years 1916 to 1918, key in the development of neoplasticist painting, are concomitant with a period of intensive dedication by van Doesburg to stained glass, a practice he developed in over twenty different projects.[288] While about half of these were commissions, the other half appear to be exercises he worked on independently as part of his artistic enquiries. Blotkamp and Engel have already argued that the manner of abstraction practiced by van Doesburg in stained glass in this period was key to his contribution to Neoplasticism.[289] Such (de)construction and abstraction strategies are

[286] Carel Blotkamp, ed., *De Stijl: The Formative Years 1917-1922* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1986), 13.

[287] Blotkamp, 'Theo van Doesburg', 13–14.

[288] Van Doesburg's 1916-1918 stained glass oeuvre is detailed as part of his catalogue raisonné in Hoek, *Theo van Doesburg*, 170–243.

[289] Blotkamp, *De Stijl*, 13–18; Henk Engel, 'Theo van Doesburg & the Destruction of Architectural Theory', in *van Doesburg and the International Avant-Garde: Constructing a New World*, ed. Gladys C. Fabre and Doris Wintgens Hötte (London: Tate Publishing, 2009), 38.

clearly visible, for example, in the small panels that he was asked to design to complement the original commission at Broek in Waterland (Fig. 51). [290] Executed in April or May 1917, that is less than a year after the heraldic display on the door with its fully recognisable swan motif, the four top panes present instead a degree of deconstruction and abstraction that hinders a figurative interpretation; the panels have been understood to represent either an abstracted version of the heraldic swan or of a seated female figure.[291]

Fig. 51 Theo van Doesburg, *Four Stained Glass Top Lights*, 1917, leaded stained glass, each 31.2 x 22.5cm. Leiden: Museum de Lakenhal.

Thus, stained glass projects, often encompassing several panels, provided van Doesburg with a particularly apt testing ground to play with deconstruction, repetition, rotation and symmetry, devices that would inform his paintings too. In a 1918 letter to Kok, van Doesburg confirmed the interrelatedness between these two mediums: "My stained glass compositions have given me various motifs for paintings."[292] Working on this medium was a particular source of pleasure for the artist, as he conveyed enthusiastically in a letter to Kok upon completing the design of a window for Villa Allegonda in May 1917:

> "I feel indescribably happy in the certainty of art. I didn't know that art could make someone as happy. I live so wonderfully with – and through – my work! I

[290] A small black and white image of the door, showing both the main composition and the four top lights is reproduced in Blotkamp, *De Stijl*, 89.

[291] Hoek, *Theo van Doesburg*, 182.

[292] Letter from van Doesburg to Antony Kok, dated 1 January 1918, quoted in Hoek, 204.

> wish you could have been at my studio a few days ago. I had finished the large 2.25 x 75 window. I had it in black and white, in three parts, one above the other, mounted on the wall, the white only areas (I hadn't yet put in the colours) separated from each other by black lines. When I had an overview of the whole, I got an indescribable splendid effect. [...] Monday I put in the colours, yet I felt the sacredness of the black and white drawing had been lost. It is now with the makers in The Hague and will be set in stained glass in ten days. How delightful all that choosing of colours is at the stained glass makers! Every colour is tested against the design. Every line is considered. [...] I hope that the colours of the glass will say what I intended. To me the black and white was consummate beauty."[293]

This excerpt reveals a tension between van Doesburg's pursuit of 'sacredness' in black and white, and his evident, almost child-like delight at choosing the colours at the glass-makers. His words imply a paramount preoccupation with rational matters of structure – the 'scaffolding' of lead strips in his black and white design – while evidencing the sensorial appeal of working with coloured glass. Van Doesburg's elation here echoes the enthusiasm and sense of purpose in the pursuit of a "crystal atmosphere" that he expressed after his visit to the Van Stolk museum and Saint Bavo church. Indeed, a further letter to Kok that same month suggests that medieval stained glass had remained a referent throughout van Doesburg's early work in this medium. Upon completing the design for a stained glass composition of a female head (Fig. 52 and 53), he wrote excitedly:

[293] Letter from van Doesburg to Antony Kok dated 9 May 1917, Hoek, 187.

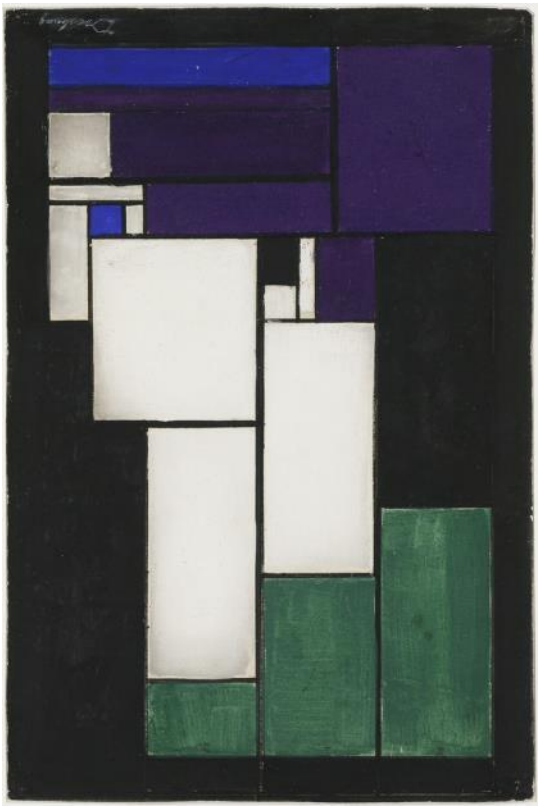


Fig. 52 Theo van Doesburg, *Design for Stained Glass Composition of Female Head*, May 1917, gouache on paper, 36.5 x 24.5 cm. Budapest: Szépmüvészeti Múzeum.

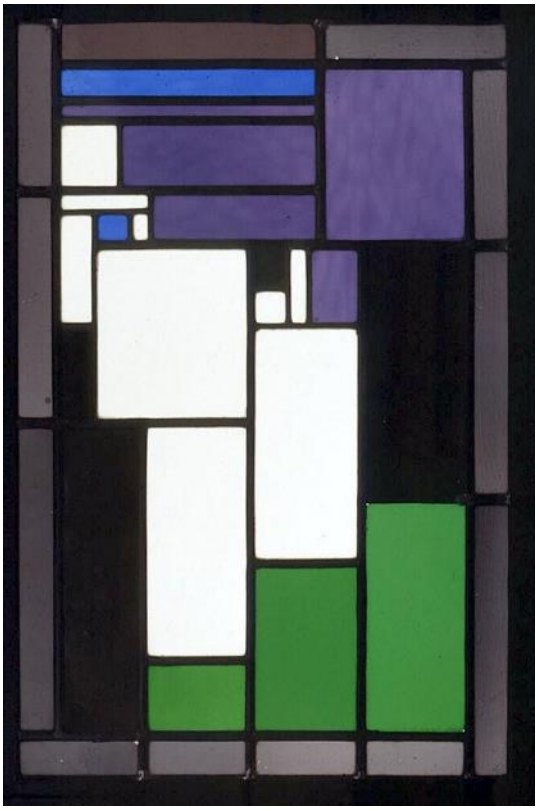


Fig. 53 Theo van Doesburg, *Stained Glass Composition of Female Head*, May 1917, leaded stained glass, sizes not given. Executed by W. Gips, The Hague. Otterlo: Kröller-Müller Museum.

> "I have a portrait of Helena for a stained glass design! I trembled for hours afterwards, and when I look now at the design tears spring to my eyes. It is the most beautiful thing that has ever been painted for stained glass. I'm going to get it made straight away. It is fantastic to see how the [drawing of a square] related to the [drawing of a vertical band] and these again to the [drawing of a horizontal band]. It completely destroys the middle Ages! The colours will be: white – black – purple – green and blue."[294]

Blotkamp attributes van Doesburg's enthusiasm here to the fact that in *Female Head* "he had accomplished for the first time a well-balanced composition of the type that would become so characteristic of De Stijl."[295] It is worth stressing that he had done

[294] Postcard from van Doesburg to Antony Kok, dated 19 May 1917. Hoek, 189–90. An abbreviated version of this quote, with a slightly different word order, had previously appeared in Blotkamp, *De Stijl*, 14.

[295] Letter from van Doesburg to Kok, 7 May 1917, as quoted in Blotkamp, 'Theo van Doesburg', 14.

so in a painting that was actually a design for stained glass and that, in the process, the artist also felt he had surpassed any medieval realisation in that medium.

Following this period of intense dedication to stained glass in the late 1910s, the medium remained an important part of van Doesburg's practice throughout the 1920s. His glass work evolved formally alongside his painting, with both mediums continuing to inform each other.[296] While he was more prolific in painting, he actually expressed a preference for working with stained glass, as he wrote to Evert Rinsema upon losing a particular commission: "What a shame that you won't be cooperating with De Boer! Separate paintings don't give the same sort of satisfaction as monumental work. I had so hoped I would get those windows for the agricultural school."[297]

In his fundamentally architectural understanding of art, which was only reinforced by his move to Weimar and his closeness to the Bauhaus, [298] stained glass provided a valued means to think through problems of painting within an architectural setting. With regard to a commission for the Agricultural Winter School in Drachten (Fig. 54), for example, that required a degree of figuration, he wrote to architect C. R. de Boer:

[296] The continuing interrelatedness between van Doesburg's stained glass and pictorial enquiries in the 1920s is argued in Fabre, 'Towards a Spatio-Temporality in Painting', 58–67.

[297] Letter from van Doesburg to Evert Rinsema, dated 23 June 1921. Quoted in Hoek, *Theo van Doesburg*, 300.

[298] Doris Wintgens Hötte, 'Van Doesburg Tackles the Continent: Passion, Drive & Calculation', in *Van Doesburg and the International Avant-Garde: Constructing a New World*, ed. Gladys C. Fabre and Doris Wintgens Hötte (London: Tate Publishing, 2009), 17. This author quotes Bauhaus teacher Oskar Schlemmer remarking in a letter that at that time the art of painting hardly existed for van Doesburg and that he was interested only in architecture.

Fig. 54 Theo van Doesburg, *Large Pastorale*, 1921-22, stained glass window, 300 x 70 cm each panel. Drachten: Agricultural Winter School.

"to turn to your question concerning 'symmetry' and 'figure' (representation) in stained glass. I can make it clear to you in a few words, that naturally a 'figure' never fits in with architecture as unconditionally as a surface. A stained glass window, if the solution is purely modern, remains in the first place a window, with as contrast: colour. A stained glass composition is thus a rhythmically broken window or more correctly a rhythmically broken field of light, that through the colour expresses rhythm and harmony. In such a window the concept of architecture is realised in its purest form."[299]

Between 1921 and 1930 van Doesburg worked on ten stained glass projects, some of which were executed while others did not go beyond the design stage.[300] The last two – four windows for the Strasbourg apartment of André Horn, and a skylight for the house he designed for himself in Meudon-Val-Fleury (Fig. 55) – are dated between 1928 and 1930. Stained glass, therefore, was an ongoing concern in his practice at the time he met and became friends with Joaquín Torres-García, whose own experience with this medium and its possible effect on his painting practice are discussed in Part II as this thesis' case study.

[299] Letter from van Doesburg to C. R. de Boer, dated 24 October 1920. Quoted in Hoek, *Theo van Doesburg*, 299. Underlined as in the original.

[300] van Doesburg's 1921-1930 stained glass oeuvre is detailed as part of his catalogue raisonné in Hoek, 296–515.

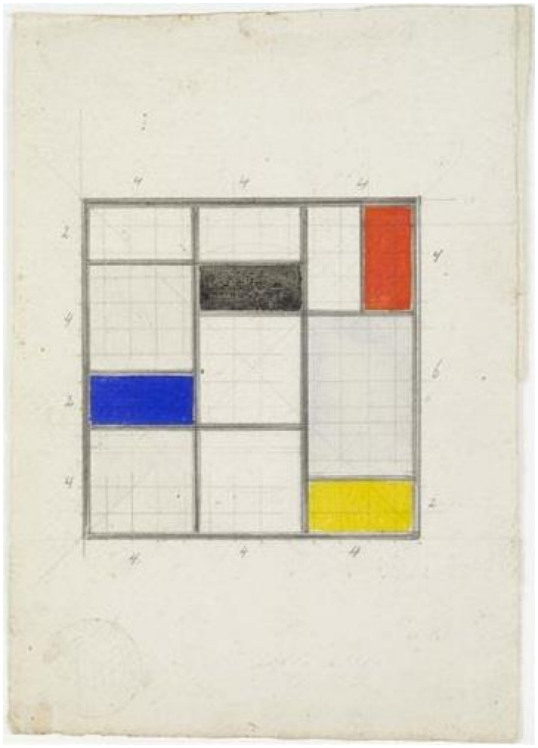


Fig. 55 Theo van Doesburg, *Design for Library Skylight*, 1930, pencil and gouache on paper, 28.5 x 20 cm. Rotterdam: Nederlands Architectuurinstituut, on loan from van Doesburg archive.

Despite the unquestionable centrality of stained glass to van Doesburg's oeuvre, his stance towards the medieval appears to have been somewhat conflicted. He enthusiastically received J. J. P. Oud's theorisation on the modern unified work of art, which the Dutch architect modelled on the cathedral, yet he did not use the medieval edifice as an example himself, referring instead just to "a monumental-collaborative art".[301] He was inspired by Mondrian's *Façade* series to write the poem *Cathedral*, yet he did not engage with gothic architecture himself in pictorial deconstruction exercises. He had an artistic epiphany upon his visit to the Saint Bavo church and the stained glass museum in Haarlem, yet this initial contact seems to have sufficed for him; unlike other artists surveyed here, he recounts no revisits to gothic buildings, no further sensorial experiences or analytical observations of medieval stained glass.

In fact, his comments on the Haarlem study trip in 1916 are perhaps the best indicator of his stance towards the medieval, and arguably towards the art of the past

[301] See quote above, note 274.

in general: "I have found my task: the crystal atmosphere. I have a positive plan for creation and what I shall create now will top everything,"[302] he wrote. This statement of intent prompted by his experience of the Saint Bavo church and the medieval art museum suggests a competitive approach to the medieval; its creations are something to be "topped". This appears confirmed by his elation at completing the 1917 *Composition of Female Head*, which causes him to state that his design "completely destroys the Middle Ages".[303] Given van Doesburg's progressive views, this statement could easily be interpreted as expressing an avant-garde rupturist, even iconoclastic, attitude towards the past. I would argue, however, that by bringing the Middle Ages into the assessment of his own modern practice, van Doesburg implicitly acknowledged that medieval stained glass had, in fact, been his benchmark all along.

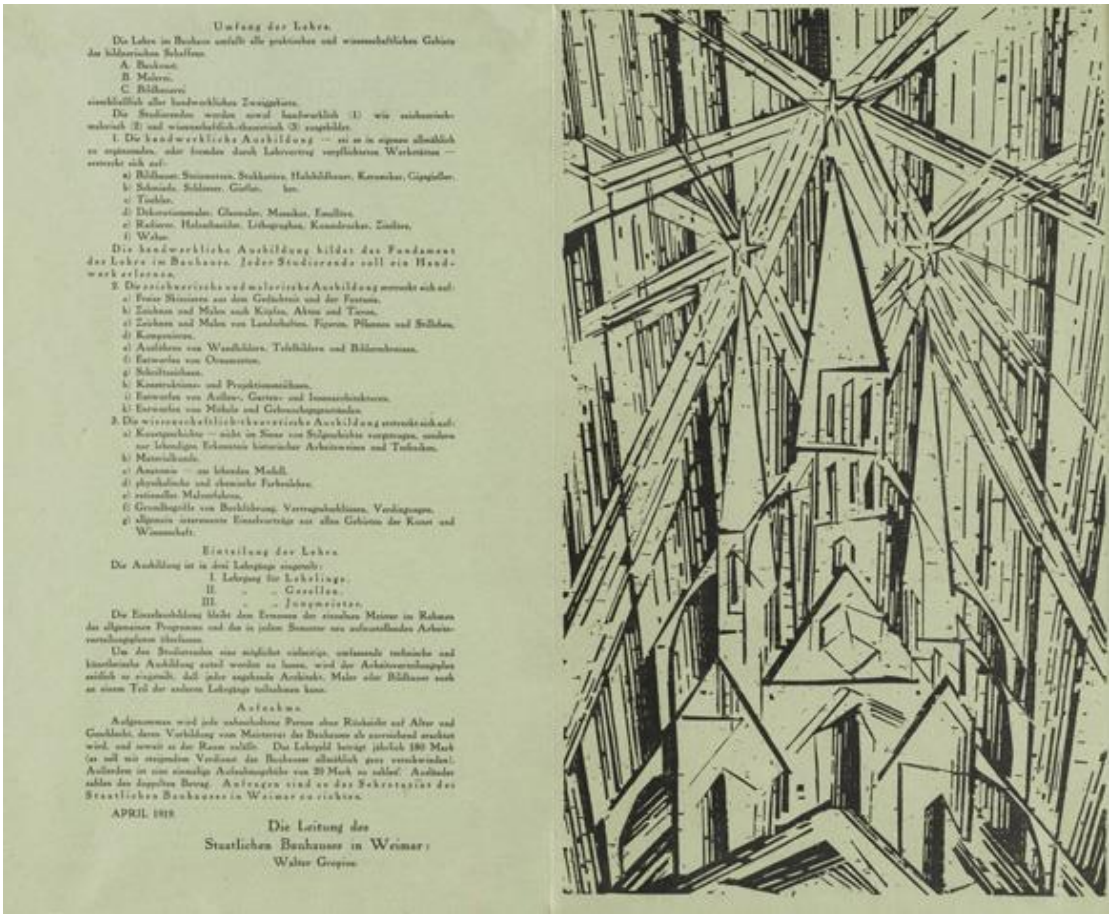
The medieval referent only seems to have featured in van Doesburg's thinking for one year: in 1916 it 'revealed' his mission at Saint Bavo and the stained glass museum, and by 1917 it had been 'topped' by his *Composition of Female Head*. From an evolutionist understanding of art, van Doesburg's attitude towards the past, therefore, appears to have been competitive, rather than destructive; the medieval was admirable, but it could be surpassed. Medieval stained glass had been, so to speak, the one to beat, and as such, very much part of his own modernist enquiry.

[302] See quote above, note 279.

[303] See quote above, note 294.

6 The medieval at the Bauhaus

In her exploration of the modern idea of the cathedral, Stephanie Glaser has noted that the discourse surrounding the gothic in Germany was "primarily future-oriented, characterized by a yearning for spiritual, cultural, and political renewal."[304] This forward-looking appropriation of the medieval is perhaps nowhere better illustrated than in the founding document of the Bauhaus, the 1919 'manifesto' written by Walter Gropius and illustrated by Lionel Feininger (Fig. 56).



Umfang der Lehre.

Die Lehre im Bauhaus umfaßt alle praktischen und wissenschaftlichen Gebiete des bildnerischen Schaffens.

A. Baukunst.
B. Malerei.
C. Bildhauerei

einschließlich aller handwerklichen Zweige hierzu.

Die Studierenden werden sowohl handwerklich (1) wie zeichnerisch-malerisch (2) und wissenschaftlich-theoretisch (3) ausgebildet.

1. Die handwerkliche Ausbildung — sei es in eigenen allmählich zu ergänzenden, oder fremden durch Lehrvertrag verpflichteten Werkstätten — erstreckt sich auf:

a) Bildhauer, Steinmetzen, Stukkateure, Hohlbildhauer, Keramiker, Gipsgießer.
b) Schmiede, Schlosser, Gießer. usw.
c) Tischler.
d) Dekorationsmaler, Glasmaler, Musiker, Emailleure.
e) Radierer, Holzschneider, Lithographen, Kunstdrucker, Zinkätzer.
f) Weber.

Die handwerkliche Ausbildung bildet das Fundament der Lehre im Bauhause. Jeder Studierende soll ein Handwerk erlernen.

2. Die zeichnerisch-und malerische Ausbildung erstreckt sich auf:

a) Freier Skizzieren aus dem Gedächtnis und der Vorstellung.
b) Zeichnen und Malen nach Körpern, Akten und Tieren.
c) Zeichnen und Malen von Landschaften, Figuren, Pflanzen und Stilleben.
d) Komponieren.
e) Ausführen von Wandbildern, Tafelbildern und Bühnenbauten.
f) Entwerfen von Ornamenten.
g) Schriftzeichnen.
h) Konstruktions- und Projektionszeichnen.
i) Entwerfen von Außen-, Garten- und Innenarchitekturen.
k) Entwerfen von Möbeln und Gebrauchsgegenständen.

3. Die wissenschaftlich-theoretische Ausbildung erstreckt sich auf:

a) Kunstgeschichte — nicht im Sinne von Stilgeschichte vorgetragen, sondern zur lebendigen Erkenntnis historischer Arbeitsweisen und Tatsachen.
b) Materialkunde.
c) Anatomie — am lebenden Modell.
d) physikalische und chemische Farbenlehre.
e) rationelle Maßverfahren.
f) Grundbegriffe von Buchführung, Vertragsabschlüssen, Verdingungen.
g) allgemein interessante Einzelvorträge aus allen Gebieten der Kunst und Wissenschaft.

Einteilung der Lehre.

Die Ausbildung ist in drei Lehrgänge eingeteilt:

I. Lehrgang für Lehrlinge.
II. „ „ Gesellen.
III. „ „ Jungmeister.

Die Einzelausbildung bleibt dem Ermessen der einzelnen Meister im Rahmen des allgemeinen Programms und den in jedem Semester neu aufzustellenden Arbeitsvorschlagsplänen überlassen.

Um den Studierenden eine möglichst vielseitige, umfassende technische und künstlerische Ausbildung sowohl wie zu lassen, wird der Arbeitsvorschlagsplan endlich so eingeteilt, daß jeder angehende Architekt, Maler oder Bildhauer auch an einem Teil der anderen Lehrgänge teilnehmen kann.

Aufnahme.

Aufgenommen wird jede unbescholtene Person ohne Rücksicht auf Alter und Geschlecht, deren Vorbildung vom Meisterrat des Bauhauses als ausreichend erachtet wird, und soweit es der Raum erlaubt. Das Lehrgeld beträgt jährlich 180 Mark (es soll mit steigendem Verdienst des Bauhauses allmählich ganz verschwinden). Außerdem ist eine einmalige Aufnahmegebühr von 20 Mark zu zahlen. Ausländer zahlen den doppelten Betrag. Anfragen sind an das Sekretariat des Staatlichen Bauhauses in Weimar zu richten.

APRIL 1919

Die Leitung des
Staatlichen Bauhauses in Weimar:
Walter Gropius

Fig. 56, Lyonel Feininger, *Cathedral, cover for the Bauhaus Manifesto*, 1919.

Charles W. Haxthausen has examined this "fervently utopian" mission statement, noting how the medieval referents contained in it effectively make it a

> "Janus-faced document (…) the founding proclamation of an institution that has become synonymous with visual modernity, exerting a profound influence on

[304] Glaser, 'Introduction: The Medieval Edifice in the Modern Period', 11.

> design, artistic practice, and art education that extends down to our own day [and which], at the same time, looked back to a romantically idealized medieval past as a model for the radical transformation of contemporary visual culture".[305]

As discussed by Haxthausen, the goal of the Bauhaus expressed in this manifesto was to reunite the arts of painting, sculpture and architecture, that were once integrated in "the great building" but had since become isolated, to the detriment of all three. This new unity of the arts – with obvious parallels to the notion proposed three years earlier by Oud in the Netherlands – was to be achieved by reviving the lost tradition of *Handwerk*, or manual craft. Gropius thus called for the creation of a new "guild of craftsmen", that would end the "arrogant class division between artisans and artists".[306] Gropius' manifesto then concluded with a call to:

> "collectively desire, conceive, and create the new building of the future, which will be everything in one structure: architecture and sculpture and painting, which, from the million hands of craftsmen, will one day rise towards heaven as the crystalline symbol of a new and coming faith."

Haxthausen draws attention to the fact that to illustrate this utopian proclamation, Gropius avoided the kind of futuristic architectural fantasy that was so common at the time in the German avant-garde. The building depicted by Lionel Feininger – a founding member of *Der Blaue Reiter* and Gropius' first faculty hire in Weimar – is not a fantastic projection of the *Zukunftskathedrale*, the "cathedral of the future", as Gropius called it elsewhere, but clearly evokes instead a gothic cathedral.[307]

The medieval element was not restricted to the founding manifesto of the Bauhaus but continued to inform the school's culture during its early years. References to the gothic cathedral surfaced repeatedly in Gropius' texts, while the idea of the guild would be developed into that of the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft*, or small community of

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[305] Haxthausen, 'Walter Gropius and Lyonel Feininger: Bauhaus Manifesto,1919', 64. The symbolic value of the gothic cathedral as Bauhaus emblem is also addressed in Alexander Nagel, 'Cathedral thinking', in *Medieval Modern: Art Out of Time* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2012), 241-247. In the same chapter the author stresses the relevance of Worringer's writings on gothic architecture to early experiments with abstraction, particularly in the German-speaking world, as discussed in the introduction to Part I.

[306] Haxthausen, 64.

[307] Haxthausen, 64.

architects, artists and craftsmen who would collaborate on the unified art. This notion was based on the *Bauhütten*, or masons' lodges – whose name inspired that of the Bauhaus – that had existed in what Gropius called "the golden era of the cathedrals."[308]

Beyond the idea of the cathedral as embodiment of the unity of the arts, and the organisation of craftwork around the notion of medieval guilds, the Middles Ages offered concrete artistic expressions that the Bauhaus deemed of value to the modern artist. Feininger's cathedral illustration for the manifesto was a woodcut, a late-medieval technique that had been revived by the German Expressionists and was used extensively in the school's graphic arts and print workshop. The school's Preliminary Course, taught by Johannes Itten and compulsory for all students, included the structural analysis of works by old masters, including the 15th century Meister Francke (Fig. 57).

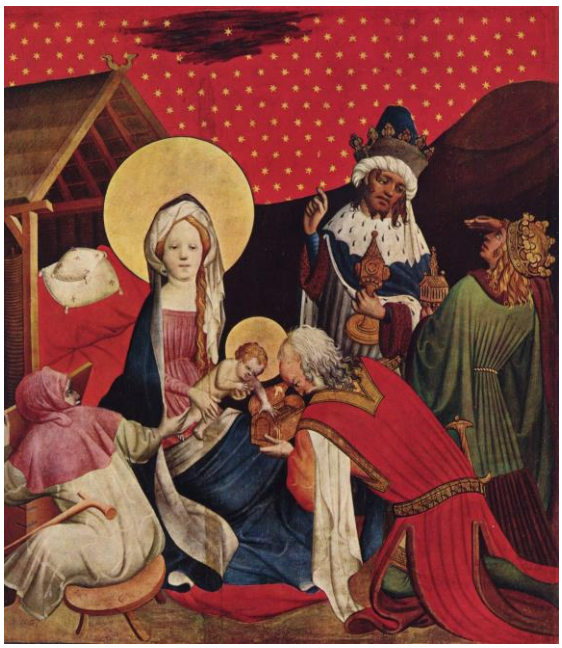

Fig. 57a Meister Francke, *Adoration of the Maggi*, from the St. Thomas Altarpiece, c. 1424 Hamburg: Kunsthalle.

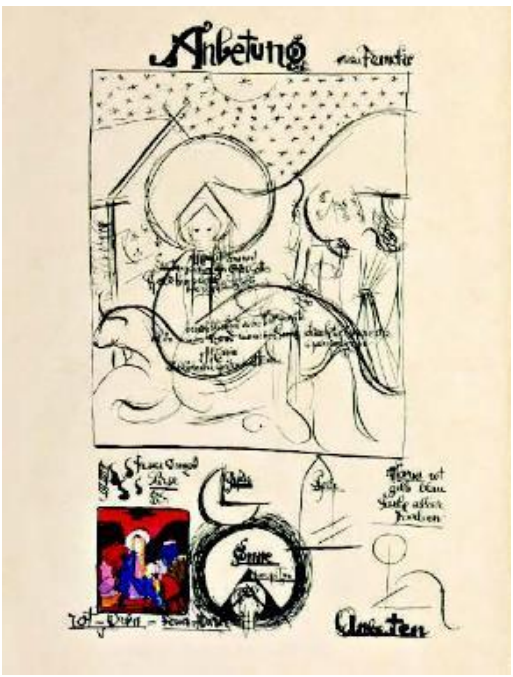

Fig. 57b Johannes Itten, analysis of Meister Francke's *Adoration of the Magi*, 1921, litograph, part of foldout in Bruno Adler's *Utopia: Dokumente der Wirklichkeit*. Berlin: Bauhaus Archiv.

[308] Haxthausen, 64.

Itten – whose workshop, incidentally, was not found in the modern buildings we have come to associate to the Bauhaus, but was located instead in a nearby neo-gothic building[309] – also included medieval examples in his teaching on colour:

> "In the early medieval illuminations of the Irish monks in the eighth and ninth centuries, we find a palette of great variety and subtlety. Most astonishing in their radiant power are those pages where the many different colours are rendered in equal brilliance. The resulting vivid cold-warm effects are such as we do not find again until the Impressionists and Van Gogh. Some leaves of the Book of Kells, for logic of chromatic execution and organic rhythm of line, are as magnificent and pure as a Bach fugue. The sensitivity and artistic intelligence of these 'abstract' miniaturists had their monumental counterpart in the stained glass of the Middle Ages. Early stained glass employed only a few different colours, and therefore seems crude, for glassmaking techniques afforded few colours as yet. Anyone who has spent a day studying the windows in the cathedral at Chartres in the changing light, and has seen the setting sun kindle the great rose window to a splendid culminating chord, will never forget the supernatural beauty of that moment."[310]

Stained glass was, in fact, one of the mediums whose perceived importance as an architectural art form earned it a dedicated workshop which, until 1922, was headed also by Itten. The term used in the Bauhaus manifesto to identify it, *Glasmalerei*, literally translates as 'glass painting' and encompasses both stained glass and painted glass. Due to a lack of commissions the Bauhaus 'glass painting' workshop struggled to sustain itself financially and in 1924 was merged with the sculpture and stage workshops as part of the 'experimental laboratory of the Bauhaus'.[311]

The financial viability of several of the school's workshops had been an issue since its foundation. By 1922 Gropius had began to urge that creative work be associated

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[309] The Tempelherrenhaus, or Templar House, built in the late 18th century and destroyed during World War II, today stands as a ruin in the Park on the Ilm, in Weimar. Magdalena Droste and Bauhaus-Archiv, *Bauhaus, 1919-1933* (Taschen, 2002), 25.

[310] Johannes Itten, *The Elements of Color* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1970), 9.

[311] 'Glass and Mural Painting : Bauhaus100', accessed 19 June 2017, https://www.bauhaus100.de/en/past/teaching/workshops/glass-and-wall-painting/index.html.

not only with craft design but also with the more sustainable industrial design.[312] As noted by Philip B. Meggs, the Bauhaus "was evolving from a concern for medievalism, expressionism and handicraft toward more emphasis on rationalism and designing for the machine."[313] Oskar Schlemmer, of the Bauhaus faculty, succinctly characterized the change as "turning one's back on utopia. Instead of cathedrals, the 'Living Machine'. Repudiation of the Middle Ages and of the medieval concept of craftsmanship... replaced by concrete objects which serve specific purposes."[314] As part of these changes, the stained glass workshop finally closed down when the school moved to Dessau in 1925. Still, while it had remained active, it had been instrumental to the artistic training and development of its best known student, Josef Albers.

7 Josef Albers – Between *lux nova* and "a new type of glass picture"

Albers's glass work at the Bauhaus

Josef Albers joined the Bauhaus in 1920 and made glass his medium of choice, remaining the glass workshop's sole student under Itten. Over the following years, his involvement in the glass painting workshop resulted in several architectural stained glass commissions, as well as a number of 'glass pictures' in various techniques that will be discussed below. This body of work in glass, most of it dating from the 1920s, is considered key to his entire oeuvre, including the much later *Homage to the Square* series of paintings for which Albers is best known.[315] An analysis of his activity in the Bauhaus, as a glass practitioner and as a teacher, provides relevant insights into the links his art theories and practice trace with the past, both his own and that of artistic tradition generally and medieval art in particular.

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[312] Rose-Carol Washton Long, 'Expressionism, Abstraction, and the Search for Utopia in Germany', in *The Spiritual in Art, Abstract Painting, 1890-1985*, ed. Maurice Tuchman and Judi Freeman (Los Angeles New York: Los Angeles County Museum of Art Abbeville Press, 1986), 213.

[313] Philip B Meggs, *A History of Graphic Design*, 3rd ed. (New York: Wiley, 1998), 279.

[314] Oskar Schlemmer diary, June 1922, as quoted in Long, 'Expressionism, Abstraction, and the Search for Utopia in Germany', 213.

[315] For a thorough discussion of Albers' glass oeuvre and its impact on his painted work, see Licht, 'Albers: Glass, Color, and Light'.

Albers joined the Bauhaus already in his thirties after several years working as a school teacher in his hometown of Bottrop. Decades later, fully established as a key figure of modernism and living in the US since the Bauhaus' forced closure in 1933, he would recall his move to the Weimar school as a momentous time in his life: "I was thirty-two...threw all my old things out of the window, started once more from the bottom. That was the best step I made in my life."[316] With its utopian ideals and enquiry-led ethos, the Bauhaus must have felt a revolutionary place to be a part of. Hence, perhaps, his recollection of it having marked a turning point, one where he started afresh forsaking the baggage of all his previous experience. Yet, as noted by Nicholas Fox Weber, "as much as Albers regarded his move to the Bauhaus and his immersion in the making of abstract art as an about-face shift, it was not, however, the total schism with his own past that he suggested."[317]

Weber, on the contrary, argues that Albers' devotion to glass as a medium was rooted in his own Catholic upbringing and the symbolic values of clarity, light and holiness that this faith attached to it.[318] Though he was no longer a practicing Catholic by the time he joined the Bauhaus, the *lux nova* of Christian faith – Abbot Suger's notion of light capable of touching the soul after passing through the stained glass of a church – remained an important referent throughout his career.[319] Glass, moreover, was a material whose work required high levels of craftsmanship. This cornerstone of the Bauhaus pedagogical programme was not new to Albers; he had learned it from his craftsman father who, by Albers' own account, had been his principal artistic influence[320] and had taught him to etch and paint glass.

Weber posits, therefore, that after his move to the Bauhaus Albers did approach glass in a completely different and pioneering way, but "he did so with values that had

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[316] Neil Welliver, 'Albers on Albers', *Art News* 64, no. 9 (January 1966): 48; as quoted in Weber, 'A New Light: Josef Albers's Work in Glass', 9.

[317] Weber, 'A New Light: Josef Albers's Work in Glass', 10.

[318] Weber points out that Albers was raised in the Catholic faith, was a practicing Catholic into his twenties and, even when he no longer practiced, knew and respected its dogmas and traditions. For a discussion of the symbolic values associated with glass and light in the Catholic faith – including holiness, the Immaculate Conception and the notion of *Lux Nova*, among others – and their bearing on Albers' practice see Weber, 9–10.

[319] Weber, 10.

[320] T. G. Rosenthal, *Josef Albers, Formulation : Articulation* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2006), 11.

been paramount to him for as long as he could remember: a high regard for traditional craftsmanship and a sense of the miraculous."[321]

Building on the skills learnt from his father, Albers' pre-Bauhaus training in glasswork had strengthened between 1916 and 1919, when he attended the Kunstgewerbeschule in Essen while he was still a school teacher at Bottrop. In Essen he came into close contact with the work of Jan Thorn-Prikker (1868-1932), a Dutch stained glass artist – and drawing instructor at the school – who is considered a key figure in the creation of a truly "modern" language in this medium.[322] Though Albers later downplayed Thorn-Prikker's role in his own developing practice, scholars have pointed out that his time in Essen was key in allowing him to deepen his understanding of glass, of "its vast potential and vigor,"[323] and that his subsequent output in this medium at the Bauhaus was clearly informed by Thorn-Prikker's own work. [324]

Albers' first known stained-glass project, *Rosa Mystica, Ora pro Nobis* (Fig. 58), was a commission for the Church of St. Michael, in Bottrop, that he completed in 1918 while attending applied arts classes in Essen. It features a central rose motif, symbolizing the Virgin Mary, traversed by beams of light and framed by the words "Mystic Rose, pray for us".

[321] Weber, 'A New Light: Josef Albers's Work in Glass', 10.

[322] Moor, *Contemporary Stained Glass: A Guide to the Potential of Modern Stained Glass in Architecture*, 17.

[323] Weber, 'A New Light: Josef Albers's Work in Glass', 11.

[324] Rosenthal, *Josef Albers, Formulation : Articulation*, 12.

Fig. 58, Josef Albers, *Rosa Mystica, Ora pro Nobis*, 1917-1918, stained glass window for St. Michael's Church in Bottrop. Original destroyed, 2011 facsimile reproduction constructed by Glasmalerei Peters GmbH.

While Weber sees in *Rosa Mystica* "a distinctly modern" window, its lines and lettering "highly charged with the energies of Art Nouveau and Expressionism,"[325] Rosenthal points out its equally obvious rooting in the gothic past.[326] Given his Catholic background, Albers was well acquainted with stained glass and its prominent presence in medieval religious buildings. In his drawings and prints of these pre-Bauhaus years, the views of the cathedrals of Cologne and Münster, as well as other smaller churches of Westphalian villages, were a recurrent theme.[327] A series of prints of Münster cathedral dated 1916 show Albers' attempt at capturing the atmosphere of the dim interior lit solely by sunlight filtering through the leaded windows (Fig. 59 and 60).

[325] Weber, 'A New Light: Josef Albers's Work in Glass', 10.

[326] Rosenthal, *Josef Albers, Formulation : Articulation*, 12.

[327] See Nicholas Fox Weber, *The Drawings of Josef Albers* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1984); Brenda Danilowitz, *The Prints of Josef Albers: A Catalogue Raisonné 1915-1976* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

Fig. 59, Josef Albers, *In the Cathedral, large middle nave*, 1916, linoleum cut print, 24.1 x 15.2 cm., as reproduced in Danilowitz 2010, 44.

Fig. 60, Josef Albers, *In the Cathedral, small middle nave*, 1916, linoleum cut print, 47 x 29.5 cm., as reproduced in Danilowitz 2010, 45.

Weber posits that it was precisely the evocation of a gothic cathedral that, in 1920, beckoned Josef Albers to the Bauhaus.[328] The claim, echoed by Rosenthal,[329] refers to Lyonel Feininger's well-known woodcut for the cover of Walter Gropius' manifesto discussed at the beginning of this section (Fig. 56 above). The manifesto's call to build "the new structure of the future" – represented by a gothic cathedral – "which will one day rise toward heaven from the hands of a million workers like the crystal symbol of a new coming faith,"[330] must have resonated deeply with an artist of Albers' sensibility. Added to this, its exaltation of the crafts and the indication that the new school would have a workshop devoted to 'glass painting', can only have made it a very attractive proposition.

[328] Weber, *The Drawings of Josef Albers*, 9.

[329] Rosenthal, *Josef Albers, Formulation : Articulation*, 12.

[330] Walter Gropius *Bauhaus Manifesto*, April 1919, available on https://www.bauhaus.de/images/2548_S2_web_hoch.jpg?w=950&h=450&c=0, accessed 14 May 2019.

Once at the Bauhaus, Albers' initial work in stained glass was an early commission for Sommerfeld House (Fig. 61) in Berlin, the school's first major project as a 'unified work of art'. This was shortly followed by further architectural commissions for Otte House in Berlin (1921-22) as well as the stairwell of the Grassi Museum in Leipzig (1923-24) and the Ullstein Publishing House (1924-26).[331]

Fig. 61 Josef Albers, stained glass window for Sommerfeld House, Berlin, 1920-1921, destroyed (as reproduced in Guggenheim 1994, p. 137.

While most of these commissions were designed by Albers but executed by professional glass workshops, at least in two of them (Sommerfeld House, above, and the *Red and White Window* for the first Bauhaus Exhibition, 1923[332]) he both designed and assembled the windows himself at the Weimar workshop. This hands-on experience

[331] These architectural glass works were all destroyed during World War II. For a complete catalogue of architectural stained glass works by Albers, see Guggenheim Museum, ed., 'Appendix of Works in Glass for Architectural Projects', in *Josef Albers: Glass, Color, and Light* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1994), 135–40.

[332] Reproduced in Guggenheim Museum, ed., *Josef Albers: Glass, Color, and Light* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1994), 139.

reinforced his awareness of the creative possibilities and constructive processes involved in producing a work of art with glass as its main component.

Over the following years he would earnestly explore the potential of this medium in experimental works produced in parallel to these architectural commissions. In these, departing from the Bauhaus' foundational focus on the integration of the arts into architecture, Albers was in effect attempting to produce glass works that could function independently of architecture. His aim was to create glass 'pictures' that could be hung on a wall as a painting but that retained some of the light effects of architectural stained glass. To that purpose, he experimented with several approaches: assemblages of waste glass of various thicknesses and textures glued onto a metal sheet, such as *Rheinische Legende* (*Rhenish Legend*), 1921 (Fig. 62); constructions of coloured glass panes held in place by a metal 'scaffolding', such as *Gitterbild* (*Grid Mounted*), c. 1921 (Fig. 63); waste and coloured glass secured by lead strips in the medieval stained glass tradition, such as *Kaiserlich* (*Imperial*), 1923 (Fig. 64).

Fig. 62 Josef Albers, *Rheinische Legende* (*Rhenish Legend*), 1921, Glass, copper, metal, wood, epoxy putty, paint and wood particle board, 71.1 × 61 × 5.1 cm. New York: Metropolitan Museum. © Estate of Josef Albers/ Artists Rights Society (ARS) New York

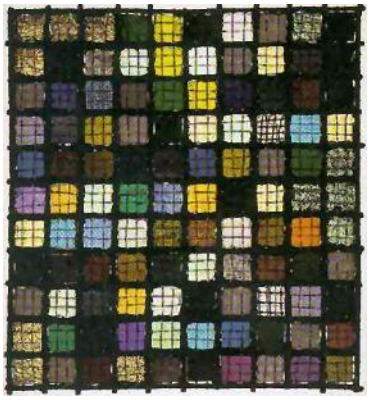

Fig. 63 Josef Albers, *Gitterbild* (*Grid Mounted*), c. 1921, Glass pieces interlaced with copper wire, in a sheet of fence latticework, 32.4 x 28.9. Connecticut: The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation.

Fig. 64 Josef Albers, *Kaiserlich* (*Imperial*), c. 1923, Glass assemblage in lead support, 48 x 49 cm. Bottrop: Josef Albers Museum.

Albers the teacher and the value of old masters to modern art

In 1922, while continuing his enquiries into the production of 'glass pictures' – a problem the solution to which he would only arrive at in 1925 – Albers was made Master

of Craft of the Bauhaus glass painting workshop. In his teaching capacity, which would continue throughout his life,[333]he found himself having to address the issue of the value, or lack thereof, of the past to a modern artistic practice. He set forth his thoughts on the matter shortly afterwards, in his 1924 article "Historisch Oder Jetzig?" ("Historical or contemporary?"):

> "We cannot bring the dead back to life. What has been chewed cannot be eaten again, what has been said does not simply belong to us. We must find a form appropriate to ourselves. Taking inspiration from the good old days, delighting in them, learning from them, is good. But to do so exclusively that is to forget oneself."[334]

While teaching at the Bauhaus, therefore, Albers favoured an approach whereby artists could, and even should, learn from the past so long as this did not impede them from making the present their priority. This view appears to be contradicted, later on in his life, by his recollection of his own experience as a Bauhaus "learner":

> "The more we studied the old memoirs, the more certain we learners became that analysing and dissecting do not constitute a goal. More importantly, we realized that the old masters themselves did not look around for even older masters, but consciously opposed what had already been done and said, in order to devote themselves more intensely to their own development. So we preferred to watch new, living masters who were determined not to follow in the footsteps of others, and it was Gropius who bravely introduced us to such masters."[335]

Here, Albers' views on tradition and learning from old masters are consistent with the perception of modernism as a forward-looking current that has little use for

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[333] When the Bauhaus was closed down in 1933 Albers moved to the US and taught first at Black Mountain College, North Carolina, and from 1952 at Yale, Connecticut, as well as giving workshops and courses in schools and universities across the US, Latin America and at the Hochschule für Gestaltung in Ulm, Germany.

[334] Josef Albers, 'Historisch Oder Jetzig?', *Junge Menschen*, November 1924. as translated in https://historiaarquitectura2.files.wordpress.com/2011/10/albers.pdf (accessed 17 May 2019).

[335] Jeannine Fiedler and Peter Feierabend, eds., *Bauhaus* (Cologne: Konemann, 1999), 176–77. As translated in Rosenthal, *Josef Albers, Formulation : Articulation*, 13. Fiedler and Feierabend do not specify when exactly Albers provided this statement. However given that the quote begins with "I was a student at the Bauhaus for three years and a teacher for ten," this recollection must be placed, at the earliest, after the closure of the school in 1933.

the art of the past and the lessons it may hold. What Albers' statement omits, however, is that while "analysing and dissecting" the past may not, indeed, have constituted a goal to him and his fellow learners, it was still necessary in order to permit any conscious opposition to "what had already been done and said", as he advocates. In fact, once again as a teacher, but now in 1963, Albers himself acknowledges this need in his seminal work *Interaction of Colour*.[336] The chapter entitled 'The Masters: colour instrumentation' reads:

> "It should be clear by now that our way of studying colour does not start with the past – neither with works of the past nor with its theories. As we begin principally with the material, colour itself, and its action and interaction as registered in our minds, we practice first and mainly a study of ourselves. Thus, we replace looking backward by looking first at ourselves and our surroundings, and replace retrospection with introspection. Though our own development and our own work are closest to us, we see and appreciate encouragement from achievements of the past, and gratefully pay practical respect to their originators as often as the opportunity arises. To honor the masters creatively is to compete with their attitude rather than with their results, to follow an artistic understanding of tradition – that is, to create, not to revive. Therefore, in our study of the masters – both past and present – there is, beyond mere retrospection and above verbal analysis, re-creating by re-performing their selection and presentation of colour, their seeing and reading of colour – in other words, their giving meaning to colour." [337]

Albers' position here with regard to old masters is noticeably more nuanced than in his recollection of learning as a Bauhaus student. Echoing Itten's position on the matter, Albers, the teacher, states quite clearly that the study of colour does not *start* with the past, but it does not disregard it either. On the contrary, he describes a modern practice that "honours" past masters creatively by studying them and competing with

[336] Josef Albers, *Interaction of Color* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975). Originally published in 1963, this work aims at summing up the findings of a lifetime of enquiry and teaching on the subject of colour interaction.

[337] Josef Albers, 'The Masters: Color Instrumentation', in *Interaction of Color*, Art (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 52–53.

their strategies for giving meaning to colour. This tension with regard to the past – this apparent need to assert one's detachment from it while, from an awareness that nothing is created in a vacuum, somewhat reluctantly admitting that an understanding of such past is actually essential, even if only to oppose it – can be sensed in Albers as in other figures of modernism (van Doesburg, just above, provides another example). In Albers' particular case, moreover, his firm belief in the importance of craft inevitably tied his practice to a certain artistic tradition. As noted by Rosenthal, this makes of Albers, "like most interesting artists, a quite paradoxical figure."[338] Rosenthal goes on to point out that while pursuing modernity, Albers also

> "pursued craftsmanship with an almost medieval fervour so that it is not surprising that he was unimpressed by those artists who expressed revolutionary zeal without craft. [...] For all his ground-breaking praxis [Albers] was always loyal to the final paragraph of Gropius' manifesto of April 1919, headed 'The principles of the Bauhaus'."[339]

Rosenthal refers here to Gropius' assertion that a thorough training in the crafts was the indispensable basis of all creative work; that there were to be "no teachers and students at the Bauhaus, only Masters, Journeymen and Apprentices."[340] A categorisation of craftsmen, it's worth stressing, that had been taken from medieval guilds.

The lesson of *Interaction of Colour* devoted to the masters also shows Albers' preferred method for studying them – through coloured paper cut-outs – that attests to his constructive understanding of art, and helps explains his preference for working with glass over paint. He describes a procedure by which students should "transfer paintings by masters into colour paper, in order to identify their colour instrumentation."[341] He is very clear that the aim here is not to produce precise replicas "as copyists do in museums" but rather to capture "the general impression only as to climate,

[338] Rosenthal, *Josef Albers, Formulation : Articulation*, 13.

[339] Rosenthal, 13.

[340] Gropius, *Bauhaus Manifesto*, April 1919

[341] Albers, 'The Masters: Color Instrumentation', 1975, 53.

temperature, aroma, or sound of their work."[342] It is, ultimately, a "means of learning to develop a sensitive and critical eye for colour relatedness".[343] Albers devotes a separate chapter of *Interaction of Colour* to justifying his preference for having students work with pieces of coloured paper, as opposed to using pigment and paint.[344] He offers several practical reasons for the pedagogical value of this technique: using coloured paper avoids the difficult and time-consuming process of mixing paints, thus also preventing the discouragement that its failures can generate in students; coloured paper, furthermore, offers consistency in tone, light and surface quality, which paint does not; coloured paper is economical and requires little equipment to work it, etc. Having listed all these advantages, Albers then offers one last "valuable advantage" for working with coloured papers instead of paint:

> "in solving our problems again and again [...] we can choose from a large collection of tones, displayed in front of us, and can thus constantly compare neighbouring and contrasting colours. This offers a training which no palette can provide."[345]

In effect, unlike paint, coloured paper cut-outs could be laid out in front of the students, offering them the possibility of organising the colours in any number of combinations, exploring their changing intensity and mood when placed next to each other. Upon arriving at a satisfactory solution to the problem at hand, the artist could then proceed to assemble the work. The same combination and assemblage logic naturally applied to stained glass, in a process that, as was the case with Freundlich and van Doesburg, allowed the resolution of constructive problems in painting too. Albers' preference for building the work out of colour blocks is revealing of a constructive understanding of art that, coupled with his concern for "the colour-light conundrum"[346]

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[342] Albers, 53.

[343] Josef Albers, 'The Masters: Color Instrumentation', in *Interaction of Color*, Revised and expanded edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 53.

[344] Albers devotes another lesson in Interaction of Color to justifying this preference. Josef Albers, 'Why Color Paper - Instead of Pigment and Paint', in *Interaction of Color*, Art (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 6–7.

[345] Albers, 7.

[346] Licht, 'Albers: Glass, Color, and Light', 20.

– the effect of light on colour, and on the soul – helps explain the centrality of stained glass to his practice during his time at the Bauhaus.

"A New Type of Glass Picture"

When in 1924 a lack of architectural stained glass commissions led the Bauhaus to close down the glass workshop[347] Albers nevertheless continued his enquiries into this medium in pursuit of a solution for his 'glass picture' problem. His aim to create compositions that could be hung on a wall meant the loss of the backlighting that illuminated colour in stained glass windows. In addition, the need to secure the glass pieces in place required each fragment to be somehow enclosed by its own individual 'frame' – be it a metal structure or epoxy resin – that impeded light from reaching the glass other than frontally. As a result of these limitations, in his early glass compositions shown above (Fig. 62 - 64) the only fragments that vibrated with luminescence were those thick enough to protrude beyond the rim of their enclosure, thus allowing light to enter laterally.

In 1925 Albers devised a new system of self-supporting glass-on-glass that avoided the need for any kind of metal 'scaffolding', thus allowing light to enter the sides of the composition and every element within it. It is what he would describe as 'sandblasted flashed glass'.[348] As noted by both Weber and Licht, in these sandblasted layers of opaque glass, with the occasional application of paint – all fused together in the kiln – Albers achieved an illusion of translucency and made reflected light appear to be coming from within the picture.[349] These sandblasted flashed glass compositions are generally hung using only top and bottom supports, such as in *Fugue* (1925) (Fig. 65),

[347] Michael Siebenbrodt and Lutz Schöbe, *Bauhaus 1919-1933: Weimar, Dessau, Berlin* (New York: Parkstone International, 2009), 81.

[348] Albers describes the process in detail in an untitled, undated statement kept as part of Josef Albers Papers, vol. 2, Sterling Memorial Library, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University, New Haven. This statement is reproduced in Guggenheim Museum, *Josef Albers: Glass, Color, and Light*, 141–42.

[349] Nicholas Fox Weber, 'The Artist as Alchemist', in *Josef Albers: A Retrospective*, by Guggenheim Museum (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1988), 23; as quoted in Licht, 'Albers: Glass, Color, and Light', 20.

rather than all-enclosing frames, so as to minimize obstacles to light and thus maximize its intended play on colour.

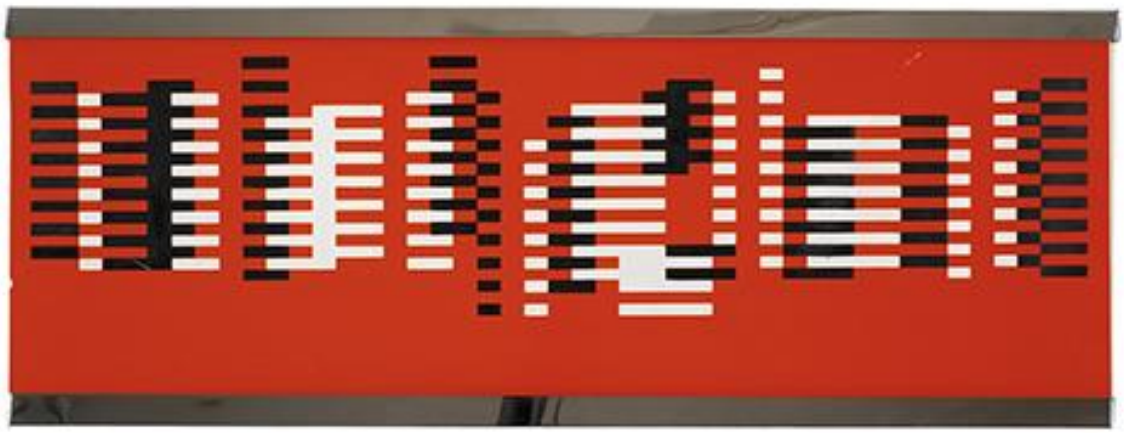

Fig. 65, Josef Albers, *Fugue*, 1925, sandblasted opaque flashed glass with black paint, 24.5 x 66 cm. Basel: Kunstmuseum Basel

The term Albers used to refer to these works, *glas bild*, and its English translation into 'glass picture', aptly sum up what he intended to create: a work "with the movability of a small easel painting"[350] (they rarely measure more than 60 cm on their longer side), but one that was *built* out of glass, and not simply *painted on* it. Albers thus approached the problem from a simultaneously pictorial and constructive perspective. The pictorial-constructive thinking behind these glass pictures transpires also from Albers' own description of individual works, such as *In the water* (1931),[351] for example, on which he wrote:

> "All colour areas are without modulation, therefore flat. [...] Despite the emphasized two-dimensionality of the design elements, the picture appears voluminous and spatial, and even transparent, though the colours are opaque."[352]

[350] Josef Albers, 'A New Type of Glass Picture', in *Josef Albers: Glass, Color, and Light*, ed. Guggenheim Museum (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1994), 141.

[351] Reproduced in Guggenheim Museum, *Josef Albers: Glass, Color, and Light*, 109.

[352] Albers, 'A New Type of Glass Picture', 142.

Albers' observations suggest that a key issue he was addressing in the glass pictures resulted from a modernist concern with the bidimensionality of painting in what was actually a constructed three-dimensional object. In effect, the pictorial conception of these 'pictures' would eventually help Albers transition from glass to painting upon his move to the US in 1933. Perhaps disheartened by the stark realisation of the fragility of glass,[353] it was ultimately paint that he would adopt to continue the exploration of colour and light interaction. His post-Bauhaus work, however, never lost the link to the 1920s glass oeuvre. On the contrary, as claimed by Weber, Albers sought in his prints and paintings "the value of glass in safer, seemingly more permanent mediums."[354] To this end, he manipulated those mediums "to emulate many of the conditions of glassmaking, above all in the *Homage to the Square* panels."[355] Rosenthal, too, notes the indebtedness of Albers' later painted work to the glass pictures of his Bauhaus years. He points out that when working with screen printing, a medium that "by definition can provide no translucency, let alone transparency, but only opacity,"[356] Albers still quoted his glass pictures by reproducing their patterns. In certain cases the self-quoting is literal, such as in *Formulation : Articulation 1:8*, of 1972, which recreates in screen printing the 1925 *Fugue* glass picture shown above (Fig. 65).

With their carefully thought-out approach to the conceptual and constructive problem of creating a picture out of glass but without recourse to a supporting metal structure, Albers' 1920s glass works were fully in keeping with the rationalism that has become synonymous with the Bauhaus. Their cerebral character is also evident in the strictly orthogonal disposition of the colour elements in the majority of these compositions, as is the case with *Fugue*.

[353] Upon his move to the US, in November 1933, he was dismayed to find that ten of the thirty two glass pictures he had shipped with him from Germany had arrived broken or cracked. Weber posits that this may have been a factor in Albers' decision to abandon glass and focus on paint. Weber, 'A New Light: Josef Albers's Work in Glass', 13.

[354] Weber, 13.

[355] Weber describes how in these painting Albers applied "six to ten coats of white Liquitex gesso on top of a hard, unyielding surface [to create] a luminous and neutral setting where color can have its fullest voice." Weber, 12.

[356] Rosenthal, *Josef Albers, Formulation : Articulation*, 13.

The celebrated rationalism of Albers' glass pictures, however, does not exhaust the motivation behind them. His description of yet another work, *White Cross* (1955)[357] attests to a concomitant pursuit of a spiritual quality in these compositions: "Though almost mathematical in form and measurement, its radial and static symmetry, I believe, improves its mystic atmosphere and vibration."[358] Creating a mystic atmosphere, it appears, was as much part of the purpose of these glass compositions as rationally solving a pictorial and constructive problem. Or, in Rosenthal's view, the glass pictures "perfectly illustrate the two most powerful threads in Albers' intellectual make-up, the – preferably Catholic – religious mysticism and the highly cerebral nature of his always precise, always controlled, abstract compositions."[359] Albers' desire to convey a sense of the spiritual in his glass pictures is perhaps nowhere more evident than in a seemingly less well-known piece entitled *Dom* (*Cathedral*) (Fig. 66).[360]

[357] Reproduced in Guggenheim Museum, *Josef Albers: Glass, Color, and Light*, 140.

[358] Albers, 'A New Type of Glass Picture', 142.

[359] Rosenthal, *Josef Albers, Formulation : Articulation*, 13.

[360] This work is reproduced in Guggenheim Museum, *Josef Albers: Glass, Color, and Light*, 105. The catalogue indicates that it has only been exhibited twice before, in 1933 Braunschweig and 1936 New York, but does not discuss it anywhere in the text despite the book's central argument for a strong spiritual, catholic-based motivation in Albers' glass oeuvre. The work is also featured in the Josef and Anni Albers Foundation website: https://albersfoundation.org/art/josef-albers/glass/#slide7

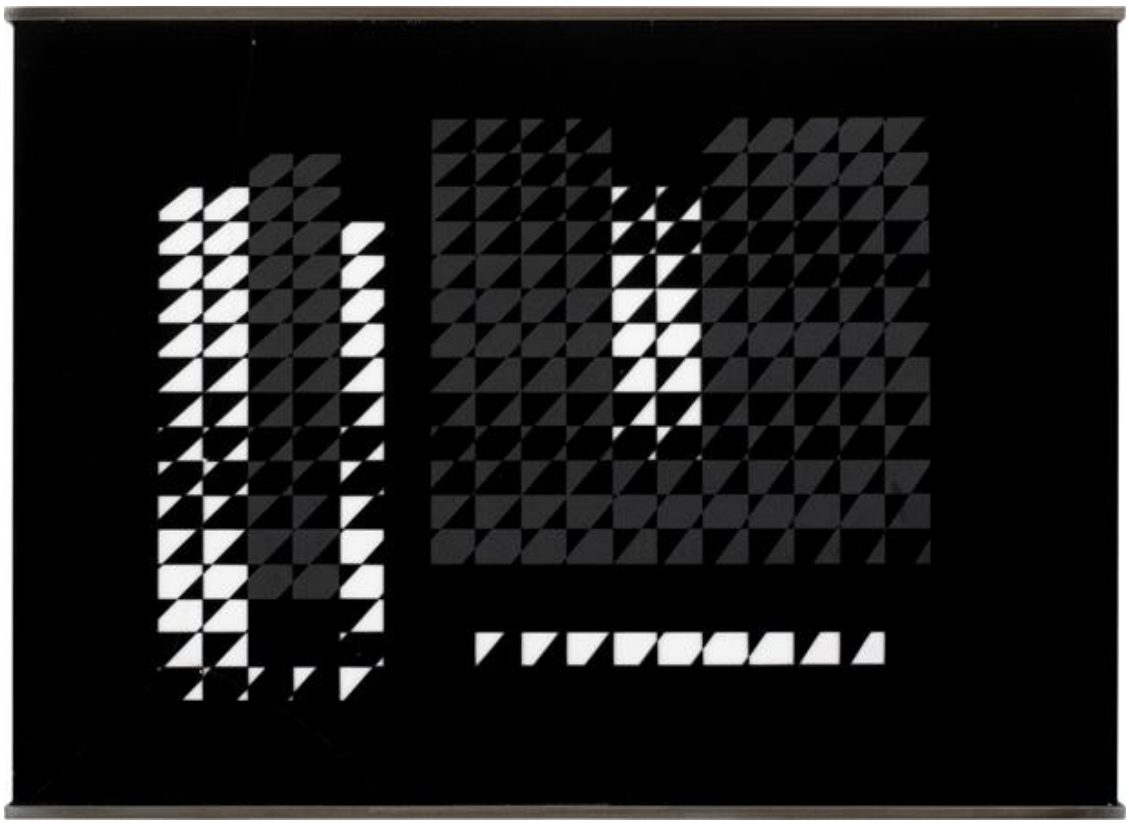

Fig. 66, Josef Albers, *Dom*, (*Cathedral*), c. 1930, sandblasted opaque flashed glass, 34.3 x 48.3 cm. Connecticut: Josef and Anni Albers Foundation.

Constructed around 1930, *Cathedral* appears somewhat unexpectedly in Albers' oeuvre. It is preceded by a large number of compositions similar to *Fugue* (Fig. 65, above): orthogonal arrangements combining black and white in vivid contrast with yellow, orange, red or blue. Their titles, when not self-referential, such as *Bundled*, *Interlocked*, *Upward*, *Frontal*, or *Dominating White*, mostly refer to the built environment of the modern world, with several *Factory*, *City*, and *Skyscraper*, with the occasional wink to day-to-day objects, such as *Glove Stretchers* (1928), fitting in with the school's focus on social modernisation through art and design. These are then followed by six orthogonal compositions titled *Interior* and *Windows*, all dated to 1929 (Fig. 67 and 68). Unlike the vibrant outside world of their predecessors, these evoke a more intimate space within a modern building, its rooms softly lit through rectangular windows in black, grey and white only.

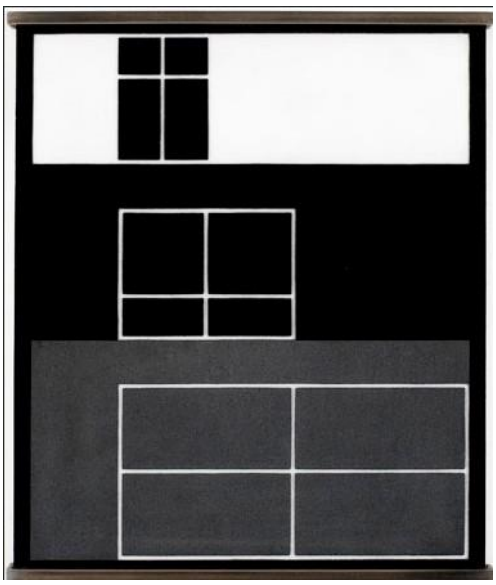

Fig. 67, Josef Albers, *Interior b*, 1929, sandblasted opaque flashed glass, 25.4 x 21.5 cm. Connecticut: Josef and Anni Albers Foundation.

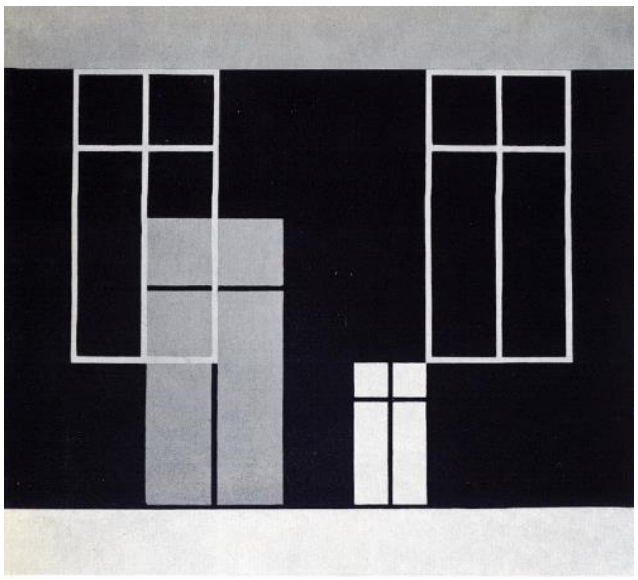

Fig. 68, Josef Albers, Fenster (Windows), sandblasted opaque flashed glass, 33.6 x 37.5 cm. Private collection of Mr. And Mrs. James H. Clark, Jr. (as of 1994)

It is at this point that *Cathedral* comes in, unexpected in its theme as in its formal rendition. There is no telling as to Albers' motivation for it, yet it is possible that the study of glass-filtered light in the modern interiors of the 1929 works were a factor in his revisit of his earlier enquiries into the same question in a medieval building, the 1916 prints showing inside views of Münster Cathedral (Fig. 59 and 60, further above). In *Cathedral*, Albers suggests the medieval setting by introducing a play of diagonals that mimic the uneven shards of a stained glass window, in stark contrast with the modern orthogonality of the *Interior* and *Windows* series. While the resulting effect is one of a certain randomness, the composition is actually carefully measured out: the diagonal lines are strictly parallel to each other, cutting across the vertical and horizontal grid at differing intervals to produce a myriad geometric shapes that suggest the irregular, sharp fragmentation of stained glass.

With *Cathedral*, ultimately, Albers seems to create a new interpretation of his own 1916 prints, using only black (in this case also thinned down to dark grey) and white to recreate the mystical atmosphere inside a gothic building, its light dimmed by leaded glass windows. It is as if having devised a modern technique for building pictures with glass that no longer required the supporting metal structure of their medieval

counterpart, Albers was now closing the circle by recreating the effect of medieval stained glass in a sandblasted picture. In its singularity within his prolific production of orthogonal abstract and modern-themed glass compositions, *Cathedral* appears almost whimsical, perhaps an indulgent remnant of the early Bauhaus' medievalism. Or, perhaps, *Cathedral* should be viewed in light of Albers' attitude towards 'the masters' of the past, his call to "gratefully pay practical respect" to them "as often as the opportunity arises," to "honour" them creatively by competing with their attitude and "create, not revive."[361] If so, *Cathedral* might be interpreted, instead, as Albers' tribute to the skilled craftsmanship of medieval stained glass, a conscious acknowledgement of the spiritual elevation it could effect and of the artistic inspiration he had drawn from it. Regardless any possible motivations behind it, this work, created using Albers' advanced glass picture technique, also provides, intentionally or not, a fittingly modern reinterpretation of the 'cathedral of the future' that the Bauhaus first set out to build.

[361] See quote above, note 337.

Part II – Joaquín Torres-García

1 The medieval in modernist art theory in Catalonia

Introduction

When Torres-García arrived in Barcelona from his native Uruguay in 1891, at the age of 17, he encountered a society in rapid change, invested in the idea of economic, industrial, cultural and social modernisation.[362] The city's arts scene had been shaken by the self-styled Modernisme movement that since 1884,[363] and in close contact with fin-de-siècle Paris, had generated a distinct aesthetic combining elements of Art Nouveau, Symbolism and Impressionism with Catalan crafts and popular arts traditions. By the time Torres-García completed his formal training in 1895, Modernisme was beginning to lose impetus and, with the arrival of the new century, it was soon to be superseded by a new movement, Noucentisme.

The name was coined in 1906 by art critic Eugeni d'Ors, the movement's original promoter and main theorist.[364] Bringing the 20th century into it – Noucentisme translates as something like '1900s-ism' – this was a broad political and cultural renovation programme promoted by the local bourgeoisie. In artistic terms, and in common with Modernisme, it advocated an art that was both modern and Catalan, alert to the European avant-gardes but in touch with the region's heritage and popular culture.[365] Aesthetically, however, it rejected what it saw as Modernisme's easy

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[362] Societal investment in the idea of modernity found expression, for instance, in Barcelona's enthusiastic organisation of its Universal Exposition of 1888. This event "offered Catalans a historic opportunity to evaluate their region in the context of vanguard European culture, technology and industry; it also established a decisive formal precedent for a modern cosmopolitan outlook". Carmen Belen Lord, 'The New Art: Modernisme', in *Barcelona and Modernity: Picasso, Gaudí, Miró, Dalí*, ed. William H. Robinson, Jordi Falgàs, and Carmen Belen Lord (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 2007), 35.

[363] The term Modernisme first appeared in the magazine *L'Avens Literari Artistich Cientific* (*Literary, Artistic, Scientific Progress*) in 15 January 1884.

[364] D'Ors first used the term 'noucentista' to refer to a generation, that of the 1900s, that in his view should move on from Modernisme. Eugeni D'Ors, *Glosari 1906* (Barcelona: Llibreria de Francesc Puig, 1907), 258, 259.

[365] Martí Peran i Rafart, Alícia Suàrez, and Mercè Vidal i Jansà, eds., *El Noucentisme: Un Projecte de Modernitat: Exposició 22desembre 1994-12 Març 1995, Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona* (Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya, Departament de Cultura; Enciclopèdia Catalana; Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona, 1994).

assimilation of trends pertaining to a European 'North'. It was particularly critical of the symbolist, impressionist and medievalist elements in Modernisme and promoted instead the region's classical Mediterranean heritage as the source to tap into for a 'truly Catalan' modern aesthetic. Torres-García was strongly attracted to this movement and was 'declared' a noucentista by its founder in 1910.[366]

From the mid-1910s an avant-garde scene developed in Barcelona in parallel to, and often interspersed with, Noucentisme. The latter had never been a monolithical movement; beyond the basic call to 'Mediterranean classicism', its aesthetic propositions were vaguely defined. There was a porous line – often crossed by local practitioners – between it and an avant-garde scene that was more confrontational and more receptive to the formal artistic enquiries pursued in major European centres.[367] This already dynamic art scene gained further complexity during the First World War with the return to Barcelona of Catalan artists based abroad, and the arrival of foreign ones fleeing the war.

Still, the bourgeois social context from which Noucentisme emerged, however keen on progress, conditioned the movement to pursue "a controlled evolution, not a revolutionary adventure".[368] Thus, the most radical avant-garde proposals, though considered and discussed, struggled to gain wider acceptance among those closer to Noucentisme. Particular resistance was shown to tendencies towards abstraction, as they were understood to run counter to the social role that the movement attributed to art and that, in its understanding, could not forgo figuration. At any rate, the engagement of artists in these debates resulted in a heterogeneous artistic production that is sometimes difficult to class as either noucentista or avant-garde.[369]

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[366] Enric Jardí, *Torres García* (Barcelona: Ediciones Polígrafa, 1973), 69.

[367] William H. Robinson, 'Avant-Gardes for a New Century', in *Barcelona and Modernity: Picasso, Gaudí, Miró, Dalí*, ed. William H. Robinson, Jordi Falgàs, and Carmen Belen Lord (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 2007), 304–18.

[368] Peran i Rafart, Suàrez, and Vidal i Jansà, *El Noucentisme*, 66.

[369] Artists like Pau Gargallo, Manolo Hugué, and Josep de Togores oscillated between both currents; others, including Juli González and Joaquin Torres-Garcia initially aligned with, even heartily championed, Noucentisme, and subsequently veered towards more avant-garde positions. See Francesc Fontbona, 'The Art of Noucentisme', in *Homage to Barcelona, the City and Its Art, 1888-1936: Hayward Gallery, London, 14* N*ovember 1985 - 23 February 1986*, by Michael Raeburn, 1st ed. (London: The Arts Council of Great Britain, 1985), 170, 177.

For the purposes of clarity, I will here adhere to the operative distinction proposed by Eva Forgács between modernism and avant-garde whereby 'modernism' is an "umbrella term for modern art and the culture of modernity," while the 'avant-garde' refers to "the activist, militant vanguard movements within modernism, that pursued clear-cut agendas usually articulated in manifestoes."[370] Translated to the Catalan case, I will be using the term modernism to refer to all the currents actively pursuing the modernisation of the arts in Barcelona at the time: from 1880s Modernisme and 1906 Noucentisme, to the more radical proposals being put forward in Barcelona in the late 1910s. Again for operative purposes, avant-garde will only be used here to refer to the latter, even though in truth the 1880s modernistes brought radical change to the arts scene of their time and were therefore the avant-garde of the late 19th century.

On the back of the cultural dynamism generated by all these movements, the period also saw the emergence of periodicals – very often with financial support by members of the bourgeoisie[371] – that for the first time made it their explicit purpose to serve as platforms for debate with a view to modernise art and literature. This chapter will explore the modernist stance towards the medieval in Catalan art theory at the time by surveying the views on the subject expressed in the publications that spearheaded such a modernisation: *L'Avenç* (founded in 1881)[372], *Pèl i Ploma* (1899), *Quatre Gats* (1899), *Forma* (1904), *Futurisme* (1907), *Pàgina Artística de la Veu de Catalunya* (1909), *Revista Nova* (1914), *Vell i Nou* (1916), *Trossos* (1916), *Un enemic del poble* (1917) and *L'Instant* (1918).

Modernism in Catalonia: the value of the past

The forward-looking stance associated with modernism traverses the publications selected for this analysis. It is implicit in the titles of two of the magazines, *L'Avenç* (Progress) and *Futurisme* (Futurism) and is a recurrent theme in the pages of them all. *Forma* advocates the need for a constant renewal; noting that science, history,

[370] Forgács, 'Modernism's Lost Future', 30.

[371] Peter Brooker et al., eds., *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, vol. 3 Europe 1880-1940 (Oxford University Press, 2013), 366.

[372] The title's spelling was changed from *L'Avens* to *L'Avenç* from the 1 January 1891 issue, as part of the magazine's campaign to help standardize written Catalan.

moral and politics are "evolutive", Miquel Utrillo, the magazine's editor, calls for an art that shares in this "dynamic conception of the world".[373] *Revista Nova* encourages artists to follow the restless example of scientists, politicians, traders, industrialists and workers and ensure their own evolution.[374] *Trossos*, for its part, celebrates Futurism not as a school, but "a tendency (…) an effort towards what's to come (…) an inexhaustible love for the new."[375] By and large, this belief in the future does not carry an implicit or explicit rejection of the past. In fact, the ease with which the idea of modernity coexisted with the presence of the old, is illustrated in the very issue of *L'Avenç* that in 1884 first introduced the term modernista in Spain.[376] The editorial piece of the issue in question contains the following passage:

> "The intellectual movement of Catalonia must not, cannot, be an exception in its century, it must keep up with it. Our Magazine is, therefore, a bit contrary; it deems criticism very important, and it tries to make it amenable and accessible to all kinds of readers, often taking a humorous approach; it advocates (and it will always try to foster) the cultivation in our land of an essentially *modernista* literature, science and art." [377]

The mission statement conveyed in the editorial piece, and summarised in the above excerpt, addresses several aspects that attest to its modernity: it calls on intellectuals to keep up with the times; it advocates criticism as indispensable to literary, artistic and scientific progress; it intends to open up the debate by making it accessible to a broad audience; it deems satire essential to critique and equally needed for its democratisation; it coins the term modernista, which would be appropriated by like-

[373] Miquel Utrillo, 'Desde Brusseles', *Forma*, May 1904.

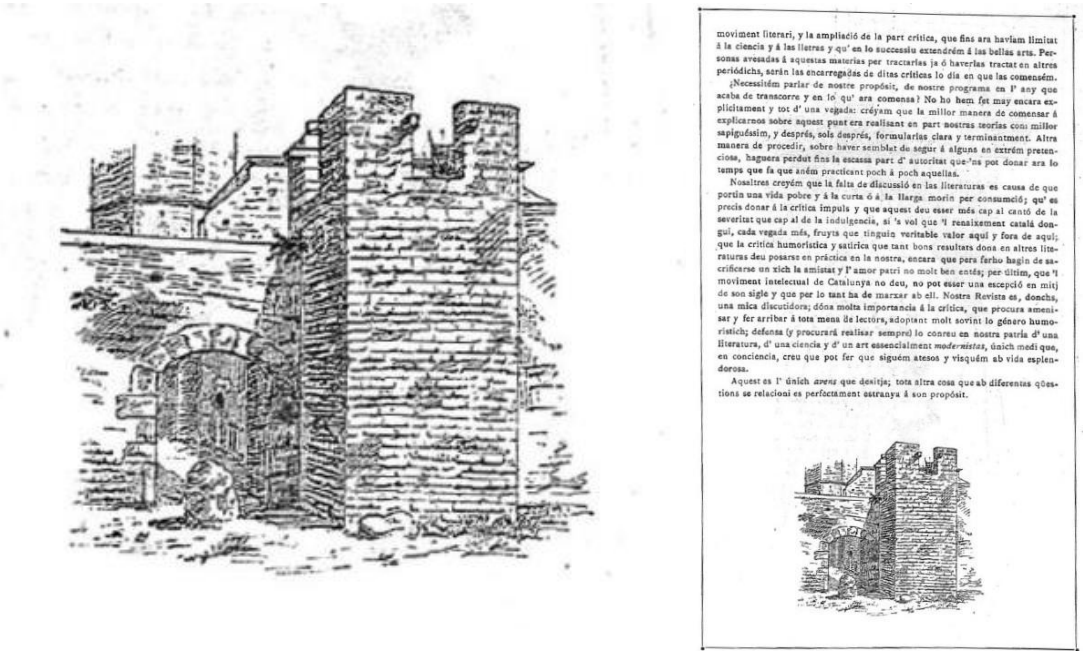
[374] [Unsigned], 'Salutació'.

[375] From the Catalan: "El futurisme segons Llucià Folgore, no és una escola. És una tendència. És un esforç cap a l'esdevenir. És l'amor inagotable del nou." [Unsigned], 'A Les Galeries Laietanes', *Trossos*, April 1918. Likely author Joan Vicenç Foix.

[376] The emergence of the term modernista and its subsequent use in the Catalan press has been traced by Joan Lluís Marfany, *Aspectes Del Modernisme*, 8th ed. (Barcelona: Biblioteca Torrell-Jordana Curial, 1990); as quoted in Lord, 'The New Art: Modernisme', 41.

[377] From the Catalan "El moviment intelectual de Catalunya no deu, no pot esser una escepció en mitj de son sigle y que per lo tant ha de marxar ab ell. Nostra Revista es, donchs, una mica discutidora; dóna molta imporancia a la crítica, que procura amenisar y fer arribar á tota mena de lectors, adoptant molt sovint lo género humorístich; defensa (y procurará realisar sempre) lo conreu en nostra patria d'una literatura, d'una ciencia y d'un art essencialment *modernistas*." Ramon D. Perés, '[Editorial]', *L'Avens Literari Artistich Cientifich*, 15 January 1884, n.p.

minded artists and writers to designate their nascent movement. Then, with no discernible purpose, it illustrates this unequivocally modern statement of intent with the following image:



moviment literari, y la ampliació de la part crítica, que fins ara haviam limitat á la ciencia y á las lletres y qu' en lo successiu extendrém á las bellas arts. Persones avesadas á aquestas materias per tractarlas ja ó haverlas tractat en altres periódichs, serán las encarregadas de ditas críticas lo dia en que las comensém.

¿Necessitém parlar de nostre propósit, de nostre programa en l' any que acaba de transcorre y en ló qu' ara comensa? No ho hem fet may encara explicitament y tot d' una vegada: créyam que la millor manera de comensar á explicarnos sobre aquest punt era realisant en part nostras teorías com millor sapiguéssim, y després, sols després, formularlas clara y terminantment. Altra manera de procedir, sobre haver semblat de segur á alguns en extrém pretenciosa, haguera perdut fins la escassa part d' autoritat que 'ns pot donar ara lo temps que fa que aném practicant poch á poch aquellas.

Nosaltres creyém que la falta de discussió en las literaturas es causa de que portin una vida pobre y á la curta ó á la llarga morin per consumició; qu' es precis donar á la crítica impuls y que aquest deu esser más cap al cantó de la severitat que cap al de la indulgencia, si 's vol que 'l renaixement catalá dongui, cada vegada más, fruyts que tinguin veritable valor aquí y fora de aquí; que la crítica humorística y satírica que tant bons resultats dona en altres literaturas deu posarse en práctica en la nostra, encara que para ferho hagin de sacrificarse un xich la amistat y l' amor patri no molt ben entés; per último, que 'l moviment intelectual de Catalunya no deu, no pot esser una excepció en mitj de son sigle y que per lo tant ha de marxar ab ell. Nostra Revista es, doncha, una mica discutidora; dóna molta importancia á la crítica, que procura amenisar y fer arribar á tota mena de lectors, adoptant molt sovint lo género humorístich; defensa (y procurará realisar sempre) lo conreu en nostra patria d' una literatura, d' una ciencia y d' un art essencialment *modernistas*, únich medi que, en conciencia, creu que pot fer que siguém atesos y visquém ab vida esplendorosa.

Aquest es l' únich *aveng* que desitja; tota altra cosa que ab diferentas qüestions se relacioni es perfectament estranya á son propósit.

Fig. 69 Illustration to editorial article in *L'Avens*, 15 January 1884.

A drawing of a partial view of a medieval building illustrates the editorial that has been recognised as marking a founding moment of the modernista movement. It attests to an unconflicted stance towards the past, which permeates, in written and graphic form, all the modernist magazines included in this survey launched between 1884 and 1916.

In the case illustrated above, the presence of a medieval building in a publication such as *L'Avenç* must be viewed in the context of a broad process of affirmation that, from the latter part of the 19th century, sought to justify a distinct Catalan identity within Spain. This was largely based on the region's distinct language, whose literary production was fostered in magazines such as *L'Avenç*, and it was also grounded on a glorified account of the region's medieval history. In the period up to the 14th century, it was proclaimed, Catalonia had enjoyed a time of greatness; its capacity to thrive, the argument went, had been undermined with the 1492 marital alliance between the Crown of Aragon (including Catalonia) and Castile, when it became a mere province or

region of what would become the modern Spanish state.[378] Catalan medieval heritage was consequently cherished as representative of this period of greatness.

This nationalist appreciation for medieval heritage gave rise to a growing interest in documenting it and making it known to the public, as *L'Avenç* does, for example, by devoting a feature to the mural paintings of a romanesque church in the Pyrenees.[379] Modernist magazines that succeeded *L'Avenç* continued to share in that purpose. *Pèl & Ploma*, featured illustrated articles on medieval objects amid its editorial content devoted to contemporary literature and art. Up to this point, the perceived value of these objects was historical, archaeological; in an article on a series of romanesque churches, for example, Miquel Utrillo, chief editor of the magazine, calls them "old things that vanish."[380] That is, there is no exploration of their architectural features, but a sense that they are historical objects that could be lost through neglect.

In a subsequent issue of this magazine, a new feature, this time devoted to gothic painting, evidences a changing approach to medieval art: it is not simply heritage, objects of historical value, but it can also be of formal interest for modern artists. Utrillo relates how gothic paintings at a recent exhibition were being "lovingly studied" by a group of young painters, and calls on the textile industry to take note of the "old modernism" displayed in the fabrics worn by the figures in them.[381]

The formal value of past artistic traditions, including the medieval, to modern art becomes a central theme of Utrillo's subsequent editorial venture, *Forma*, launched in 1904. Its full title – Illustrated Publication of Old and Modern Spanish Art and Foreign Works in Spain – evidences a non-identitary approach to heritage by broadening the field to the whole of Spain. Every issue is lavishly illustrated with dozens of reproductions, some of them in colour, of every imaginable object from the fine and

[378] This rationale underpins the vision for the region set out in an article published in the launch issue of Catalonia magazine, Alexandre Cortada, 'Ideals Nous Pera La "Catalonia"', *Catalonia*, 25 February 1898, 9–12.

[379] Joseph Puiggarí, 'Pinturas Murals de Pedret, Sigle XI - XII', *L'Avens Literari Artistich Cientifich*, 25 July 1889.

[380] Miquel Utrillo, 'Pirineu Català I', *Pèl & Ploma*, 1 May 1902, 380.

[381] Miquel Utrillo, 'L'exposició d'art Antic', *Pèl & Ploma*, 1 January 1903, 26.

applied arts – between which it claims not to distinguish – from Antiquity to the contemporary, excepting the academic.

Forma's call to safeguard and study a nation's own heritage as an essential platform on which to build its modernity is often modelled in foreign practices. Utrillo praises France, Germany, Belgium, England and Holland for the way they cherish and constantly enlarge their collections of old art and antiques, "without which," he asserts, "there is no renovation in the life of art." The author remarks how these countries "acquire notable old works and show their right to the modern life". Observing, on the contrary, what was happening in Spain, where such objects were dismissed as "old stuff", he calls on his country's institutions to adopt policies of heritage acquisition, study and divulgation as a way to contribute to its own modernisation. "On the foundations of the old," he concludes "the modern is born strong." [382]

The call to learn from the art of the past was not to be construed as a licence to imitate it, a potential pitfall against which warnings also abounded: modern art had much to learn from the past, but it had establish a "rapport with the people and things of his time," in order to avoid falling into "archaeological theatrics."[383]

The stance towards the art of the past established by *Forma* found continuity in subsequent modernist publications, in particular *Pàgina Artística de la Veu de Catalunya* and *Vell i Nou*, whose title, meaning Old and New, sums up its editorial intent. In their pages, art from all periods coexists with the latest avant-garde trends. Their respective treatment, however, differs. In these publications contemporary art, both by local and foreign practitioners, is critiqued, whereas pre-modern art is still mostly discussed for its heritage value only. That is, the lessons that pre-modern art ostensibly holds for modern practitioners are presumably to be learned by exposure to it; little to no guidance is offered by the editors in the form of an actual discussion of its formal or conceptual values that might be of worth to modern art.

[382] From the Catalan "Fransa, Alemania, Bélgica, Inglaterra i, Holanda, rodoneijant les llurs coleccions i millorantles, perque son pobles que's vigorisen, i tots guarden gelosament lo que posseheixen, adquireixen obres antigues notables i demostren els seus drets a la vida moderna, amb les obres produides per el seu geni nacional històric. Amb el fonament de lo antic, lo modern neix fort." Miquel Utrillo, 'Un Catálec Model', *Forma*, April 1904, 114–18.

[383] Miquel Utrillo, 'Un Pintor de Son Temps', *Forma*, December 1907, 447–48.

A case in point is provided by two interrelated articles in *Vell i Nou* on a 12th century illuminated manuscript.[384] Their author, Joan Sacs, points out that the work in question is considered "one of the first monuments of Catalan painting," and stresses its "importance" in the "history of our art." He then adds:

> "This manuscript is also important from the point of view of the primitivist aesthetic that so influences a considerable part of today's arts and that so concerns a great number of modern artists everywhere."[385]

The article, however, then goes on to discuss the manuscript only from an art historical perspective. Moreover, having established its potential value as a primitivist referent for modern artists, Sacs finds this work lacking in quality in comparison with romanesque manuscripts from elsewhere (Italy, France, Castile) on account of, of all things, the unsophisticated execution of its illuminations.

The co-habitation of the old and the new in modernist magazines began to disappear in *Revista Nova*, a magazine launched in 1914 with the explicit purpose of distancing itself from this practice. In an advertising leaflet distributed prior to its first issue, it announced its purpose thus:

> "contrary to current art publications that concern themselves preferably with old art and archaeology, and only incidentally with modern art, [Revista Nova] will analyse and showcase almost exclusively the latest artistic trends, so that the energies and yearnings of the new spirits no longer find themselves neglected."[386]

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[384] Joan Sacs, 'El Llibre de Les Homilies Del Venerable Beda de Girona', *Vell i Nou*, 1 August 1919; Joan Sacs, 'La Catalanitat Del Beda de Girona', *Vell i Nou*, 1 September 1919.

[385] From the Catalan: "[El Llibre de les Homilies del Venerable Beda de Girona] és tingut per un dels primers monuments de la pintura catalana. La seva importáncia pot doncs ésser gran en la história del nostre art. També és important aquest manuscrit baix el punt de vista de l'estética primitivista que tant influeix a un important sector de les arts d'avui i tant preocupa a bona part dels artistes moderns de tot arreu." Sacs, 'El Llibre de Les Homilies Del Venerable Beda de Girona', 287.

[386] From the Catalan: "Aquesta publicació, que amb el nom de Revista Nova, veurà aviat la llum, al revés de les actuals publicacions artístiques que s'ocupen amb preferència d'art antic i d'arqueologia i sols incidentalment d'art modern, vindrà quasi únicament a analisar i evidenciar les tendències artístiques d'última hora, a fi de que les energies i ànsies dels esperits nous no's trobin desemparades com fins ara." As quoted in Joan Torrent and Rafael Tasis, *Història de la Premsa Catalana* (Barcelona: Bruguera, 1966), 526–27.

In truth, the magazine still features art from periods in the past, from ancient Buddhist frescoes in India,[387] and Egyptian funerary masks in a private collection,[388] to 8th century Japanese paintings.[389] Presumably, however, because all of these referents pertain to non-Western European contexts, they are perceived as ahistorical and therefore ostensibly in line with the stated mission not to feature "old art and archaeology".

Any past artistic traditions, Western or otherwise, vanish in the more avant-garde titles launched from 1916 – *Trossos*, *Un enemic del poble*, and *L'Instant* – that devote their pages only to contemporary art and literature. In fact, it is in *Un enemic del poble* that the idea of a break with the past is first formulated in the modernist art press. It is in an article by Torres-García,[390] dated November 1917, that will be examined in the following chapter. Still, it is worth stressing that this avant-garde press, even if not ostensibly interested in past artistic traditions, appears nevertheless sensitive to the destruction of heritage brought on by the war still raging in Europe. In an article in *L'Instant* under the title "Pour le patrimoine de l'esprit" the text decried the damage caused to heritage – "mutilated statues, burnt-down cathedrals, destroyed villages" – and considered the new future opening up after the conflict. For this, the author stated: "[…] we have come to believe that, without completely breaking the umbilical cord of tradition, we must lay the foundations for a new world that can somehow contain the wonderful seeds of the old world".[391]

[387] [Unsigned], 'Ajantà', *Revista Nova*, 30 July 1914.

[388] [Unsigned], 'El Sr. Guimet i El Museu Guimet', *Revista Nova*, 27 June 1914.

[389] Joan Sacs, 'L'escola Japonesa "Toça" de Pintura', *Revista Nova*, 15 October 1914.

[390] Joaquín Torres-García, 'Art Evolució (a Manera de Manifest)', *Un Enemic Del Poble*, November 1917.

[391] From the French "Nous en sommes venu a croire qu'il faut, sans rompre tout à fait le cordon ombilical de la tradition, poser les fondements d'un monde nouveau qui puisse en quelque sorte contenir les semences merveilleuses du monde antique", J. Perez-Jorba, 'Pour Le Patrimoine de l'esprit', *L'Instant*, July 1918, 5–6. J. Perez-Jorba, the magazine's editor in Barcelona, signed with the pseudonym Litus.

The medieval in Noucentisme: d'Ors, Folch and Torres-García

For all the visibility given to medieval art in the pages of modernist magazines, and for all its exaltation as heritage for modern artists to learn from, its actual impact on the coeval artistic production appears to have been limited. Aside from the well-documented case of Joan Miró,[392] Narcís Comadira has pointed out a degree of romanesque inspiration in the work of architects Rafael Masó and Josep Maria Pericas, as well as in that of sculptor Fidel Aguilar.[393] In painting, Mercè Vidal has suggested a link between romanesque mural painting and the wall decorations by Xavier Nogués in Galeries Laietanes.[394] Such a limited uptake of the medieval in the practice of contemporary artists may be explained, at least in part, by a marked classicist atmosphere in the Catalan art scene of the 1910s resulting from the noucentista vision for the cultural regeneration of the region, described thus by Christopher Green:

> "[Cultural regeneration] would come from ignoring the north and Castile, and turning south and east towards the Mediterranean, its landscapes and its classical antiquity. [...] Reason over emotion, collective order (civilization) over anarchic individualism, the 'classical' over the medieval past: these were the essentials of a new culturally defined 'Catalan' identity as represented by Noucentisme."[395]

Indeed, such was the vision promoted by the movement's founder and leading theorist, Eugeni d'Ors. His exaltation of Catalonia's classical past and contempt for all things medieval – consistently portrayed as 'Northern' and 'barbarian' – pervade his G*losas*, the column he wrote regularly for *La Veu de Catalunya* under the pseudonym Xènius. A compilation of such *Glosas* was published in 1906 with a prologue by fellow critic Raimon Casellas (1855-1910), in which d'Ors' views on the classical and the medieval are summed up as follows:

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[392] Parcerisas, *Agnus Dei*; Balsach, *Cosmogonías de un mundo originario (1918-1939)*.

[393] Narcís Comadira, 'The Forms of Paradise: Noucentista Painting and Sculpture', in *Barcelona and Modernity: Picasso, Gaudí, Miró, Dalí*, ed. William H. Robinson, Jordi Falgàs, and Carmen Belen Lord (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 2007), 250.

[394] Alícia Suàrez and Mercè Vidal i Jansà, 'Xavier Nogués, dionisíac', *Serra d'Or*, April 1984, 53.

[395] Christopher Green, *Picasso: Architecture and Vertigo* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 138–39.

"Xènius loves, above all, mythology [...] which he considers an essential product of the Mediterranean people. [...] And since a fortunate fate dictated that us, Catalans, saw the light of life on the shore of this splendid sea that knows how to breed mythologies – albeit at the opposite end to the paradise where myths were born, – we can cast into eternal oblivion, without any kind of civic scruple, all the medieval glories, all the romanticist agitations – Northern barbarisms after all – to become ourselves mythology idolisers, classic. Because… before we were Romanesque barbarians, Gothic barbarians, is it not very true that we had been Empurians,* a little bit of Greece, so to speak, even if as a colony?"[396]

D'Ors discourse placed Catalonia within a larger classical/greco-latin identity, shared with other Mediterranean peoples, which was promoted in opposition to a Northern/gothic identity. This identitary discourse was in line with the classicism championed in France by Charles Maurras' Action Française, with which d'Ors was closely associated.

Within Noucentisme, still, other voices took a less exclusive stance towards the art of the past, finding value both in the classical and the medieval as potential sources for modern art. A key figure of this current was Joaquim Folch i Torres (hereinafter Folch) (1886-1963), a historian, museologist and art critic whose thinking was also highly influential in the noucentista art scene.[397] From a position of close proximity to Lliga Regionalista, the party in power in the Catalan regional government, Folch played a central role in the implementation of its cultural policy, in particular with regard to heritage conservation and museums. In this capacity, in 1912 he was appointed director of medieval and modern art at Junta de Museus, the board responsible for all Barcelona museums. As an art critic, Folch contributed regularly to the modernist publications

[396] From the Catalan "En Xènius ama, sobretot, la mitologia [...] que ell creu producte essencial de la gent mediterrania. [...] Y com que un fat sortós ha disposat que nosaltres, catalans, vegéssim la llum de vida a la ribera d'aquest mar esplèndit que sab infantar mitologies – mal sia al canto oposat del paradís ahont els mitus van néixer, – sense cap mena d'escrúpol cívich podem donar a oblit etern totes les glories mitjevals, tots els bulls romanticistes – barbaries del Nord al capdevall – per a fernos mitòlatres y clàssichs. ¿Perque… abans d'esser barbres romànichs, barbres gòtichs, no és molt cert que havíem estat empuritans, una mica de Grecia com qui diu, encara que en classe de colons [...]?" *Empuries, today an archeological site, was a Greek colony founded in the 6th century b.C. Raimon Casellas, 'Prolech', in *Glosari 1906*, by Eugeni D'Ors (Barcelona: Llibreria de Francesc Puig, 1907), 16.

[397] For a comprehensive study of Joaquim Folch i Torres' work in heritage conservation, museology and art criticism, see Vidal i Jansà, *Teoria i Crítica En El Noucentisme*..

discussed above and, in particular, to *Pàgina Artística*, which he edited from 1910 to 1920.

The purpose of this weekly supplement, as announced in its subheading, was to inform and educate on a broad mix of art- and heritage-related issues: from archaeological finds to contemporary art theory, national and international exhibitions, conference reviews, museums and collections, and artistic pedagogy. Folch's articles, discussing anything from the restoration works of a given monastery to the latest avant-garde trends, evidence a profound knowledge of the art of various periods and cultures, and a genuine curiosity as to the lessons they might hold.

His views in this regard are conveyed in his critique of a collective exhibition of contemporary Catalan artists at the newly refurbished Parés gallery in October 1911. Bemoaning the mediocrity of the works exhibited - their lack of originality, scarce intellectual content, thematic complacency and unreflective adoption of "trends" from abroad – Folch encouraged artists to overcome their difficulties by searching for the source from which sprang what he considered prime examples of art from former times. In his view, such a source, which he located in "man's love of life", had given rise to the wonders of Greek Art, first and foremost, but also "Byzantine domes, Constantinople's aurific mosaics, gothic cathedrals with their elaborated altarpieces [...] and the great delights of the [early] Italian Renaissance."[398]

Folch's embrace of classicism, therefore, unlike d'Ors', was not exclusive. His background as a historian and a museologist made him aware of the relevance of both the classical and the medieval legacy in Catalonia. Thus, in an article entitled "The modernity of art", he insisted on the notion that "all the currents of past civilisations" flowed together in the present, and considered which of these currents were specifically relevant to modern art in Catalonia: "At this point in time, the only two major positive values, the two treasures inherited by our civilisation, [...] are artistically circumscribed to the formal value of Greece and the spiritual value of the Middle Ages."[399]

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[398] Joaquim Folch i Torres, 'Sobre La Nostra Pintura. A Propòsit de La Exposició de Cân Parés', *La Veu de Catalunya*, 26 October 1911, sec. Pàgina Artística.

[399] From the Catalan: "des del nostre moment, els dos grans i únics valors positius, els dos tresors heretats per la civilització nostra, [...] se circumscriuen artísticament al valor formal de la Grècia, al valor espiritual de l'Edat Mitja," Joaquim Folch i Torres, 'La Modernitat de l'art', *La Veu de Catalunya*, 4

Quite what Folch meant here by "spiritual" is not further developed in the article. Other writings by him suggest that his understanding of the spiritual was not related to religion, but to the ideaist nature of medieval art, its transcendental and non-mimetic character. It is what he advocated for modern art in a further article on mural painting, in which once again his references encompass both the ancient and the medieval:

> "But I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid, because not painting canvases does not only not destroy anything substantial in the beauty and revelation of life's harmonies, but actually gives art the glory of the ancients and of the Middle Ages, in which the beautiful reality of existing things was not copied, but rather the spirit set about creating beautiful realities".[400]

As the two main theorists of Noucentisme, therefore, d'Ors and Folch represent two different stances towards the medieval: rejected in the name of classicism by the former, valued alongside the ancient classical by the latter. As an artist and also a prolific theorist within this movement, Torres-García appears to have found himself torn between these two positions. The differing views of all three authors on the medieval as a potential source for modern Catalan art are subtly illustrated in three interrelated articles published by them in close succession in *Pàgina Artística*. The articles, dated February 1912, discussed the merits of Cubism and considered its potential interest for noucentista aesthetics.[401] A growing interest in the movement would lead to an Exhibition of Cubist Art in Galeries Dalmau, between April and May 1912 that received

January 1912, sec. Pàgina Artística; as quoted in Mercè Vidal i Jansà, 'El viatge del jove Joaquim Folch i Torres', in *Llibre de viatge: (1913-1914)* (Barcelona: GRACMON, Grup de Recerca en Història de l'Art i del Disseny Contemporanis : Universitat de Barcelona ; Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2013), 86.

[400] "Mes, jo us dic, amics, que no tingueu por, que el fet de no pintar quadres no solament no destrueix res de substancial en la bellesa i en la revelacio de les harmonies de la vida, sino que dona a l'art aquella gloria dels antics i de l'Edat Mitjana, en la qual no es copiava la realitat bella de les coses existents, sino que l'esperit es llançava a la creació de belles realitats. Joaquim Folch i Torres, 'Cap d'Any. Als Amics', *La Veu de Catalunya*, 1 January 1914, sec. Pàgina Artística.

[401] The articles in question are: Eugeni D'Ors, 'Pel Cubisme a l'Estructuralisme', *La Veu de Catalunya*, 1 February 1912, sec. Pàgina Artística; Joaquim Folch i Torres, 'Del Cubisme y del Estructuralisme Pictórich', *La Veu de Catalunya*, 8 February 1912, sec. Pàgina Artística; Joaquín Torres-García, 'Consideracions al voltant del cubisme y del estructuralisme pictórich', *La Veu de Catalunya*, 22 February 1912, sec. Pàgina Artística. This was not the first discussion of Cubism in the artistic press of Barcelona. D'Ors himself had already written in a similar vein in the same newspaper a few months earlier. Eugeni D'Ors, 'Glosari - Del cubisme', *La Veu de Catalunya*, 9 October 1911.

ample coverage in the press, including the reproduction of a considerable number of cubist works.[402]

In the articles in question all three authors expressed a positive opinion of Cubism on account of what they perceived to be its structural 'frankness', the way it made its pictorial constructive problems explicit. The notion of construction was central to noucentista art theory. In a previous article by d'Ors on cubism, he had admired its practitioners for not hiding the constructive logic of their paintings, for showing instead its "naked" form, stressing it, so that painting, "which had turned excessively musical, now becomes decidedly architectural."[403] Folch, for his part, underlined that painting must be understood, first and foremost, as "something built out of matter", a view that Torres-García unreservedly subscribed to. All three authors also saw merit in the non-realistic nature of cubist representation, the way it conveyed an idea of reality rather than its appearance. While they criticized certain aspects of Cubism, such as a perceived tendency to abstraction (d'Ors) or a perceived pursuit of "corporeal solutions" that implied volume in painting (Folch), they appreciated lessons to be learned from it for the development of the "structuralism" that in view of all three authors must form the basis of noucentista painting.

In these articles the authors' differing stances towards past artistic traditions become apparent in the examples they provide of art forms already possessing some of the qualities they highlight in Cubism. D'Ors, a convicted classicist, praised Cubism as a first attempt at an "ascetically constructive pictorial art" and related its structural "honesty" with that of a Doric temple. Folch, for his part, gave his own examples of past artistic traditions displaying the same non-mimetic approach to representation, and the same treatment of painting as something built out of matter, that he valued in Cubism:

> "The images on Greek vases, therefore, are the best of paintings. In them, the artist does not seek to translate a real thing, but rather embellish a surface

[402] On the reception of Cubism in Barcelona, see Mercè Vidal i Jansà, *L'Exposició d'art cubista de les Galeries Dalmau 1912* (Barcelona: Publicacions Universitat de Barcelona, 1996); Jordi Falgàs, 'Gleizes and Picabia at Galeries Dalmau: Too Green for Our Teeth', in *Barcelona and Modernity: Picasso, Gaudí, Miró, Dalí*, ed. William H. Robinson, Jordi Falgàs, and Carmen Belen Lord (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 2007), 319–27.

[403] D'Ors, 'Glosari - Del cubisme'.

through specific technical means. Immediately behind Greek vases […] comes the medieval painting of representations and ideas. It, too, complies with the principles of matter and finds its glory precisely in being just painting. But this is followed by Renaissance painting, the true interruption of the logical evolution of the arts, which cleverly conceals the means in order to please not through painting itself, but through what the painting translates."[404]

Greek art was, therefore, at the top of Folch's hierarchical understanding of art, but it was closely followed by medieval art. In his view, moreover, Renaissance mimetism had marked an interruption in a "logical evolution" of the arts that had only been resumed with modernism. This suggests that Folch's appreciation for the 'classical' was selective – it encompassed the art of ancient Greece while explicitly excluding the Renaissance – and in no way implied a rejection of the medieval, as was the case with d'Ors. Finally, Torres-García expressed his wholehearted agreement with d'Ors' and Folch's key ideas and went on to offer his own examples of art forms from the past worth learning from for their structured, flat, non-mimetic conveying of ideas. Like Folch, he mentioned in the first place Greek vases. Unlike him, however, he chose as his second example not medieval painting, but "the Byzantine".

This is a subtle but eloquent variation on Folch's choice of models. As will be discussed in the next chapter, Torres-García's stance towards the medieval in his Barcelona years is ambiguous, a largely overt rejection punctuated by instances of veiled appreciation. Here, his reference to the Byzantine instead of the medieval could owe to just such a rejection. Other factors, however, related to power dynamics within Noucentisme, could also be at play. Torres-García was the only one of the three theorists discussed here who was also an artist. As such, in his practice, he was subject to the

[404] From the Catalan "La imatgería dels vasos grechs, en aquest càs, sería la millor de les pintures. Allí l'artista no cerca pas traduir una cosa real, sinó embellir segons uns medis tècnichs, una superficie. Immediatament se'ns presenta darrera la pintura dels vasos grechs, que vol complaurens per aquests medis d'embelliment, la pintura mitjeval de les representacions y les idees. Ella aixís mateix vé a complir, donchs, ab els principis de la materia y troba sa gloria justament en ser pintura. Mes, segueix al seu darrera la pintura del Renaixement, la veritable interrupció de la lògica evolució de les arts, el qual per l'enginy dissimula els medis a fí de complaure no per la pintura en sí, sinó per lo que ella tradueix". Folch i Torres, 'Del Cubisme y del Estructuralisme Pictórich'.

highly influential critical opinion of both d'Ors and Folch. D'Ors' Mediterranean classicism implied a strong ideological opposition to the 'Northern' medieval, a position that Torres-García may not have wished to be seen to challenge by seconding Folch's appreciation for the art of the Middle Ages. As an artist Torres-García was conceivably aware of the close formal links between Byzantine and Western medieval art, among them, not least, their shared flatness and non-mimetic representation of ideas. By valuing these qualities in Byzantine art he was effectively agreeing with Folch's views while celebrating an artistic tradition that was, if not classical, at least Greek, Mediterranean, and therefore more acceptable to d'Ors than the medieval.

Torres-García's choice of examples in his article speaks to his reservations with regard to medieval art at a time when he was fully immersed in noucentista art theory and striving for recognition in the classicist atmosphere of the Barcelona art scene. Yet, it was also during this period that he had to engage with gothic architecture and stained glass through his involvement in heritage restoration programmes. The following chapter will examine how, over time and already away from Barcelona, his noucentista reservations towards the medieval evolved into a still conflicted but nonetheless fruitful relationship with it. More specifically, it will examine how gothic architecture and stained glass may have informed a long, stop-and-start, process of pictorial deconstruction and construction that culminated in the Constructive Universalism theory and practice he developed from the late 1920s onwards.

2 Joaquín Torres-García, the medieval in his oeuvre and the development of the "cathedral style"

The rupturist narrative on Joaquín Torres-García: from noucentista classicism to avant-garde constructive painting

Torres-García's early career in Barcelona, before he left for New York in 1920, is commonly presented as comprising two phases. In the first one, from the early 1900s, he was closely involved with Noucentisme, having been 'anointed' a noucentista by Eugeni d'Ors, the movement's initial promoter and theorist. Alongside his artistic practice he was himself a prolific thinker of Noucentisme, writing extensively in art periodicals as well as publishing books on art theory.[405] His pictorial production at the time therefore followed a classicist path, with subject matter dominated by Mediterranean and ancient Greece themes (Fig. 70 and 71).

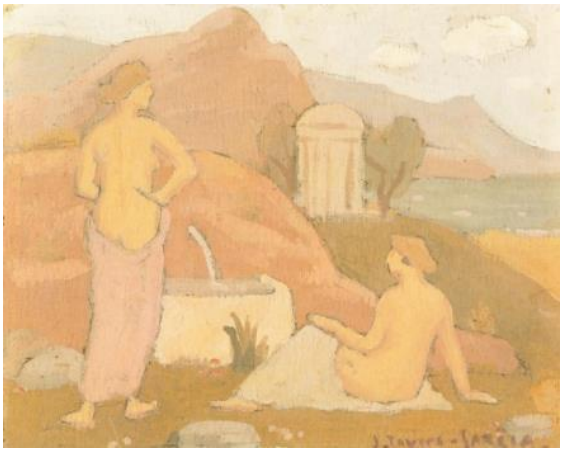

Fig. 70 Joaquín Torres-García, *Escena neoclásica* (*Neoclassical Scene*), c. 1912, oil on cardboard, 40 x 50 cm. (CR 1912.10) Barcelona: Private collection.

Fig. 71 Joaquín Torres-García, *Arquitectura con figuras clásicas* (*Architecture with Classical Figures*), 1914, tempera on cardboard and wood with nails, 55 x 62 cm. (CR 1914.01) Montevideo: Museo Torres García.

[405] Torres-García remained a prolific writer throughout his career. His online Catalogue Raisonné lists over twenty books and over one hundred articles penned by him. See http://www.torresgarcia.com/literature/index.php?TorresGarcia&sort=LitType&maxRows=500

The beginning of the second phase of his Barcelona career is consensually placed in historiography at around 1916-1917.[406] Around this time Torres-García became disillusioned with the Noucentisme project and its internal politics,[407] and veered closer to the city's avant-garde scene. The latter's growing dynamism – fuelled in part by the arrival in Barcelona of artists taking refuge from the First World War given Spain's neutrality in the conflict[408] – also attracted fellow Uruguayan Rafael Barradas, who is considered a key factor in the drastic shift in Torres-García's pictorial language at the time.[409] Indeed, Torres-García's work during this period shows a mutation from the previous Arcadian themes to more markedly geometric representations of the modern city surrounding him (Fig. 72 and 73).

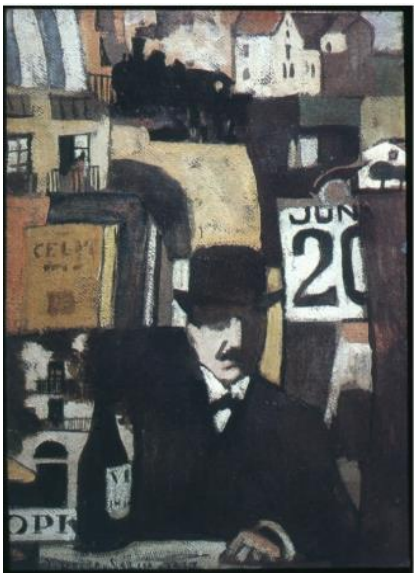

Fig. 72 Joaquín Torres-García, *Figura con paisaje de ciudad* (*Figure with Landscape of the City*), 1917, oil on cardboard, 70 x 49.4 cm. (CR1917.09) Buenos Aires: Private collection.

Fig. 73 Joaquín Torres-García, *Escena de una calle de Barcelona* (*Barcelona Street Scene*), 1917, oil on cardboard, 61.6 x 72.4 cm. (CR1917.12) Barcelona: Private collection.

This shift opened up a variety of approaches to painting that the artist developed throughout the 1920s and eventually gave way to the grid-based compositions with

[406] Mª Lluïsa Faxedas Brujats, 'Barradas' Vibrationism and Its Catalan Context', *RIHA Journal*, no. 0135 (15 July 2016), http://www.riha-journal.org/articles/2016/0131-0140-special-issue-southern-modernisms/0135-faxedas-brujats.

[407] Joaquín Torres-García, *El Descubrimiento de Si Mismo: Cartas a Julio Que Tratan de Cosas Muy Importantes Para Los Artistas* (Girona: Tip. de Masó, 1917); as quoted in Jardí, *Torres García*, 80.

[408] Robinson, 'Avant-Gardes for a New Century', 310.

[409] Morse, 'Art-Evolució and Vibracionismo: Torres-García, Barradas, and an Art of Higher Consciousness'; Faxedas Brujats, 'Barradas' Vibrationism and Its Catalan Context'.

symbolic and cryptographic inscriptions[410] – designated by him as Constructive Universalism – that would dominate the rest of his career and for which he became internationally renowned. (Fig. 74 and 75).

Fig. 74 Joaquín Torres-García, *Nature morte avec théiére* (*Still Life with Teapot*), 1929, oil on canvas, 60 x 73.5 cm. (CR1929.10) Estate of the artist.

Fig. 75 Joaquín Torres-García, *Constructif avec poisson* (*Constructive with Fish*), 1929, oil on canvas, 60.6 x 73.3 cm. (CR1929.54) Estate of the artist.

Torres-García's departure from classicist, Mediterranean-inspired art around 1916-1917 and his adoption of a more avant-garde pictorial language focused on the modern city has been portrayed in historiography as a critical point of break with the past. According to this view, at this point in his career, Torres-García left behind his own noucentista enquiries and lost interest in the idealised Greek legacy championed by the movement as the ultimate source for Catalan modern art.[411] Indeed, works such as *Figure with Cityscape* and *Barcelona Street Scene* (shown above) form a stark contrast with those of his previous practice, and therefore support the notion of a break, of an entirely new artistic path undertaken by the artist. Reinforcing this obvious change of direction in his formal and subject-matter enquiries, Torres-García's rupturist stance seems further confirmed by his own writings at the time calling for a departure from

[410] Pérez-Oramas, 'The Anonymous Rule: Joaquín Torres-García, the Schematic Impulse, and Arcadian Modernity', 25. lists the variety of languages and sources explored by the artist during this period: "he passed through a stylized Cubism, was seduced by Dada, returned to the dark, earthly palette of his first cityscapes, and approached the language of Constructivism. Like Fernand Léger, he imagined a world of machines and processes in perpetual motion, and he returned to earthly paradises and depictions of tribal life, becoming African, Iberian, and Polynesian, half Neo-Plasticist, half Neolithic."

[411] Jardí, *Torres García*, 83.

artistic tradition. This is particularly visible in a book he wrote in 1916 entitled *El descubrimiento de si mismo. Cartas a Julio, que tratan de cosas muy importantes para los artistas* (*Self-Discovery. Letters to Julio Dealing With Very Important Things for Artists*), a comprehensive reflection on art that he composed in the form of letters to an imaginary correspondent. This much quoted text abounds with advice for artists to leave the past behind, such as:

> "Forget the past, including your own. Look upon it as a dead thing that must have nothing to do with the present so that none of that past will overcome you, and, thus, the originality that shall sprout from you at all times, as from a fountain, shall have the freshness of living things. [...] In the end, my friend Julio, be a new man in every moment, and don't bother to check whether or not this new man looks like the old man, the dead man, the man from yesterday or the one from an hour ago!"[412]

A revised and enlarged version of the same book, published in 1917, incorporates the transcription of a well-known conference Torres-García gave at the Dalmau Gallery early that year. In it, he stressed the same idea again by declaring: "Nothing is more beautiful than forgetting the past and embarking on an adventure. I am the enemy of tradition of any kind whatsoever."[413] This was shortly followed by another well-known piece by the artist, *Art Evolució: a manera de manifest* (*Art*

[412] Joaquín Torres-García, *El Descubrimiento de Si Mismo: Cartas a Julio Que Tratan de Cosas Muy Importantes Para Los Artistas* (Terrassa: Est. Tip. La Industrial Morral & Co., 1916), 29–30. From the Spanish "Olvida todo lo pasado, aún lo tuyo. Mira todo eso como cosa muerta, pensando que con nada del presente ha de tener relación, a fin de que nada de eso pasado, se te imponga, y así lo original que brotará de tí en todo momento, como de Fuente, tendrá la frescura de las cosas vivas. (…) En fin, amigo Julio, sé a cada momento *un hombre nuevo*, sin cuidarte de si este hombre nuevo se parece o no al viejo, al muerto, al de ayer, al de hace una hora!" As translated and quoted in Faxedas Brujats, 'Barradas' Vibrationism and Its Catalan Context', para. 6.

[413] From the Spanish: "Nada más bello que olvidar el pasado para ir a la aventura. Soy enemigo de toda tradición del género que sea." As quoted in Jardí, *Torres García*, 83. This quote has been amply used in scholarship in order to emphasize an idea of rupture in Torres-García's trajectory, for example in Aarnoud Rommens, *The Art of Joaquín Torres-García: Constructive Universalism and the Inversion of Abstraction* (Routledge, 2016), 6; Emmanuel Guignon, 'The Dunkerke Lighthouse', in *A intuição e a estrutura: de Torres-García a Vieira da Silva, 1929-1949*, ed. Museu Colecção Berardo and IVAM Institut Valencià d'Art Modern (Lisbon: Museu Colecção Berardo; IVAM Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, 2009), 185–89.

Evolution: by way of manifesto), which, in a similar vein, stated: "Nothing that has already been done can be of use to us; not even our own works."[414]

Both of these texts – *El descubrimiento de si mismo* and *Art Evolució* – have been consistently interpreted as evidence of an inflection point in Torres-García's career; a point where he set out to break with all preceding art, both his own as a noucentista and that of any previous tradition; [415] a point where he called on his fellow practitioners, too, to leave the past behind.[416] However, while the quotes above suggest a genuine desire by the artist to embark on new artistic ventures, I would argue that reducing this to a blanket break with artistic tradition over-simplifies the issue at hand. As will be explored in the following section, further writings by Torres-García – some penned while still in Barcelona – as well as his own work over the following years, suggest a far more complex relationship with the art of the past, both his own and that of artistic tradition(s) generally.

How much of a rupture?

Torres-García's much quoted stance against the artistic past, as expressed in *El descubrimiento de si mismo*, was actually nuanced by other passages of the same book, where he explicitly acknowledged the value of art from previous periods as a source for a modern artist:

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[414] From the Catalan "Res que ja sigui realitzat, pot servirnos; ni les mateixes obres nostres." Joaquín Torres García, "Art-Evolució: a manera de manifest", in *Un enemic del poble*, 8, November 1917. This 'manifesto' was subsequentely translated into French and Italian in the single published issue of another avant-garde magazine, *Arc Voltaic*, 1, February 1918.

[415] The rupturist, anti-traditionalist statement from *El descubrimiento de si mismo*, quoted in an early monograph on Torres García, Jardí, *Torres García*, 83, has been used extensively in subsequent historiography on the artist. It has been interpreted as evidence of the artist's way of "mocking the past", Emmanuel Guignon, 'The Dunkerke Lighthouse', in *A intuição e a estrutura: de Torres García a Vieira da Silva, 1929-1949*, ed. Nicolás Arocena Armas (Lisbon: Museu Colecção Berardo; IVAM Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, 2009), 186; of Torres-García abandoning the past as a source of references in order to "live intensely in the personal subjective present", Alejandro Díaz, 'Joaquín Torres García: Integridade da arte', in *Joaquín Torres García: geometría, criação, proporção*, by Alejandro Díaz and Jimena Perera (Porto Alegre, Brazil: Fundação Iberê Camargo, 2011), 26; and as his way of "repudiating his previous adherence to neoclassicism in [a] belated echo of the polemical stance of futurism" Rommens, *The Art of Joaquín Torres-García*, 6.

[416] Fundação Arpad Szenes-Vieira da Silva, *J. Torres-Garcia* (Lisboa: Fundação Arpad Szenes-Vieira da Silva, 1996), Biografia, no page number.

"[...] if, on the one side, the artist must reject everything not coming from himself, on the other side he must search in the works of the past the path that must take him to the pinnacle, because this is not the work of a man, but of generations of men. [...] There is no doubt, therefore, that *we must learn from the works of the past*. The great masters are and will always be masters. The great works will not only awaken those with the proper disposition, turning them into the creators of equally great works, but will also point the way to the top".[417]

Torres-García makes it very clear, however, that appreciation for the art of the past, and the lessons it may hold, does not legitimate its mere imitation. He thus accompanies these assertions with warnings against the perils of unconsciously falling into the trap of copying.[418] Instead, the artist must relentlessly aim for originality. For Torres-García, "that which is *original* – within the artist, it goes without saying, but also within man – is sacred".[419] Crucially, the search for "the original" – a quest that characterised so much of modernism – was, in his understanding, not incompatible with an interest in "tradition". This much he acknowledged, for example, in a letter to fellow artist and critic J. M Sucre, written toward the end of his years in Barcelona:

"I think people here are very traditionalist. I am too, even though I boast about being current. But my tradition goes further, to the original, to the origin, where we can all meet, ancient and modern – and future – in an eternal present. Because I believe in nothing but the spiritual man."[420]

Torres-García's emphatic 1916 positioning "against tradition of any kind whatsoever" is therefore contradicted by these words written a few years later, which

[417] My italics. From the Spanish: "[…] si por un lado el artista debe rechazar todo cuanto no venga de él, por otro debe buscar en las obras del pasado, el camino que debe llevarle a la altura, ya que ésta no es obra de un hombre, sinó de generaciones de hombres. […] Que debemos aprender, pues, en las obras del pasado, no cabe duda. Los grandes maestros son y serán siempre maestros. Las grandes obras, no solo despertarán a los bien dispuestos, para hacerles creadores de otras tan grandes, sino que señalarán el camino para llegar a la cumbre." Torres-García, *El Descubrimiento de Si Mismo*, 1916, 21,22.

[418] Torres-García, 15, 24.

[419] Torres-García, 22.

[420] From the Catalan: "Crec que els d'aquí són molt tradicionalistes. Jo també ho sóc, a pesar de ventar-me de ser actual. Però, la meva tradició va més lluny, a l'original, a l'origen, a on ens podem trobar tots, antic i moderns - i futurs - en un present etern. Perquè no crec més que en l'home espiritual." Letter to J. M. Sucre (1886-1969) fellow artist and critic, 15 January 1919, published in Pilar García-Sedas, *Joaquim Torres-Garcia: Epistolari Català: 1909-1936* (Barcelona: Curial : Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 1997), 42–43.

suggest that ‘tradition’, far from being something to disentangle oneself from, was in fact something to immerse oneself in, in search for that elusive ‘original’. It is an understanding of tradition that brings together the ancient, the modern and the future "in an eternal present"; one that corresponds to the notion of "compressed temporality" posited by Pérez-Oramas to explain Torres-García's idea of modernity.[421]

The apparent inconsistency between both statements is not a rare occurrence in Torres-García’s writing. In fact, in *El Descubrimiento de sí mismo* he had already acknowledged a conflicted feeling about forgetting the past and advocated "saying whatever occurs to you at all times, without fear of contradiction."[422] In effect, a degree of incongruity has been noted as a defining feature of his written and visual oeuvre,[423] most recently by Pérez-Oramas who describes Torres-García as "an artist who seems to have incessantly cultivated the spirit of contradiction".[424]

Notwithstanding his ambiguity with regard to the notion of ‘tradition’, Torres-García’s letter to Sucre a year before his departure from Barcelona does appear to express his disillusionment with the city’s art scene of the late 1910s, which he now found too conservative. Indeed, while avant-garde trends had been developing in the city for some years, the bulk of its artistic production, critique and institutions were still mostly dominated by Noucentisme, which meant more limited opportunities – including commissions – for avant-garde practitioners.

Against this particular backdrop, therefore, Torres-García’s 1916 words against tradition might still be interpreted as a critique against Noucentisme. In this case, his above-quoted calls to break with the past could be construed as a genuine and coherent intention to leave behind, if not what he considered the great art of the past, at least his own noucentista practice. In effect, since 1916 Torres-García had been exploring news paths of pictorial research as part of Barcelona’s avant-garde circles. As a result, his work

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[421] Pérez-Oramas, ‘The Anonymous Rule: Joaquín Torres-García, the Schematic Impulse, and Arcadian Modernity’, 30–31 as discussed in the Literature Review section of this thesis.

[422] Torres-García, *El Descubrimiento de Si Mismo*, 1916, 30, 31.

[423] Braun, ‘Joaquín Torres-García: The Alchemical Grid’, 253; Mario H. Gradowczyk, ‘Torres-García and His Strategies with Regard to the Primitive’, in *Torres-García: Darrere La Màscara Constructiva*, ed. Marc Domènech Tomàs (Girona: Fundació Caixa Girona, 2007), 236.

[424] Pérez-Oramas, ‘The Anonymous Rule: Joaquín Torres-García, the Schematic Impulse, and Arcadian Modernity’, 34.

of the following years has, on the surface, little in common with that produced before 1916-1917. It is this obvious shift in his work, both in form and subject matter, coupled with selected quotes from his extensive writings at the time, that has been interpreted by some authors as evidence of Torres-García's rejection of Noucentisme.[425] But here, too, this artist's contradictory nature comes into play. Although his charge of excessive traditionalism in Barcelona does convey a desire to pull away from its noucentista-dominated art scene – which he would do the following year with his move to New York – it does not follow that he renounced the work and writings he had produced while he had been a convicted advocate of the movement. In fact, the opposite appears to be the case. Other writings coeval with his 1916-17 ostensible desire to break with his own past already suggest a conciliatory, rather than rupturist, approach to his practice. In an article equally published in *Un enemic del poble* just two weeks before the much quoted 'Art Evolució', Torres-García wrote:

> "We must always walk forwards. Otherwise, we will never progress. Just as looking back, tying ourselves to a tradition, is stopping, it is also stopping to govern our lives by certain fixed principles [...]. It is true that not only what we acquire through experience but also what we carry with us by inheritance, constitute the basis, at all times, of our personality, of what we are. All of this is undeniable. But since nothing that is really alive is fixed, this background we carry, if we want it to be alive, we must constantly modify it, enlarge it, adjusting it to the facts, and thus we progress."[426]

Torres-García's words convey an unquestionably forward-looking attitude to art while at the same time acknowledging the impossibility of denying one's past – thus countering the rupturist stance often over-emphasized in said historiography. For Torres-García, in effect, the artistic past is to be neither shunned nor imitated, but rather

[425] See note 415 above.

[426] From the Catalan: "Devem caminar… sempre endavant, altrament, mai no progressarem. Així com mirar enrera, lligantnos a una tradició, és aturar-se, també ho és el regir la nostra vida per certs principis fixos [...]. Es cert que no sols el adquirit per la pròpia experiència, sinó el que portem en nosaltres per herència, formen la base, en tot moment, de la nostra personalitat, de ço que som. Tot això és innegable. Però com que res que realment visqui és quecom de fixe, aqueix fons nostre, si volem que sigui cosa vivent, devem anar-lo modificant, aixamplant, ajustant-lo als fets, i en aqueix sentit progressem." Joaquín Torres García, "Devem caminar…", in *Un enemic del poble*, 7, November 1917.

learned from. Instead, the artist's practice should "seek to express the unity and harmony of an eternal present"[427], constantly questioning itself in order to 'evolve'.[428]

Thus, despite the obvious shift in pictorial language occurring in this artist's work around 1916-17, and again in the late 1920s, significant lines of continuity, as well as returns and revisits, can be found spanning his entire career. From the standpoint of art theory, for instance, Faxedas notes how "[Torres-García's] transition from Noucentisme to the avant-garde never implied a complete rejection of all of the noucentista artistic principles; keystones of noucentista painting theory, such a structure, architecture or construction,[429] would reappear even in the texts he wrote for the journal *Cercle et carré* in 1930".[430] In a similar vein, Jed Morse observes that some of the key ideas expressed by Torres-García in *Universalismo Constructivo* (his 1944 seminal work, which set out to synthesise the all-encompassing art theory he had arrived at over more than three decades of practice), "such as painting like architecture, proportion and constancy, closely reflect the ideals of [his] previous noucentista painting."[431] This is also plainly visible in Torres-García's thinking on mural painting, the core principles of which – subordination of painting to architecture, anti-illusionistic flatness and chromatism – are set down in almost identical terms in his 1914 article in the fully noucentista *Revista de l'Escola de Decoració*[432] and again in *Universalismo Constructivo* of 1940.[433]

From the standpoint of his artistic production, too, there are significant lines of continuity that can be seen bridging his earlier years with his practice of the 1920s, a period of diversified experimentation that was critical to the development of his Constructive Universalism formula. The years 1916-17 mark the first appearance of

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[427] Morse, 'Art-Evolució and Vibracionismo: Torres-García, Barradas, and an Art of Higher Consciousness', 334.

[428] Aside from "Devem caminar..." and "Art-Evolució", the need for a constantly evolving practice is also discussed by Torres-García in a series of five articles entitled "Evolucionismo", published *in La Publicidad* between December 1917 and March 1918. Morse, 333.

[429] As already discussed with regard to the 1911-1912 *La Veu de Catalunya* articles on structuralism and Cubism, quoted in note 401.

[430] Faxedas Brujats, 'Barradas' Vibrationism and Its Catalan Context', para. 11.

[431] Morse, 'Art-Evolució and Vibracionismo: Torres-García, Barradas, and an Art of Higher Consciousness', 334.

[432] Joaquín Torres-García, 'Notes sobre art', *Revista de l'Escola de Decoració*, March 2014, 5, PDF, BFT.

[433] Joaquín Torres-García, 'Lección 119 - Nuestro problema de decoración mural', in *Universalismo constructivo*, vol. 2, 2 vols (Madrid: Alianza, 1984), 653–59.

modern urban themes in Torres-García's work, and these take centre-stage over the following years with his move to New York. Consequently, this has been presented as a point in Torres-García's career where he "abandoned the nostalgic temptations" of Noucentisme to "throw himself into expressing with ever greater intensity the delirious and ferocious vibrancy of modern life".[434] However, the ostensible abandonment of the Arcadian subject matter to which he had become so attached in his noucentista years turned out to be short-lived. As early as 1920, at a time when he was mostly concerned with portraying the hustle and bustle of New York City in increasingly geometrically partitioned compositions (Fig. 76 and 77), Torres-García also produced two idealised classical landscapes that strongly resonate with his pre-1916 work (Fig. 78 and 79).

Fig. 76 Joaquín Torres-García, *New York Street Scene*, c.1920, oil and collage on academy board, 45.7 x 60.8 cm. (CR1920.07) New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery (Gift of Collection Société Anonyme).

Fig. 77 Joaquín Torres-García, *New York Street Scene*, 1920, oil on paper mounted on wood, 47.5 x 65.5 cm. (CR1920.14) Washington D.C.: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution.

Fig. 78 Joaquín Torres-García, *Paisaje con templete* (*Landscape with Temple*), 1920, oil on cardboard, 65.5 x 97.5 cm. (CR1920.22) Barcelona: Private collection.

Fig. 79 Joaquín Torres-García, *La fuente* (*The Fountain*), 1920, oil on cardboard, 31.3 x 47.6 cm. (CR1920.23) Madrid: Private collection.

[434] Joaquín Torres-García and Guido Castillo, *Primer Manifiesto Del Constructivismo*, 2ª ed (Madrid: Cultura hispánica, 1976), 20–21.

It is worth considering the circumstances of this resurfacing of Arcadia in Torres-García's practice. Since he had ostensibly left Noucentisme behind over three years before, during his '1916-1917 crisis', he had been devoted to capturing the life, rhythm and forms of the urban present, first in Barcelona and since June 1920 in New York. On arrival in this city he had found its vibrancy fascinating, but also overwhelming. In *Impresiones de Nueva York* (*Impressions of New York*) he described the place as "one of a kind", a city that struck him by its immensity, its towering skyscrapers, bridges held by a thousand cables, the deafening rush of all manner of vehicles, the subway tunnels, transporting millions of people. Yet, he also expressed how such a city "crushes the artist".[435] Thus, while fascinated by its modernity, he found the place, as noted by Pérez-Oramas, disturbing and challenging.[436]

It is perhaps out of a need for momentary refuge from the urban frenzy of New York that Torres-García chooses to revisit the tranquil, idealised, bucolic scenes of his noucentista production. Striking as the coevalness of such disparate works might seem, *Landscape with Temple* and *The Fountain* do not constitute an isolated occurrence in the artist's post-1916 trajectory, but rather early instances of a resumed classicist-Mediterranean line of pictorial practice that would intensify during his 1925-26 stay at Villefranche-sur-Mer and even linger into his Paris years.

The artist himself describes his sojourn at this Côte d'Azur town as a wonderful time where he is at peace, he has reencountered the Mediterranean landscape and the two previous years of "Cubism in Italy have completely vanished, and now, with more conviction than ever, I have gone back to the tradition of the great classic art."[437] A glance at the artist's catalogue raisonné reveals how up to 1927 his varied painted oeuvre, dominated by portraits, urban landscapes and harbours, is interspersed with dozens of works unquestionably revisiting his earlier noucentista themes and

[435] Juan Fló, *J. Torres-García: New York* (Montevideo: Fundación Torres-García; Casa Editorial HUM, 2007), 75. This book contains a facsimile version of the 1921 unpublished *Impresiones de Nueva York* by Torres-García, as quoted in Pérez-Oramas, 'The Anonymous Rule: Joaquín Torres-García, the Schematic Impulse, and Arcadian Modernity', 22.

[436] Pérez-Oramas, 'The Anonymous Rule: Joaquín Torres-García, the Schematic Impulse, and Arcadian Modernity', 22.

[437] Joaquín Torres-García, 'Esbós Autobiogràfic Del Pintor Torres-García', *D'ací i d'allà*, February 1926, 439.

compositions, including the classical architectural maquettes framing simulated frescoes (Fig. 80).[438]

Fig. 80 Joaquín Torres García, *Tres figuras junto a una fuente y arquitectura* (*Three Figures next to a Fountain and Architecture*), 1926, tempera, wood strips, and nails on wood, 42 x 82.5 cm. (CR1926.29) New York: Private collection.

In most of these cases, there is a perceptible revision of the mode of depiction of the subject matter: figures appear more simplified, sometimes slightly more angular, the rendering is less neat than in his 1910s noucentista works. At times, however, his self-quoting is so literal, that it has proved difficult to place accurately certain works at one side or the other of the supposed 1916-1917 Noucentisme-to-avant-garde watershed.[439] Therefore, with regard to both artistic theory and practice, Torres-García's apparent break with Noucentisme must be viewed with as much caution as his ostensible desire to move on from artistic tradition in general. His claim that "Nothing that has already been done can be of use to us; not even our own works"[440] is repeatedly contradicted by his own theory and practice.

[438] See Catalogue Raisonné references 1920 (22, 23); 1922 (07, 13); 1923 (09, 12); 1924 (13, 42); 1925 (01, 02, 04, 05, 07, 08, 10, 11, 13, 18, 19, 25); 1926 (02, 03, 05, 09, 11, 19, 20, 23, 24, 26-30, 32, 34, 37-41, 49, 50); 1927 (40-44, 58, 59, 61, 65, 103-105).

[439] Such is the case of *Two figures under arches*, CR 1912.03, dated to either 1912 or 1927, and of *Architectural construction with figures*, CR 1915.04 dated to either c. 1914 or 1925-26.

[440] See quote above, note 414.

This return to previous themes and modes of depiction is not limited to his noucentista repertoire, but rather a constant in his career. [441] It is what Pérez-Oramas describes as "a practice of stylistic changes, a frequent revisiting of earlier forms that he seemed to have moved beyond (that) would characterize his work until the end".[442] Thus, rather than a regression, or a nostalgic throwback to the idealised classicism of his early years, the reappearance of Arcadia in Torres-García's oeuvre must be seen as part of a non-linear development of various overlapping lines of enquiry that he aimed to synthesize into a modern form. In this endeavour, Mediterranean Antiquity was but one of the manifold sources that Torres-García explored – not only as a repertoire of motifs but also from a "structural" perspective[443] – in his quest to reconcile what he had described in the above-mentioned 1919 letter to Sucre as "the original, [...] the ancient and modern – and future – in an eternal present".[444]

Another key source in Torres-García's pursuit of this "primitive" eternal present is to be found in the legacy of the Pre-Columbian American peoples.[445] Both of these threads – the ancient Mediterranean and Pre-Columbian American – have been amply explored in this artist's historiography, most recently in his latest monographic exhibition, aptly titled *Torres-García, the Arcadian Modern*.[446] Other sources such as African and Early Renaissance art have also been acknowledged as part of Torres-García's 'primitivist' enquiries.[447] The art of the Middle Ages, for its part, while occasionally mentioned,[448] remains arguably the most underexplored as a contributor

[441] Pérez-Oramas, 'The Anonymous Rule: Joaquín Torres-García, the Schematic Impulse, and Arcadian Modernity', 20.

[442] Pérez-Oramas, 25.

[443] Pérez-Oramas, 13.

[444] From the Catalan: "Crec que els d'aquí són molt tradicionalistes. Jo també ho sóc, a pesar de ventar-me de ser actual. Però, la meva tradició va més lluny, a l'original, a l'origen, a on ens podem trobar tots, antic i moderns - i futurs - en un present etern. Perquè no crec més que en l'home espiritual." Letter to J. M. Sucre (1886-1969) fellow artist and critic, 15 January 1919, published in Pilar García-Sedas, *Joaquim Torres Garcia: Epistolari Català: 1909-1936* (Barcelona: Curial : Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 1997), 42–43.

[445] Barbara Braun, *Pre-Columbian Art and the Post-Columbian World: Ancient American Sources of Modern Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Publishers, 1993).

[446] Pérez-Oramas, *Joaquín Torres-García: The Arcadian Modern*.

[447] Torres-García's primitivism is the subject of essays by several authors in Marc Domènech Tomàs, ed., *Torres-García: Darrere La Màscara Constructiva* (Girona: Fundació Caixa Girona, 2007).

[448] Domènech Tomàs, 10.

to Torres-García's art. The following section addresses precisely this by examining the place that medieval art occupies in Torres-García's written and visual oeuvre. Special attention in this examination is given to his acquaintance with a specific form of medieval art – stained glass – during his Barcelona years, and the role this experience may have played in the later development of Constructive Universalism.

Torres-García's conflicted stance towards the medieval

Despite Torres-García's ambivalence towards medieval art during his noucentista period (discussed in the previous chapter), the art of the Middle Ages features repeatedly as a relevant reference in his later theorisation of Constructive Universalism. Writing in 1937, for example, in the magazine *Círculo y Cuadrado*, he stated:

> "Soon, when our obsolete materialist pseudo-civilisation falls, the need for another art will be felt: an art (once again) within the great human tradition, such as that of Antiquity and the Middle Ages, and of the continents of America."[449]

In Torres-García's copious written oeuvre, his anti-materialist political views are not often expressed as clearly as in the above excerpt.[450] For Torres-García art and society are indissociable; his lifelong advocacy of mural painting over easel painting is illustrative of that belief. In 1937 he views the world he lives in as decadent and corrupt and predicts that for art to be able to contribute to a new civilization it will have to connect to what he calls the "Great Tradition", one that began in prehistoric times, was interrupted by the Renaissance and has only resurfaced in certain modern artistic

[449] From the Spanish: "A no tardar, tras el derrumbe de nuestra caduca y pseudo-civilización materialista, se hará sentir la necesidad de otro arte: de un arte (nuevamente) dentro de la gran tradición humana, cual el de la Antigüedad y Edad Media, y de los continentes de América." Torres-García, 'El arte naturalista y el arte geométrico', in *Círculo y Cuadrado*, second series, October 1937.

[450] Torres-García tends to omit politics from his writings. In a rare explicit reflection on the subject of art and communism, written in 1942, he stresses his non-bourgeois attitude to material posessions while stating "I detest politics and the political struggle. (…) I am by nature an idealist." From the Spanish: "Detesto la política y la lucha política; toda guerra en el campo real. Y, si soy por naturaleza idealista ¿quén tendrá derecho a exigir que no lo sea?" in Joaquín Torres-García, 'Arte y comunismo', in *Universalismo constructivo: contribución a la unificación del arte y la cultura de América* (Buenos Aires: Poseidon, 1944), 932.

proposals, beginning with Impressionism and Cézanne.[451] This quote is, in fact, very similar to another one from 1913 (reproduced in full further below) in which he claimed that the Great Tradition had ended with Raphael, and that with the "Venetians" (by which he presumably meant 16th century Venetian painting) a "deviation towards realism" began that only ended with modern Impressionism.[452] The key difference between the 1913 and 1937 quotes on the Great Tradition appears to be in the political associations he traces in the latter, which were absent from the former. Thus, in 1937 by associating the post-medieval with materialism, Torres-García was echoing a longstanding progressive discourse – seen for example in Worringer and Freundlich in Part I – that celebrated the Middle Ages as the pre-bourgeois.

Other references to the medieval, this time related to the notions of civilization, abstraction and construction, are contained in his 1938 *Constructive Doctrine*: [453]

> "The tradition of civilization is the tradition of the ABSTRACT MAN. The barbarian only lives in the concrete, real, man. Tradition of the ABSTRACT MAN: tradition of construction. The man of all time: next to the pre-historian, next to the primitive, next to the Aztec and the Inca, next to the Egyptian and the Greek – in the Middle Ages – there he was."[454]

The capitals for 'abstract man' are as in the original. The emphasis on this term, however, must not be construed to mean that Torres-García subscribed to the notion of abstraction as self-referential art, which he in fact explicitly rejected. Abstraction was for him the expression of ideas by non-mimetic representation. The abstract, in his

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[451] Guido Castillo, 'El primer manifiesto del constructivismo de Joaquín Torres García', in *J. Torres-García: dibujos del universalismo constructivo* (Montevideo: Casa de América; Museo Torres García, 2001), 16.

[452] Joaquín Torres-García, 'Pintura decorativa', in *Notes sobre art* (Girona: Masó, 1913), 44.

[453] Joaquín Torres-García, *La tradición del hombre abstracto: doctrina constructivista* (Montevideo: Asociacion de Arte Constructivo, 1938); as quoted in Margit Rowell, 'Introducció a La Tradició de l'Home Abstracte', in *Torres-García: estructura-dibuix-símbol: París - Montevideo 1924-1944*, ed. Fundació Joan Miró (Barcelona: Fundació Joan Miró, 1986), 27.

[454] From the Catalan: "La tradició de la civilització és la tradició de l'HOME ABSTRACTE. El bàrbar només viu en l'home concret, real. Tradició de l'HOME ABSTRACTE: tradició de la construcció. L'home de tots els temps: al costat del prehistoric, al costat del primitiu, al costat de l'asteca i l'inca, al costat de l'egipci i del grec – a l'Edat Mitjana –, allí hi era." as quoted in Joaquín Torres-García, 'La tradició de l'home abstracte (doctrina constructivista)', in *Torres-García: estructura-dibuix-símbol: París - Montevideo 1924-1944*, ed. Fundació Joan Miró (Barcelona: Fundació Joan Miró, 1986), 29.

understanding of art, was indissociable from the constructive and was to be found, once again, in that Great Tradition than encompassed the Middle Ages.

In yet another instance, in 1940, and this time with regard to mural painting, he wrote:

> "True and real decorative art is based on a structure. That is, the relation of the parts to the whole, as it must also be in architecture. For this reason, it must develop its figurations within the law of frontality and, therefore, its constituent elements must be plastic and not mimetic. Such is the art of the primitives (today the Africans and Australians) and was the art of Antiquity, the Chaldean and Assyrian, the Greek and the Egyptian, the Byzantine and, in part, that of the Middle Ages. Also the art of the American civilizations, the Inca and the Aztec. And in the same line would be Cubism, Neoplasticism and Constructive Art".[455]

Leaving aside the artist's identification of Africans and Australians as contemporary 'primitives' (the colonial implications of which cannot be dealt with here) the relevance of the above quote to this thesis lies in the characteristics that, in his view, true decorative art should possess: focus on structure, frontality, and non-mimetic figuration. These, he claimed, were common to a broad range of periods/cultures/civilizations, including – even if only in part – the Middle Ages. They were also fundamental to avant-garde movements that, like his own Constructive Universalism, were concerned with the notion of construction.

The references to the medieval in the excerpts above attest to Torres-García's perception of the art of this period as a legitimate source for his own practice. Still, qualifying Torres-García's sources within this very diverse mix, Guido Castillo brings them under the artist's unique understanding of classicism which, he clarifies:

[455] From the Spanish: "El verdadero y real arte decorativo tiene por base una estructura. Quiere decir, relación de las partes con un todo, y tal como también debe ser la arquitectura. Por tal razón, debe de desarrollar sus figuraciones dentro de la ley frontal, y por esto, sus elementos componentes han de ser plásticos y no imitativos. Es el arte de los primitivos (hoy los africanos y los australianos) y fue el arte de la Antiguedad, el caldeo y el asirio, el griego y el egipcio, el bizantino, y en parte el del Medio Evo. También el de las civilizaciones de América, el incaico y el azteca. Y en la misma línea estarian el Cubismo y el neoplasticismo y el arte constructivo." Torres-García, 'Lección 119 - Nuestro problema de decoración mural', 657.

"has little to do with what is generally understood under this term, and that often refers to the exact opposite, as the Uruguayan painter finds it rather in Egypt and pre-classical Greece than in the Greece of Pericles; rather in the gothic period than in the Renaissance, and rather in the romanesque than in the gothic."[456]

The last part of this sentence, attributing to Torres-García a preference for the romanesque over the gothic, corroborates a certain ambivalence that can sometimes be sensed in the artist's appreciation of the art produced in the later centuries of the Middle Ages.

In this regard, in two of the three excerpts by Torres-García reproduced at the beginning of this section, there appears to be a subtle reservation in his legitimation of medieval art as a source or reference. In one instance, when he says: "The man of all time: next to the pre-historian, next to the primitive, next to the Aztec and the Inca, next to the Egyptian and the Greek – in the Middle Ages – there he was", the Middle Ages appear slightly apart from all the other references to unequivocally relevant past periods and cultures, separated from them by eloquent dashes, as if added to the list with a certain reservation. In the other instance, in praising "the art of the primitives (today the Africans and Australians) and [...] the art of Antiquity, the Chaldean and Assyrian, the Greek and the Egyptian, the Byzantine and, in part, that of the Middle Ages", he is explicitly acknowledging only part of medieval art as worthy.

This interpretation of ambivalence towards the medieval could admittedly be a case of reading too much into the wording of these excerpts; it could also be, however, that there remained, indeed, in Torres-García a certain reluctance to fully acknowledging, at least explicitly in writing, the relevance of a specific period within medieval art – that of the gothic – to his modern practice. Such ambiguity would stem from his own formative years immersed in *noucentista* classicism, given the generally anti-medieval, and particularly anti-gothic, stance of a considerable part of this movement under the Mediterraneanist identitary guidance of Eugeni d'Ors. Yet, his

[456] From the Spanish "el extraño clasicismo personal de Torres García, el cual tiene poco que ver con lo que comúnmente se conoce bajo ese nombre y que muchas veces significa todo lo contrario porque el pintor uruguayo lo encuentra más en Egipto y la Grecia preclásica que en la Grecia de Pericles; más en el periodo gótico que en el Renacimiento y más en el románico que en el gótico." Castillo, 'El primer manifiesto del constructivismo de Joaquín Torres García', 26.

years in Barcelona also gave him the opportunity to take part in restoration programmes directed at the region's medieval heritage, much cherished by the political class for its association to an idealised medieval period of Catalan 'sovereignty'.

The Majorca Cathedral stained glass project

Torres-García's first recorded hands-on encounter with gothic architecture and stained glass was propitiated by architect Antoni Gaudí when he requested the young artist's assistance in the refurbishment works of the Palma de Majorca Cathedral. This project provided Torres-García an opportunity to explore first-hand the constructive and compositional logic of stained glass, an early contribution to what would become a lifelong study of the notions of structure and construction. Between 1903 and 1905, under Gaudí's guidance and together with painters Jaume Llongueres (1883-1943) and Iu Pascual (1883-1949), Torres-García was to help in the design and execution of new stained glass windows for Palma de Majorca's gothic cathedral.[457]

The collaboration between Gaudí and Torres-García was marked by a generational gap and diverging artistic interests between them. By the time the Majorca stained glass project got underway, Gaudí, then 50, remained a committed representative of a *modernista* movement already on the wane, while Torres-García, in his late 20s, was about to join the ranks of the nascent *noucentista* movement that sought to overcome the former altogether. This resulted in major differences between them, as described by Torres-García himself: "From the smallest to the biggest thing, we dissented in everything […] [Gaudí] was baroque, while I advocated the classical (not the art they call classical), the idea. […] I saw everything at a human scale […] while he, a formidable romantic, saw everything as limitless."[458] Being artistically out of step with

[457] A full documentary record of Gaudí's stained glass work in Majorca Cathedral can be found in J. Bassegoda Nonell, 'Las Vidrieras de La Capilla Real de La Catedral de Majorca', in *La Catedral de Majorca És El Document: La Reforma de Gaudí Cent Anys Després*, ed. Mercè Gambús Saiz, vol. I Les fonts de la reforma, Col·lecció Seu de Majorca 10 (Palma de Majorca: Publicacions Catedral de Majorca, 2015), 514–27. First reproduced in J. Bassegoda Nonell, *El Gran Gaudí* (Sabadell: Ausa, 1989).

[458] From the Spanish: "De lo pequeño a lo grande en todo disentíamos. […] El era un barroco, y yo defendia lo clásico (no el arte que llaman clásico), la idea. […] Yo lo veía todo a medida humana […] y él, que era un formidable romántico, todo lo veía en lo ilimitado." Joaquín Torres García, 'Mestre Antoni

each other left in Torres-García the regret of having been misunderstood, even undervalued, by Gaudí.[459] Still, their disagreements did not prevent the young artist's profound admiration for the older architect. Torres-García would devote a chapter of *Universalismo Constructivo* (Lesson 81) to his early experience with Gaudí, illustrating it with a drawing of the latter's best known work, the Sagrada Familia (Fig. 81).[460]

Fig. 81 Joaquín Torres García, Drawing of the Sagrada Familia illustrating Lesson 81, 'Mestre Antoni Gaudí', in *Universalismo Constructivo*, 1944 [1936], 563.

Torres-García's account in *Universalismo Constructivo* reveals how significant their collaboration was for his acquaintance with the medieval through the eyes of an architect who professed his admiration for the art of the Middle-Ages while positing the need to make its lessons relevant to the modern times. In Torres-García's own words:

Gaudí', in *Universalismo constructivo: contribución a la unificación del arte y la cultura de América* (Buenos Aires: Poseidon, 1944), 561. [1936]

[459] Joaquín Torres-García, *Joaquín Torres-García: historia de mi vida* (Barcelona; Buenos Aires; Mexico: Paidós, 1990), 80.

[460] Torres-García, 'Mestre Antoni Gaudí', 560–66. It is perhaps telling of Torres-García's admiration for Gaudí that the Lesson devoted to him in *Universalismo Constructivo* is part of a set of chapters in this book discussing other artists that Torres-García admired too. The list includes Picasso, Braque, Gris, Jacques Lipchitz, Mondrian, Arp, Ozenfant, Barradas, and finally Gaudí.

"One can discuss Gaudí's work; one can criticize this or that minor detail, but one cannot deny that he was an extraordinary man, a true creative genius and an architect; though in order to understand the value of such a word, we should go back to the builders of cathedrals in the Middle Ages. A strong man, of the same race as them, from another time in which, above the materiality of living, there was a consciousness of a superior order.[461] […] Gaudí knew everything, […] his conversation was like a revelation. You had to hear him speak about Greece, about the Middle-Ages, about construction and mathematics, about teaching, religion, saints and mystics…! All taken to a large scale, in rhythms and relations at formidable distances in time and place, but brought up to the current time. He had the gift of being able to make these things familiar and present".[462]

Thus, Torres-García, who describes the two years devoted to the Palma de Majorca project as "very beneficial because of the continuous dealings [I] had to have with Gaudí,"[463] was not simply learning from this architect's erudition about times past, and in particular about the Middle-Ages, but, crucially, was being made aware of their currency in the 20th century.

As recounted by Torres-García, upon receiving the Palma de Majorca commission, Gaudí set out on a thorough study of the stained glass windows of churches in Barcelona in order to better acquaint himself with this medium.[464] He realised that stained glass had undergone significant changes in technique over the centuries. In early windows, motifs had been made up of irregular glass fragments, each one stained a single translucent uniform colour – that is, with a pigment mixed into the molten glass

[461] From the Spanish: "Podrá discutirse la obra de Gaudí; podrá criticársele tal o cual nimiedad, pero no podrá negarse, de que era un hombre extraordinario, un verdadero genio creador y un arquitecto; si bien para comprender el valor de tal palabra, tendríamos que remontarnos a los constructores de Catedrales de Medio Evo. Hombre fuerte, de la raza de aquéllos, de otra edad en la que por encima de la materialidad del vivir, había la conciencia de un orden superior." Torres García, 'Mestre Antoni Gaudí', 566.

[462] From the Spanish: "Todo lo sabía Gaudí (…) Por esto su conversación era como una revelación. Había que oírle hablar de Grecia, del Medio Evo, de construcción o de matemáticas, de enseñanza, de religión, de santos y místicos…! Todo llevado a la escala grande, en ritmos y relaciones a formidables distancias de lugar y tiempo, pero actualizado. Tenía el don de hacer la cosa familiar y presente." Torres-García, 560.

[463] Torres García, *Joaquín Torres García: historia de mi vida*, 80.

[464] Torres García, 'Mestre Antoni Gaudí', 562.

paste -, held together by a web of lead strips. A limited amount of black enamel was then used to paint lines over the coloured glass in order to create details in specific areas such as hands, faces and drapery.[465] While achieving aesthetically striking compositions, this technique resulted in images that were flat and, given the limited range of hues available to glassmakers, bore little chromatic resemblance to reality (Fig. 82).

Already in the 12th century, a desire for a more naturalistic rendition of the subject matter led to experimentation with grisailles and enamels that could be *painted over the glass* in order to achieve a broader range of colours and shading effects. Initially, these were used sparingly, again mostly to give volume to faces, hands and clothing. By late-medieval and early-Renaissance times, however, enamel painting was being used extensively to create chromatically complex and illusionistic compositions painted over increasingly large fragments of clear glass (Fig. 83). Coloured glass windows had effectively been transformed from *compositions constructed out of coloured glass* fragments into large-scale enamel *paintings over clear glass*.

Fig. 82 Prophet Osee (Hosea) at Augsburg Cathedral, c. 1110, part of the earliest extant stained glass programme.

Fig. 83 Virgin and Child, 1556. Paris: Louvre Museum

The 19th century revival of stained glass relied even more heavily on the later glass painting techniques. In his research in Barcelona churches Gaudí realised that the enamels and grisailles painted over the glass undermined the translucency of any underlying colour, resulting in compositions that, while realistic and chromatically rich, were dull, lacking the luminosity of early medieval stained glass. Gaudí thus set out to

[465] See Raguin, *The History of Stained Glass*. Catherine Brisac, *A Thousand Years of Stained Glass* (Edison, NJ: Chartwell Books, 1984).

achieve the colour transparency and vibrancy of early stained glass, without any added enamels or grisailles fragments. In this understanding of stained glass he was in sync with Eugène Grasset and his theory on ornamental composition.[466] However, while not wishing to use anything other than coloured glass, Gaudí saw the restricted original palette of medieval stained glass as a creative limitation.[467] To solve this problem, he opted for a new technique, developed shortly before by Tiffany & Co. for Saint Michael's Church in New York, known as trichromy. This involved superimposing up to five thin layers of glass, each stained with one of the three primary colours, in order to achieve not only a very broad range of hues, but also sophisticated modelling effects thanks to the refractory properties of the various layers (Fig. 84).

Gaudí's purpose in the Palma de Majorca cathedral was not to recreate early medieval stained glass but, rather, to modernize its technique while remaining faithful to the original concept. As an architect, and not a painter, he appreciated the former's constructive nature and wished to apply it to his project while overcoming its chromatic limitations with the latest technological advances in coloured glass production.

In *Universalismo Constructivo* Torres-García gives a brief description of this technique he learned with Gaudí and praises the "superb palette, completely translucent" that resulted from it, as well as the "wonderful" windows that were achieved with it in the Palma de Majorca project.[468] However aesthetically satisfactory the results, though, the trichromy technique was painfully slow and labour-intensive, which ultimately proved too costly for the Cathedral's resources.[469] Thus, after almost three years of work, Gaudí's stained glass commission was cut short with work completed only on the rose and two of the eight windows originally planned.

[466] This Swiss-French artist's treatise *Méthode de la composition ornamentale* devoted a chapter to ornamentation with stained glass where he explicitly dimissed glass painted over with enamels in favour of compositions constructed with stained glass fragments. Eugène-Samuel Grasset, *Méthode de composition ornementale. Éléments rectilignes* (Paris: Librairie centrale des beaux-arts, 1907), 360, available online at http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6109619d.

[467] Torres-García, 'Mestre Antoni Gaudí', 562.

[468] Torres-García, 562.

[469] Torres-García, 562.

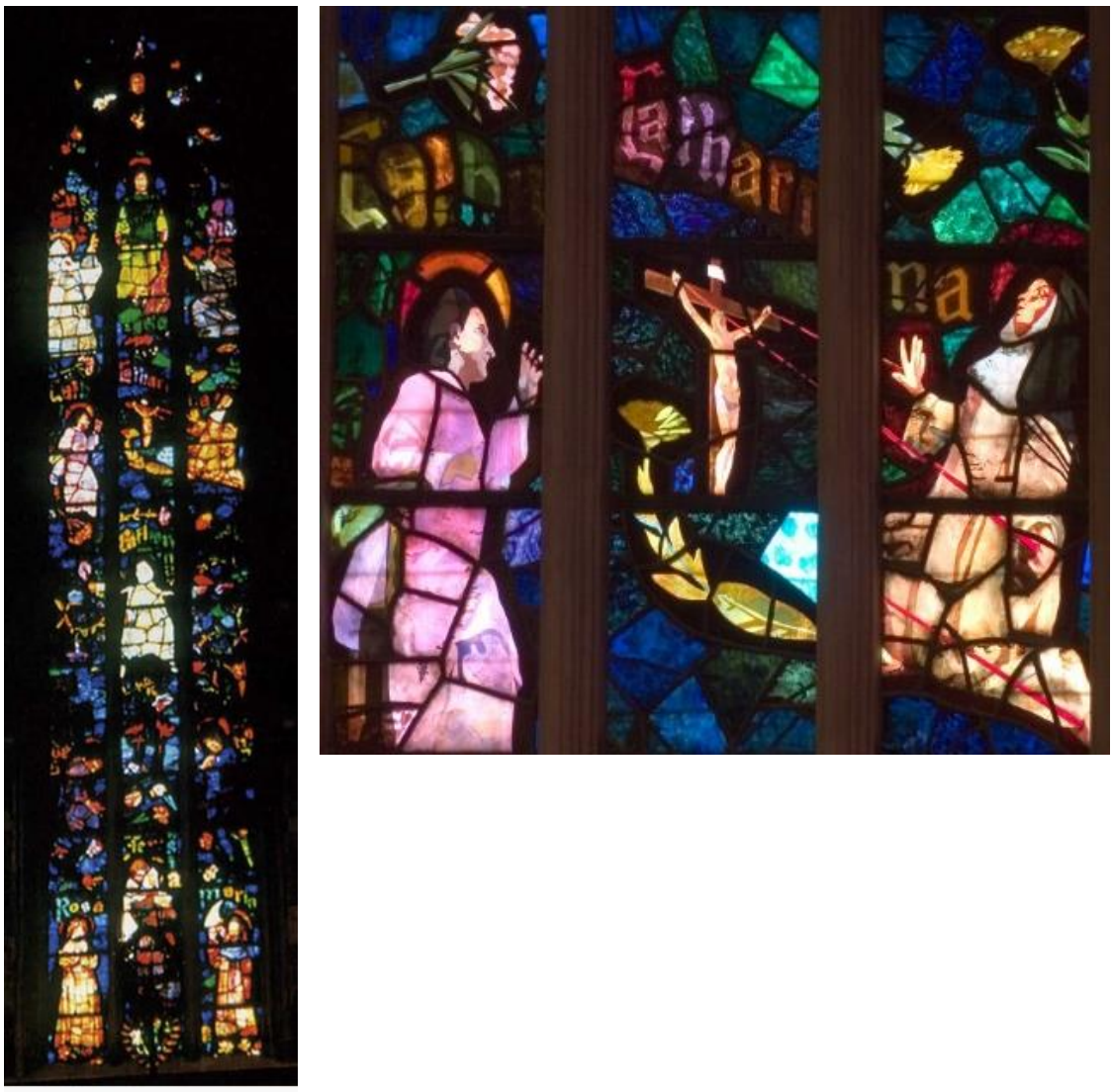

Fig. 84 Antoni Gaudí (assisted by Joaquín Torres-García, Iu Pasqual and Jaume Llongueres*), Queen of Virgins* stained glass window at Palma de Majorca Cathedral, 1903-1905. Close-up of the same window showing the kind of enamel-less modelling pursued by Gaudí through trichromy.

What is worth stressing from the above description of the technique used by Gaudí and his team in Majorca, is that with trichromy Torres-García experienced first-hand how rather than *painting* a figure or a scene over fragmented glass, the artist could effectively *build* the image by juxtaposing pieces of glass within a supporting structure of lead strips; just as it had been done, with a restricted palette dominated by the three primary colours, in early medieval stained glass.

The 'Northern' gothic and the romanesque in Torres-García's early paintings

The cathedral first appeared as a subject of Torres-García's paintings in 1910. Between November 1909 and February 1910 he stayed in Brussels where he had been commissioned to paint two murals for the Uruguayan pavilion at the Brussels Universal Exposition. While in the city, and also during his passage through Paris on the same trip, he produced several urban landscapes and two views of St. Gudule church (later, St. Gudule cathedral) (Fig. 85 and 86). These were exhibited upon his return to Barcelona to rather poor reviews. With noucentista Mediterranean classicism having established itself as the ideal in the Catalan art scene by then, these works were criticized for their 'Northern' subject and chromatism.[470] Perhaps unsurprisingly, the only positive review of the Brussels paintings came from Joaquim Folch i Torres, whose vocal advocacy of medieval heritage – and against-the-grain appreciation for Northern gothic art – has been discussed in the previous Chapter.

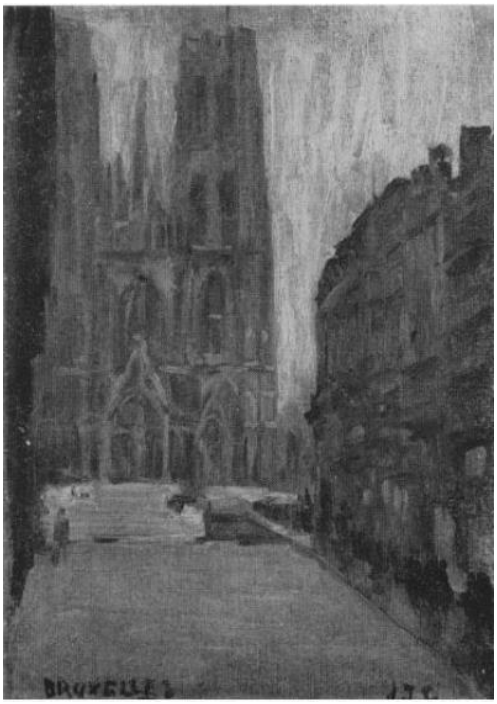

Fig. 85 Joaquín Torres García, *Bruselas* (*Brussels*), 1910, oil on canvas, 34 x 23.5 cm. (CR1910.20) Private collection.

Fig. 86 Joaquín Torres García, *Santa Gudula de Bruselas* (*Saint Gudule of Brussels*), 1910, oil, no sizes given (1910.23) Whereabouts unknown.

[470] These two paintings, together with other urban views executed both in Brussels and in Paris, were part of an exhibition at Faianç Català in October 1910. Sureda i Pons, *Torres García: Pasión Clásica*, 88–89.

After this disappointing experience, gothic architecture vanished from Torres-García's work which now, in the strongly classicist atmosphere promoted by Noucentisme, focused instead on Mediterranean landscapes and classical themes. St. Gudule, nevertheless, must have left a strong impression; he would evoke its imposing façade, three decades later, in a series of paintings he completed in 1940, when he was settled back in Uruguay (Fig. 87).[471]

Fig. 87 Joaquín Torres-García, *Evocación de la iglesia de Santa Gudula, Bruselas* (*Evocation of Saint Gudule Church, Brussels*), 1940, oil on cardboard, 58 x 48 cm. (CR1940.54) Estate of the artist

In the early 1910s, however, and after the negative reception of his Brussels and Paris urban views, Torres-García ostensibly 'converted' to d'Ors' brand of Noucentisme by rejecting what he referred to as the art of the "Northern peoples" – presumably gothic – in favour of an art drawn from the Mediterranean.[472] In this vein, he was also quoted in 1913 by Argentinian writer and journalist Roberto J. Payró as having expressed how his discovery of Homer, Horatio and Theocritus, among others, caused his "absolute conversion to paganism and instilled in [him] a profound hatred of the Middle Ages and gothic art".[473] As reported speech, this must be taken with caution. In fact, the same

[471] Aside from CR1940.54, pictured here, I am referring to CR1940.55, http://torresgarcia.com/catalogue/entry.php?id=1687 and CR1940.64, http://torresgarcia.com/catalogue/entry.php?id=1689.

[472] Joaquín Torres-García, *Notes Sobre Art* (Girona: Masó, 1913), 8.

[473] From the Spanish "Estos estudios – comentó Torres García a su amigo Roberto J. Payro, refieriéndose a su descubrimiento de Homero, Horacio, Teócrito, etc. – provocaron mi absoluta conversión al

year he had allegedly professed a "profound hatred" of the Middle Ages and gothic art he also wrote in *Notes sobre Art* in a similar vein to what he would express decades later in the excerpts quoted at the beginning of this section. Here he advocated the need for modern art to be non-mimetic and decorative, qualities that far from being a novelty of modernism, he traced back to the "origins" of art:

> "in a trend [that] follows an uninterrupted straight line, in the already perfect art of Egypt, Greece and Rome, it is in Byzantine mosaics, in Gothic art, in artists before Raphael... until a deviation towards realism begins with the [Renaissance] Venetians that ends [...] with modern Impressionism."[474]

Notes sobre Art was published in 1913, a year after the three articles on Cubism by d'Ors, Folch and Torres-García discussed in the previous chapter.[475] In the above passage, Torres-García closely echoed the views expressed by Folch in his article;[476] he described a tradition of non-mimetic and decorative art that was ostensibly already at its best in Antiquity, encompassed the medieval, was interrupted by Renaissance mimetism, and resurfaced with modernism. Still, somewhere else in the same book, Torres-García clarified that he found gothic art to be, in decorative value, much inferior to Greek art.[477] His observations in *Notes sobre Art* therefore suggest and ambivalent stance towards the medieval; they speak to what seems to be a genuine appreciation for gothic art already in his Barcelona years, even if muffled by the strongly anti-gothic Mediterranean classicism fostered in particular by Eugeni d'Ors' regionalist theorisation of Noucentisme.

Romanesque art, for its part, seems to have fared slightly better in Torres-García's perception during his time in Barcelona. He was fully aware of the conservation

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paganismo y me infundieron odio profundo hacia la Edad Media y al arte gótico". This quote was part of a biographical sketch written in 1913 from Brussels for the Argentinian newspaper *La Nación*, which was later published as the book Roberto J. Payró and Guillermo de Torre, *Torres-García* (Madrid, 1934), 16; as quoted in Sureda i Pons, *Torres García: Pasión Clásica*, 73.

[474] From the Catalan: "I aquesta tendència segueix sense interrupció i en línia recta, en l'art ja perfecte de l'Egipte, de Grecia i de Roma, està en els mosàics bisantins, en l'art gòtic, en els prerrafaelistes... fins que amb els venezians comença la desviació cap al realisme, que fineix, com hem dit, amb l'impressionisme modern." Torres-García, 'Pintura decorativa', 44.

[475] See note 401.

[476] See quote above, note 404.

[477] Torres-García, *Notes Sobre Art*, 100.

campaigns being carried out at the time on the mural paintings of a considerable number of rural Romanesque churches in Catalonia (discussed in the previous chapter). He noticed the paintings' "warmth", their "torridness" even, and their simplicity, which he saw as "very ours", that is, very Catalan.[478] According to Sureda, these Romanesque paintings must have piqued his interest enough to produce a few drawings and watercolours based on them, as well as some paintings of the Saint Peter church, in Terrassa.[479] While this seems to be the extent of references to the Romanesque in Torres-García's writings and practice at this time, Sureda points out that distinct memories of it resurface in his paintings in the 1940s. Among these, for example, are *Christ* (Fig. 88), a rendition of the *Maiestas Domini* depictions found in the kind of romanesque paintings he had copied while in Barcelona, and *Terrassa Church*, both dated 1940 (Fig. 89).[480]

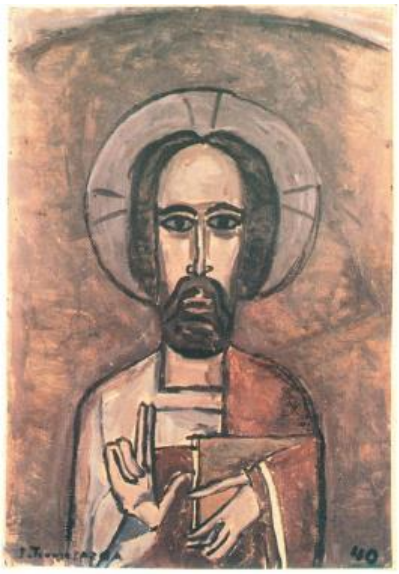

Fig. 88 Joaquín Torres García, *Cristo* (*Christ*), 1940, oil on cardboard, 66 x 45 cm. (CR1940.25) Montevideo: Museo Torres García.

Fig. 89 Joaquín Torres García, *Iglesia de Terrassa* (*Terrassa Church*), 1940, oil on canvas, 31 x 38 cm. (CR1940.71) Montevideo: Private collection.

[478] Joaquín Torres-García, *Diàlegs* (Terrassa: Imprenta Mulleras, 1915), 158; as quoted in Sureda i Pons, *Torres García: Pasión Clásica*, 162.

[479] Sureda i Pons, *Torres García: Pasión Clásica*, n. 416.

[480] It has not been possible to verify the existence or contents of the sketches mentioned by Sureda, but the resurfacing of a *Maiestas Domini* in the 1940 *Cristo* suggests that he may have kept them with him throughout his many moves, revisiting them at this late stage in his career.

A stained glass commission for a gothic palace

Notwithstanding his conflicted views on the gothic, at any rate, Torres-García was happy to accept a commission in late 1911 to create two stained glass windows for the gothic Council Room of the Diputació Palace (today Generalitat Palace). This building, dating from the 15th to the 17th centuries, was being refurbished as the seat of the Catalan regional government. In line with the nationalist discourse promoted by the Catalan government at the time, the commission involved representing a series of known figures from the region's exalted medieval history. The subject matter, in turn, befitted the gothic architecture, with its elongated tripartite trefoil windows of the room in question.

As part of the redecoration programme of the Diputació Palace, in February 1912 Torres-García was also given a major mural painting commission of twelve large panels, for another room, to be executed in the fresco technique. This commission led him to embark on a research trip to Italy with the purpose of studying Florentine frescoes of the 14th and 15th centuries. The visit to Tuscan churches also gave Torres-García the chance to see their stained glass windows, which, he writes, he "studied carefully" presumably also in preparation for his Council Room project.[481] While much is known and has been written about the mural decoration of the palace's Sant Jordi Hall, the stained glass project has received very little historiographical attention.[482]

What little is known about this project comes from the artist's own biography and correspondence, as well as some mentions in the local press.[483] These sources

[481] Letter to Enric Prat de la Riba, president of the Catalan regional government, 17 May 1912, reproduced in García-Sedas, *Joaquim Torres-Garcia*, 22–23. The letter lists all the churches Torres-García visited in Florence.

[482] The project's dates, and correspondence related to it, are mentioned in Sureda i Pons, *Torres García: Pasión Clásica*, 105.

[483] There are references to work in progress for these windows in letters sent by Torres García to Joan Llongueras (24 January 1912) and to Enric Prat de la Riba (4 January 1913) reproduced in García-Sedas, *Joaquim Torres-Garcia*, 21, 26–27. The first window, installed shortly before October 1915, showed king Pere II the Great, admiral Roger de Llúria and chronicler Ramon Muntaner, according to Romà Jori, "Les decoracions d'en Torres García", *Vell i nou*, year 1, 10 (1 October 1915), 11. There is a contradictory account by Torres García himself as to the characters represented, which he lists as king Pere IV, Roger de Llúria and Lluís Vives, Torres García, *Joaquín Torres García: historia de mi vida*, 103–4. According to the only surviving drawing for this project (Fig. 38), the second window (Finestral B), which was initiated but never completed, would have shown king Pere IV flanked by poet Bernat Metge and saint Ramon de Penyafort.

confirm that only one of the windows was ever installed, in 1915, and that it did not remain in place for long. For reasons unrelated to this discussion, it was dismantled just two years later.[484] The only surviving material evidence of this work is a preparatory drawing for the second window (Finestral B) (Fig. 90).

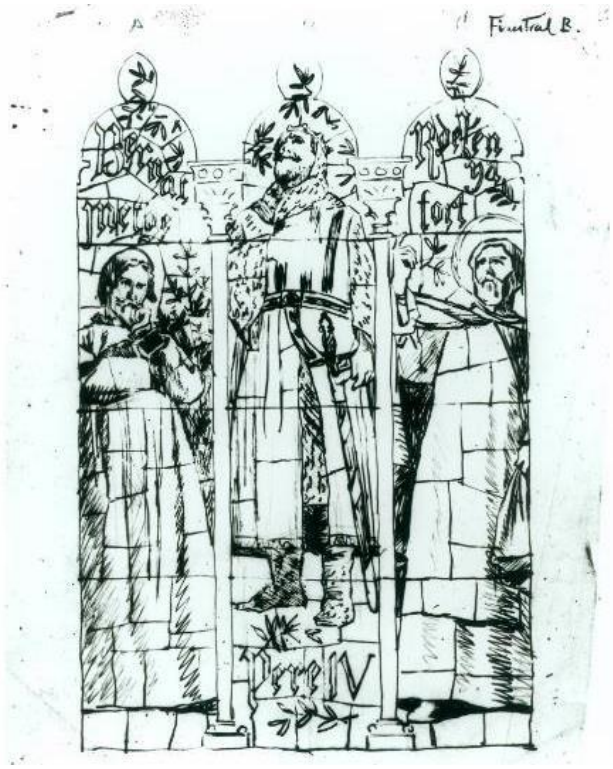

Fig. 90 Joaquín Torres-García, preparatory sketch for stained glass window in the Council Room of the Diputació Palace, depicting (left to right) poet Bernat Metge, king Pere IV, saint Ramon de Penyafort, c. 1915-1916. (CR1915.18)

In preparation for this project, Torres-García was required to submit two samples to the commissioners, using different stained glass techniques. Drawing on his experience with Gaudí at Palma de Majorca in 1903, he produced one of the samples in the trichromy technique, and another through the conventional process of applying enamels and grisailles over stained or clear glass. The samples were put on display on site, that is, in the gothic Council Room that was to receive the completed windows. There, they were critically appraised, among others, by Joaquim Folch i Torres as a

[484] According to Torres-García, the only installed window disappeared surreptitiously shortly after the death in August 1917 of its commissioner, Enric Prat de la Riba, head of the Catalan regional government and supportive patron of this artist. Torres García points the finger for its sudden disappearance at Josep Puig i Cadafalch, Prat de la Riba's successor, whom he describes as authoritarian, ambitious and lacking in artistic sense. Torres-García, *Joaquín Torres-García: historia de mi vida*, 103–4.

noucentista theorist and advisor to the Catalan government on matters of art and heritage. Folch wrote a short article about the samples in *Pàgina Artística de la Veu de Catalunya*, in February 1912.[485] It is worth noting that this piece, entitled 'Vitratges' ('Stained glass'), appeared the same month and in the same periodical as the trilogy of articles devoted to the question of Cubism and structure – by Folch himself, d'Ors and Torres-García – already discussed in the previous chapter. In 'Vitratges', Folch once again takes on the issue of structure, of the work of art as something 'built', and applies it here not to painting, but to stained glass

As is to be expected from a theorist advocating the primacy of architecture, and the need to integrate all art forms under it, it becomes clear in the article that he understands stained glass as a constructive procedure, a "mosaic" of coloured glass pieces held together by lead strips in order to cover an opening on a wall. Conversely, and echoing Gaudí's thinking on the matter, Folch deplores the notion of stained glass as a surface on which to paint with enamels and grisailles. While he acknowledges that enamels and grisailles were in use from a fairly early time, he claims that before the Renaissance these were only used sparsely to create necessary details that could not be produced by the combination of coloured glass and lead strips. The 16th century, he continues, marked the beginning of the "decadence" of this art form by treating it as painting over increasingly large panels of colourless glass, and seeking to eliminate the lead strips that used to define the structure of the composition. For Folch i Torres the "glory of old stained glass"[486] lay precisely in its respect for the construction procedures.

In this regard, Folch's and Torres-García's eminently constructive, as opposed to painterly, understanding of stained glass remained faithful to that discussed for Gaudí and Eugène Grasset above. As referred to in Part I, the same views on the medium were being taught by Kupka to his students in Chartres, as were advocated by Freundlich throughout his career, both of whom dismissed glass painted over with enamels, in favour of compositions constructed with transparent stained glass. Also in common with Gaudí and Torres-García, Freundlich would devise a technique of overlapping glass (and

[485] Joaquim Folch i Torres, 'Vitratges', *Pàgina Artística de La Veu de Catalunya*, no. 115 (29 February 1912).

[486] Folch i Torres.

even opal) layers, similar to trichromy, in order to broaden the chromatic possibilities of the medium.[487]

Of the two samples prepared by Torres-García, therefore, Folch expressed his preference for the trichromy one, which relied on the assemblage of pieces of internally coloured glass and lead strips to build an image. But he also pointed out what he saw as a shortcoming of this technique. Consisting of up to five layers of glass, trichromy resulted in fairly thick and heavy panels. These had to be cut down into relatively small fragments so that their weight could be supported by the lead strips. Attempting to put together large figures – such as those devised for the windows – by means of small fragments required breaking up the composition into segments whose contours often cut across the actual lines of the drawing.

In the trichromy windows of the Palma de Majorca cathedral, Gaudí had evidently encountered the same problem, and equally opted for breaking up the subjects and background in an arbitrary fashion (Fig. 84 above) obeying mostly to a logic of compositional balance and integrity. This arbitrary fragmentation of the depicted object was troublesome for Folch. A few years later, in 1916, Van Doesburg would express similar concerns with regard to the swan depiction for the Broek in Waterland stained glass commission,[488] where he confronted the problem of reconciling the 'natural' lines of figuration with the partition lines imposed by the weight-bearing limitations of the lead strips.

In fact, however, the arbitrary fragmentation to which Folch objected in the trichromy sample actually brought this modern technique closer to the medieval stained glass compositions that he so claimed to admire for their structural explicitness. Unable to produce large panels of glass, medieval artisans had to work with small irregularly-shaped pieces whose leaded contours often cut across whatever figure they were a part of. Versed as he was in medieval art, Folch was surely aware of this. However, while he was most interested in the translucency and constructive nature of gothic stained glass, he wished for the new windows to overcome what he saw as its shortcoming: the arbitrary fragmentation of natural forms. Thus, his recommendation to Torres-García

[487] See note 220.

[488] See quote above, note 283.

for the Council Room windows was to opt for trichromy but cut the glass pieces so that they followed as closely as possible the 'natural' lines of the drawing.

The need to fragment the image against 'natural' contour lines does not seem to have troubled Torres-García. The surviving sketch for window B (Fig. 38 above) shows how he intended to divide the field into roughly geometric panels: except for their heads and hands, the three figures are made up of irregular quadrangles that cut across the vertical lines of their tunics; each of the two side characters rests on a row of similar quadrangles that do not attempt to mimic a natural base or ground, while the middle one appears to float over an equally partitioned field; the area above the figures is also broken up into geometric shapes, now of a more irregular design, each containing either a plant motif or a random number of the letters – neither entire words nor syllables – making up the captions for the figures.

Thus, what Folch had seen as a shortcoming of Torres-García's trichromy sample – the arbitrary fragmentation of the depicted object – does not appear to have been an issue for the artist. On the contrary, not long after the installation of the first stained glass window in the Council Room of the Diputació Palace, Torres-García was experimenting precisely with this kind of arbitrary fragmentation in the mural paintings he executed for the home of industrialist and politician Emili Badiella (1875-1929) in Terrassa, a manufacturing town just outside Barcelona.

Given the relevance of these two projects – the Badiella murals and the Diputació stained glass windows – to the argument at hand, it is worth trying to establish their chronology as accurately as possible. Torres-García's online catalogue raisonné dates the Diputació stained glass windows to 1915, and the Badiella murals to 1916-17. We know that the first Diputació window was indeed installed in August 1915,[489] and that the surviving drawing corresponds not to this but to the second window.[490] We also know that the project ended abruptly after its commissioner, Prat de la Riba, died in

[489] Sureda i Pons, *Torres García: Pasión Clásica*, 23. While Sureda i Pons does not provide documentary evidence for this, Romà Jori, writing for the October 1st issue of *Vell i nou*, informs that "one of the windows is already in place", suggesting that it was a fairly recent development. Romà Jori, "Les decoracions d'en Torres-García", *Vell i nou*, any 1, num. 10 (1915-10-01), p. 11.

[490] The characters that can be seen in the surviving drawing are not those mentioned by Romà Jori for the first window. The surviving drawing is marked 'Window B' which reinforces the idea that it corresponds to the second window, never actually installed.

August 1917[491] and the first window was dismantled. Therefore, it would be reasonable to assume that between these two dates – August 1915 to August 1917 – Torres-García would have continued working on the second window in the expectation of installing it as soon as it was ready. In fact, this seems confirmed by the artist's own recollection that "if that work had been completed, it would have been a wonderful thing, but only one window came to be *completely* finished."[492] It had taken Torres-García almost four years to finalise the first window; trichromy, as mentioned before, was painstaking work, made even slower by the artist's simultaneous dedication to other projects, not least the mural paintings for the same Diputació Palace. Taking all of this into consideration, it is likely that work on the second window would have been ongoing, however inconsistently, between August 1915, when the first window was installed, and August 1917, when the commission was ended. As such, any work on the second uncompleted window would have been simultaneous not only with the Badiella murals - executed between October 1916 and October 1917[493] - but also with other key works, explored further below, in this critical period of transition in Torres-García's pictorial language.

The Badiella murals

The Badiella commission thus came at a time when Torres-García was busy at the Diputació palace, certainly with the Sant Jordi murals but also, plausibly, with the second stained glass window for the Council Room. The Badiella project comprised a series of murals, both for inside and outside the house, plus an additional mural for the back wall of a garden grotto. The paintings mostly depicted classical scenes and land-related labours and Mediterranean landscapes, all of it in keeping with conventional *noucentista* iconography. The only exception to these themes was one of the inside panels, showing a densely built industrial town,[494] probably chosen on account of the

[491] See note 483.

[492] My italics. From the Spanish: "De realizarse aquella obra, hubiera sido una maravilla, pero sólo un ventanal llegó a terminarse completamente." Torres García, *Joaquín Torres García: historia de mi vida*, 103.

[493] Sureda i Pons, *Torres García: Pasión Clásica*, 24–25.

[494] CR1917.24 http://torresgarcia.com/catalogue/entry.php?id=302

patron's industrial background. Also in accordance with *noucentista* art theory giving primacy to drawing,[495] the subjects in all the Badiella panels are rendered in neatly contoured forms. This stress on the line as the structural element of the painting is particularly visible in some of the inside panels (Fig. 91) where each individual shape – the men's feet and legs, each pot, rock, tree trunk and cloud – is treated as a rather flat colour field enclosed by a thick dark line, with shading reserved only for modelling the figures' naked torsos.

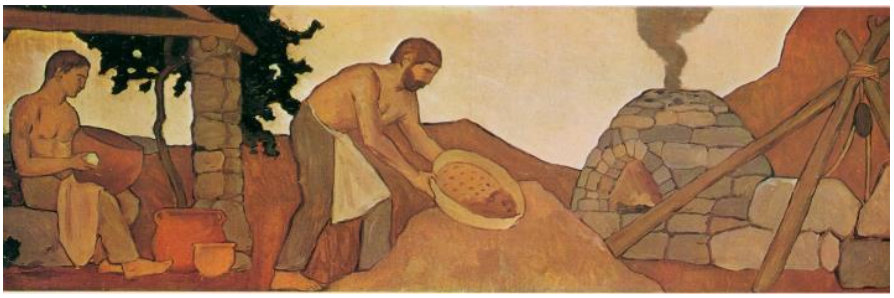

Fig. 91 Joaquín Torres-García, Panel from the mural decoration of the Badiella residence, 1916-1917, oil on canvas, 51 x 130 cm. (CR1916.01). Private collection.

As already discussed in Part I, the cloisonist compositional device seen here, consisting of flat colour fields enclosed by heavy outlines, had originally been developed in the late 1880s by Louis Anquetin and Émile Bernard based on their study of Japanese prints and medieval stained glass and tapestries. Torres-García had already used similar contouring in previous works such as the murals he produced for the Barcelona City Hall in 1908 (Fig. 92), and easel paintings such as *Peasant Figures* (Fig. 93), among others.[496]

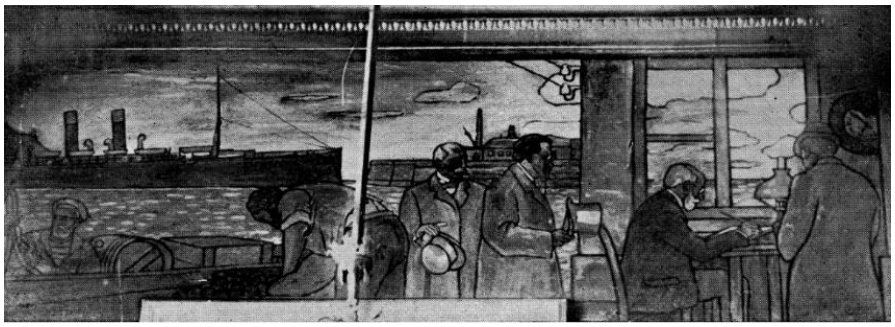

Fig. 92 Joaquín Torres García, Mural painting for the Barcelona City Hall, 1908, sizes unknown (CR1908.01a). Destroyed.

[495] The importance of a neatly contoured, well defined form was another pillar or noucentista art theory, as defended by d'Ors in the article on Cubism and Structuralism discussed in the previous chapter. D'Ors, 'Pel Cubisme a l'Estructuralisme'.

[496] See, for example, *Hombre descansando* (*Man at Rest*), 1911, (CR1911.01) http://torresgarcia.com/catalogue/entry.php?id=139

Fig. 93 Joaquín Torres García, *Figuras de campesinos* (*Peasant Figures*), c. 1911, oil on canvas, 36 x 41 cm. (CR1911.08). Location not given.

Whether he was aware of the origins of the contouring technique he was using here, and of its indebtedness to medieval stained glass, among other sources, is not known. In any case, by the time he produced these works, cloisonism had been in use for over two decades and had therefore become common among artists, especially after Cézanne, regardless of any awareness they might have, or not, of medieval art. Thus, the heavy outlining that can be seen in all of these paintings could simply owe to current pictorial practice at the time. As such, a causal link between the cloisonism in them and Torres-García's own experience of stained glass in the Palma de Majorca and Diputació Palace projects (1903-1905 and 1912-1917 respectively) cannot be supported.

There is, however, a further panel in the Badiella project, that of the garden grotto, where I would argue that Torres-García did establish a deliberate connection between stained glass and painting.

Fig. 94 Joaquín Torres García, Grotto mural at the Badiella residence, 1916-1917, fresco, sizes unknown. (CR1916.28), as reproduced in *L'Instant* in 1919. Destroyed.

As the mural was later destroyed, the only evidence of its existence is a black and white photograph published in 1919 in the modernist magazine *L'Instant* (Fig. 94).[497] The image was accompanied by other works and a short text by Torres-García himself which, unfortunately, does not discuss this particular painting. The grotto mural has received very little attention in the vast historiographical corpus devoted to the artist, having been reproduced only twice.[498]

One of the few works that draws attention to it, albeit without providing an image, is the catalogue published on occasion of the exhibition *Joaquín Torres-García: geometria, criação, proporção* held in Brazil in 2011-2012.[499] In a brief analysis of this work, the catalogue's author, Alejandro Díaz, sees in the mural "a fragmentation of the pictorial space in an almost literal sense", a "'stony' exercise of fragmentation [that] may

[497] *L'Instant, revista quinzenal*, Year 2, 5, 15 October 1919, 10.

[498] According to the Torres-García online catalogue raisonné, other than in *L'Instant*, this painting has been reproduced in: Jardí, *Torres García*, 73., and Adolfo M. Maslach, *Joaquín Torres-García: sol y luna del arcano*, 1998, 125. There exists a third, partial reproduction in Sureda i Pons, *Torres García: Pasión Clásica*, 141.

[499] Alejandro Díaz and Jimena Perera, *Joaquín Torres García: geometria, criação, proporção* (Porto Alegre, Brazil: Fundação Iberê Camargo, 2011).

have been suggested based on the location of the fresco, painted in an artificial grotto built in stone near the house".[500]

In this mural, Torres-García applied the same cloisonist technique as in the remaining Badiella murals, with every rock, tree trunk, arm and shirt neatly set apart by a thick contour. However, in contrast with his other compositions where the background landscape was rendered as a single flat monochrome mass, or at most as two or three large colour fields (Fig. 39 above), in the grotto mural he fragmented the terrain into many irregular blocks, in light and dark tones, set against each other in unlikely rock formations. He also broke up the sky in a similarly arbitrary fashion. The fragmentation of the sky is deliberate and devoid of any representational purpose. Even accepting that he may have chosen to partition the land background to represent a particularly rugged terrain – the "stony" exercise suggested by Díaz ostensibly to mimic the appearance of the grotto – he had no figurative reason to divide the sky up into irregular, roughly geometrical shapes around two conventionally represented clouds.

I would argue instead that he was simply experimenting with the kind of field fragmentation he had to use in the Diputació Palace windows owing to the impossibility and/or reluctance to use large panes of glass in the shape of 'natural' forms. Yet other elements of the grotto mural appear to be a pictorial transposition of Torres-García's stained glass work. Specifically, the row of trapezoid shapes on which the scene rests bring to mind the rows of quadrangles under the feet of the figures in the Diputació windows (Fig. 38 above). Even more thickly contoured than the rest of the colour fields in the grotto painting, they form a row of self-contained compartments, some enclosing their own distinct contents: a plant, two leaves, a lizard, a snail. Just as with the sky fragmentation described above, the compartmentalization of the base of the pictorial field does not have a discernible representational purpose, appearing instead as a deliberate construction.

Finally, and also unlike the rest of the Badiella murals, the artist framed the remaining sides of the grotto composition with a border of small, elongated sections that appear to be simply a continuation of the bottom row compartments and that

[500] Díaz, 'Joaquín Torres García: Integridade da arte', 205.

mimic the conventional 'framing' of stained glass compositions (Fig. 95). Through the combination of these devices, the overall effect of the grotto mural is strikingly reminiscent of that of a stained glass window.

Fig. 95 Seraph, Reims Cathedral, c. 1275.

Taking into account the likely closeness in time between this mural and Torres-García's work for the second window at the Diputació palace, I would argue that in the Badiella grotto mural he was consciously experimenting with the construction of a painting through colour fields and thick black lines just as he had built the figures, captions and background of the Diputació Palace windows with glass panels and lead strips. In the whole of the Badiella commission, this type of fragmentation is reserved only for this work. The more secluded location of this mural, in a garden grotto, may have given the artist greater freedom to experiment with a new form of representation. Moreover, the shaded atmosphere of the grotto may have seemed like a suitable setting for a stained glass 'simulation', even if the absence of transparency and backlighting rendered it blind.

1916 - 1917 Decomposition, crisis

Both of the above projects – the second Diputació stained glass window and the Badiella murals – were ongoing at a critical time in Torres-García's practice, what has

been termed the "1917 crisis".[501] This crisis was marked by his growing disillusionment with the noucentista project, its internal politics and narrow aesthetics, which among other things dismissed his enquiries into primitivism.[502] Torres-García began to search for a pictorial language away from its Arcadian classicism. His close friendship at the time with fellow Uruguayan Rafael Barradas has been amply acknowledged as having played a decisive role in this regard.

The relationship with Barradas helped open up Torres-García's vision to the vibrancy of the modern city and to the formal possibilities of expressing it in paint. However, without detracting from Barradas' key part in this process, several authors have also pointed that Torres-García's theory and practice were clearly changing before the two met in August 1917: by 1916 he was already reassessing his theoretical and aesthetic bases,[503] and moving away from classicist iconography,[504] in a process that was being discussed in the artistic press.[505] Indeed, in paintings such as *Labour* and *Barcelona street with wall and tree*[506] (Fig. 96 and 97), Torres-García had turned his attention to contemporary reality. His paintings began to capture tranquil scenes with a mix of urban, rural and industrial elements, still far from the bustling city scenery that would fill his paintings after his acquaintance with Barradas, but nevertheless already signalling a major shift in subject matter from at least 1916.[507]

[501] Díaz, 20.

[502] Jardí, *Torres García*, 73.

[503] Morse, 'Art-Evolució and Vibracionismo: Torres-García, Barradas, and an Art of Higher Consciousness', 333.

[504] Faxedas Brujats, 'Barradas' Vibrationism and Its Catalan Context', para. 8.

[505] J. (no surname), 'Les noves idees estètiques d'En Torres García', *Vell i Nou* (15 August 1916), 158-160.

[506] The title of this painting appears as "Calma" in the above *Vell i Nou* article.

[507] "Labour" is dated to 1916 in the online catalogue raisonné. Though difficult to make out, the date above the signature appears to be actually 1915.

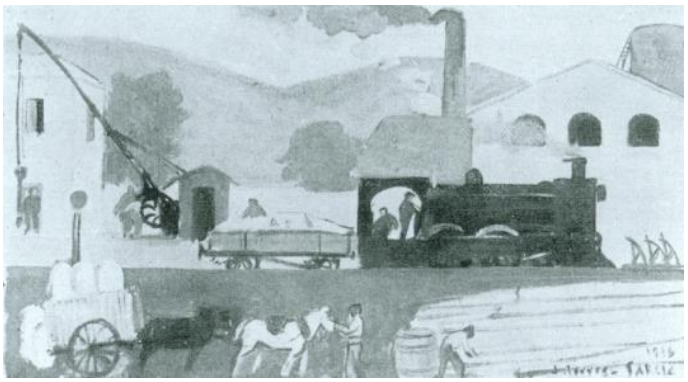

Fig. 96 Joaquín Torres García, *El trabajo* (*Labour*), 1916 (1915?), sizes unknown. (CR1916.09) Whereabouts unknown.

Fig. 97 Joaquín Torres García, *Calle de Barcelona con tapia y árbol* (*Barcelona Street with Wall and Tree*), 1916, oil on canvas, 50 x 65 cm. (CR1916.12) São Paulo: Private collection.

Of greater relevance to this thesis than subject matter is another key development in Torres-García's production at the time which concerns the issue of pictorial field structure and construction. Indeed, it was also around 1916-1917 that a form of fragmentation of these new urban landscapes began to appear in both his drawings and paintings. As noted by several authors, this early compartmentalisation and arbitrary reorganisation of truncated figuration would, in time, transition into the grid-like structuring of the pictorial field that came to define Torres-García's mature style from the late 1920s onwards.[508] An often cited example of this early 'grid' is the drawing published in the avant-garde magazine *Un enemic del poble* in June 1917 (Fig. 98).

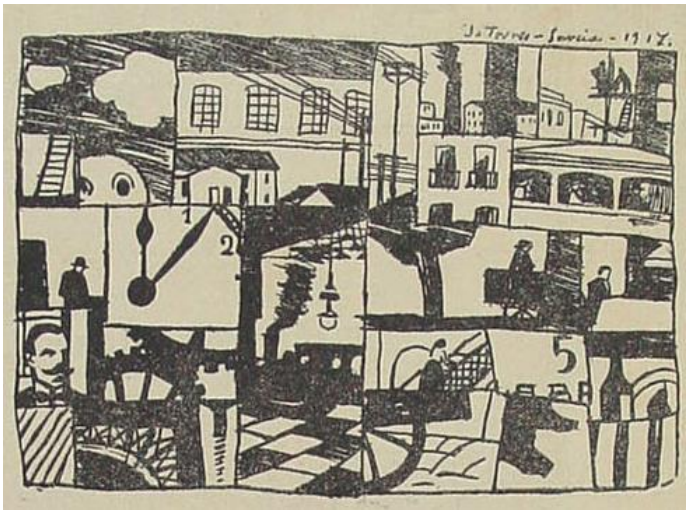

Fig. 98 Joaquín Torres García, Drawing of fragmented city views published in *Un enemic del poble*, June 1917

[508] Braun, 'Joaquín Torres-García: The Alchemical Grid', 253; Morse, 'Art-Evolució and Vibracionismo: Torres-García, Barradas, and an Art of Higher Consciousness', 334; Díaz, 'Joaquín Torres García: Integridade da arte', 20; Pérez-Oramas, 'The Anonymous Rule: Joaquín Torres-García, the Schematic Impulse, and Arcadian Modernity', 20.

In this drawing, the sort of urban and industrial landscapes Torres-García had been painting since 1915 appear to have been broken into irregular geometrical fragments to be then randomly assembled into a collage-like composition. Several of the truncated objects depicted here – such as "the façades, the carriages with axle wheels, clocks, bottles, streetcars and words and numbers added to the visual field like palimpsests" – were to be consistently reworked in his 1930s constructive paintings. [509] While less explicitly defined than in drawings, this form of fragmentation has also been identified in paintings. An example of this is *Figure with Cityscape* (Fig. 99) where "each element appears isolated, carefully counterpoised in an orderly, almost grid-like pattern."[510]

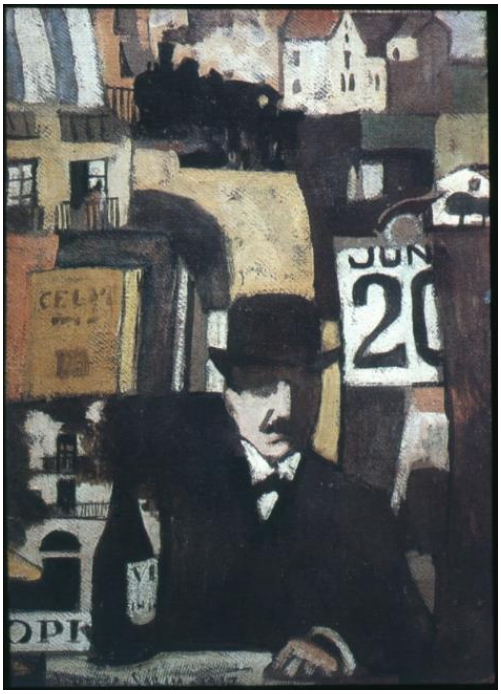

Fig. 99 Joaquín Torres García, *Figura con paisaje de ciudad* (*Figure with Cityscape*), 1917, oil on cardboard, 70 x 49.5 cm. (CR1917.09) Buenos Aires: Private collection.

Given the centrality of the grid to Constructive Universalism, several authors have delved into its emergence in Torres-García's practice. With both of the above works preceding Torres-García's first encounter with Barradas and his Vibrationist art,[511]

[509] Pérez-Oramas, 'The Anonymous Rule: Joaquín Torres-García, the Schematic Impulse, and Arcadian Modernity', 20.

[510] Morse, 'Art-Evolució and Vibracionismo: Torres-García, Barradas, and an Art of Higher Consciousness', 334.

[511] Pérez-Oramas, 'The Anonymous Rule: Joaquín Torres-García, the Schematic Impulse, and Arcadian Modernity', 19–20. This claim is based on a letter contained in García-Sedas, *Joaquim Torres-Garcia*, 61. showing that the first encounter between Torres García and Barradas is dated 27 August 1917, while the

several other sources have been considered for the random fragmentation of subject matter and its rearrangement into an explicit, roughly regular grid. For Mario Gradowczyk the grid develops during Torres-García's later years in Barcelona as a "paradigm of urban cosmovision", that is, inspired by the reticular layout of streets, façades, tram lines, etc.[512] Gradowczyk also posits that this frontal articulation of the plane, suggested by the rising buildings of a Barcelona in full expansion, might have been rooted in the visual register of post-Haussman Paris, which the artist visited for the first time in 1910. He further relates Torres-García's orthogonal grid with the process of flattening different viewpoints of objects onto a single plane, thus finding affinities with the early Cubism of Gris and certain works by Gleizes. Finally, this author refers to Mondrian's own geometrisation of urban landscapes, systematically applied by him and Theo van Doesburg from 1910, which helped turn the orthogonal grid into an archetypical element of modern art,[513] as yet another source informing Constructive Universalism.

For his part, Pérez Oramas also points to the façade as a key referent for the grid, one closely intertwined with the notion of the cathedral with which Torres-García characterised his compositional model in 1931. He also acknowledges the importance of the neoplastic grid in this development. He stresses, however, that the linear rhythms of Torres-García's work – while more defined after his contact with Seuphor, Van Doesburg and Mondrian in *Cercle et Carré* – were already at play in works in which he demonstrated his fascination with façades, made not only during his New York period but as early as the turn of the century in Barcelona. [514]

A further visual referent for Torres-García's grid is identified by Barbara Braun in pre-Columbian constructions. Again, while acknowledging that the 1916-17 drawings anticipate –albeit in an irregular manner – the grid structure of the artist's mature formulation, she points to Andean masonry and architecture as a key element in the

drawing in question was published two months before, in the June 1917 issue of *Un enemic del poble*, the same month that the painting *Figure with urban landscape* is dated to. The same date for the first encounter between Torres-García and Barradas had previously been established by Mario H. Gradowczyk, *Torres García: Utopía y Transgresión* (Montevideo: Museo Torres García, 2007), 52.

[512] Gradowczyk, *Torres García: Utopía y Transgresión*, 52.

[513] Gradowczyk, 58.

[514] Pérez-Oramas, *Joaquín Torres-García: The Arcadian Modern*, 30.

development of orthogonality in the late 1920s framework. In this regard, she draws attention to a series of 1927-1928 drawings of the Tiwanaku Gateway of the Sun, originally the doorway to a major Andean temple, a cast of which could be found at the entrance to the Trocadero. In these drawings, Torres-García "employed Andean masonry in much the same way that Piet Mondrian had used Parisian buildings in his path breaking *Façades* series of 1914, extracting horizontal and vertical lines through a process of simplification and purification to arrive at an abstract essence".[515]

Façades, urban layouts, pre-Columbian structures and neoplastic thinking no doubt all played a part in the development of Torres-García's constructive grid and, in particular, in its increasingly consolidated orthogonality over the 1920s. In the case of pre-Columbian art, furthermore, Braun makes a strong case for its role as a model for the insertion of pictograms within this grid, a trademark of Torres-García that distinguishes his art from that of constructivist/neoplasticist practitioners.[516] At this point, however, having seen the variety of sources that inform the process of reticular construction in Torres-García, it is worth stressing a crucial observation by Díaz: what ultimately became a constructive process – fed by all the above sources – began in 1916 as a process of *deconstruction*, or *decomposition*.[517] Torres-García himself described it so:

"In 1906, I started to paint frescoes, and this painting was inspired by the classical forms of paintings on Greek vases, that is, *perfectly normal images*. Such painting then developed but within this same spirit: flat, orderly, universal, and never deviating from the normal appearance. Why did I not continue this way? It did not satisfy me. I saw the possibility of another, more concrete art. And then from 1916 until 1924 I started to decompose the image and, indeed, *find a structure*. That is why in 1928 and 1929 I was able to formulate *my theory of Constructive art*, by then at a *universal plane*."[518]

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[515] Braun, 'Joaquín Torres-García: The Alchemical Grid', 259.

[516] Braun, 'Joaquín Torres-García: The Alchemical Grid'.

[517] Díaz, 'Joaquín Torres García: Integridade da arte', 20.

[518] Joaquín Torres-García, *La recuperación del objeto: lecciones sobre plástica*, vol. 1 (Montevideo: Biblioteca Artigas, 1965), 70. From the Spanish "En 1906 comencé yo a pintar al fresco, y tal pintura se inspiraba en las formas clásicas de las pinturas de los vasos griegos, vale decir, en imágenes *perfectamente normales*. Tal pintura luego fue desarrollándose pero dentro del mismo espíritu: planista, ordenada, universal. Y siempre sin salirse del aspecto normal. ¿Por qué yo no continué así? No me satisfacía. Veía la posibilidad de otro arte más concreto. Y ya entonces desde 1916 hasta 1924 comencé

The artist therefore describes the decomposition of images that began in 1916 as the process that revealed to him the structure that, in turn, over a decade later, allowed him to formulate his theory of Constructive Universalism. Díaz observes that in those early stages of enquiry "the exercise of fragmentation and decomposition of the plane and the form acquires several expressions that occur simultaneously".[519] He then goes on to identify the Badiella grotto mural as the first one and "possibly the least interesting and most ephemeral" of such expressions. The other two forms of defragmentation and decomposition occurring simultaneously at the time were, according to Díaz, the wooden toys that Torres-García began to design and build between 1917 and 1918, and the drawings showing fragmented urban views – such as the one above, published in *Un enemic del poble* (Fig. 98 above) – also dated 1917.

Díaz, therefore, sees the Badiella grotto mural as a kind of isolated exercise in defragmentation, somehow disconnected from the other two. Created, in his view, simply to visually suit the organic shapes of an artificial grotto, its highly irregular fragmentation bearing little resemblance to the more geometric partitions that would come to define this artist's constructive paintings, the grotto mural is thus seen as ephemeral, as having had no precedents and no consequences in Torres-García's practice. Dismissing the potential relevance of this mural, in order to explore the origins of the artist's (de)constructive grid, Díaz turns his attention instead to the 1917 partitioned drawings while proposing a possible source for the fragmentation seen in them.

To this end, he draws attention to the process involved in the creation of monumental murals such as those the artist had been executing for years both at the Diputació palace and elsewhere: the transposition of a small-scale preparatory drawing onto a large-scale painting on the wall by means of an orthogonal matrix. Superimposed on the design, this grid allows the forms in the drawing to retain their shape and relative positions when transferred onto a larger scale matrix on the wall. Díaz illustrates his

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a descomponer la imagen, y, en realidad, a encontrar *una estructura*. Por eso en 1928 y 1929, pude formular *mi teoría de Arte Constructivo*, y, entonces, en un *plano universal*. A slightly different translation, omitting the last sentence, is quoted in Díaz, 'Joaquín Torres García: Integridade da arte', 20. Emphasized terms as per the original transcription.

[519] Díaz, 'Joaquín Torres García: Integridade da arte', 205.

point with the preparatory drawing of the fifth mural for the Sant Jordi hall of the Diputació Palace, entitled *Industrial Catalonia* (never actually executed) (Fig. 100) with which Torres-García was busy around 1916-1917.

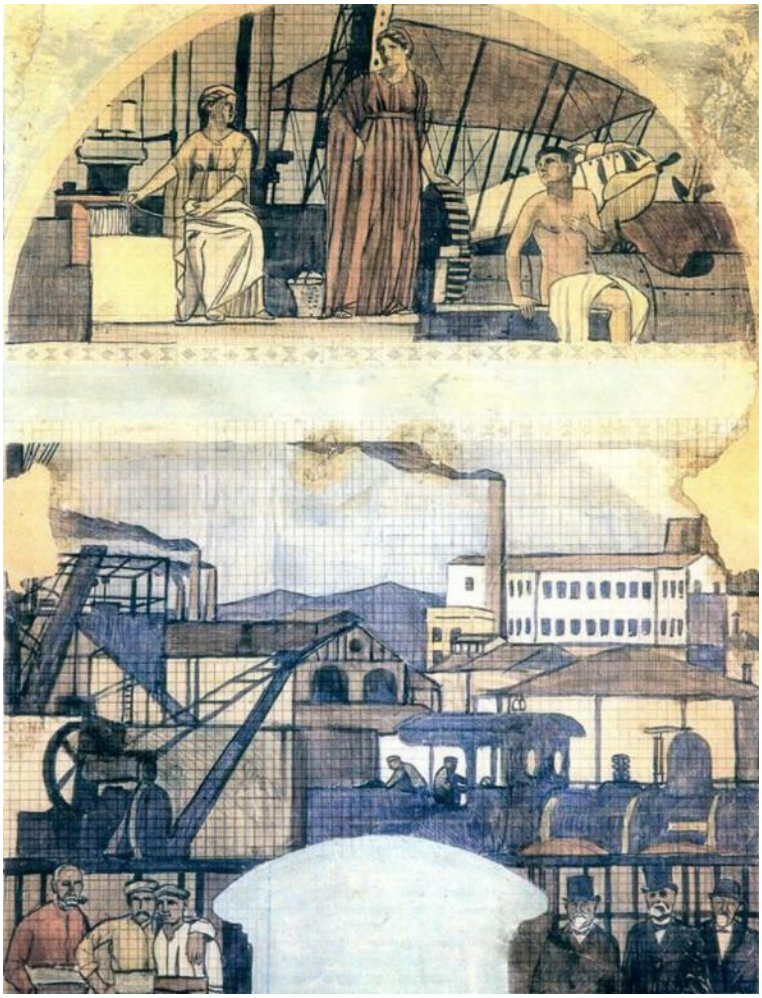

Fig. 100 Joaquín Torres García, Preparatory drawing for the fifth Sant Jordi Hall mural, *Industrial Catalonia,* c. 1916-1917

Díaz rightly argues that when the matrix is applied to the drawing, and the latter is transferred onto the wall, the partial forms within each square become dissociated from their original representational function and acquire an independent plastic value. Thus, the process of transposition from the drawing to the wall results both in the fragmentation of the image and the magnification of its details, two aspects that are visible in the 1917 drawings.[520] Díaz's reflection on this process with regard to this specific mural – which he considers a transitional work in both composition and iconography – is particularly apt to explain not only the fragmentation and magnification

[520] Díaz, 206.

but also its application to contemporary subject matter, which can also be seen in the 1917 drawings.

Though certainly compelling, this explanation for a possible source of Torres-García's initial grid-based compositions is not without problems. The first one is to do with grid size: the matrix superimposed on the *Industrial Catalonia* drawing is necessarily tight in order to ensure accuracy in the transposition of the drawing to the wall. This means that each matrix square actually contains very little in it. In the *Industrial Catalonia* preparatory drawing, for example, most of the squares are just monochrome; when they do contain part of an object, this is often such a small fragment as to become just a line across the square, not quite like the plainly recognisable partial views of people, buildings and machines in the 1917 drawings.

The second question is to do with grid regularity: the mural transposition matrix certainly resonates with the nearly orthogonal fragmentation of the 1917 drawing that Díaz uses to illustrate the point, the one published in *Un enemic del poble* (Fig. 98 above). However, in Torres-García's broader production of 1917 experimental drawings, this manner of regular composition is visible in a limited number of works.[521] Others – such as drawings contained in the Barcelona Notebook, and the various versions of the cover for *El descubrimiento de si mismo* – show a far more irregular partitioning of the field (Fig. 101-104), which is harder to associate with the mural transposition matrix.

[521] Aside from the drawing published in *Un enemic del poble*, the orthogonal composition is visible in the drawings *Comercio* and *Agosto 6 Lunes*, all used by Gradowzcyk to argue his point. Gradowczyk, *Torres García: Utopía y Transgresión*, 54–57.

Fig. 101 Joaquín Torres García, Barcelona Notebook Drawing no. 9-10, 1917, ink on paper, 13 x 20 cm.

Fig. 102 Joaquín Torres García, Barcelona Notebook Drawing no. 25-26, 1917, ink on paper, 12 x 20.5 cm.

Fig. 103 Joaquín Torres García, Cover for *El descubrimiento de si mismo*, 1917.

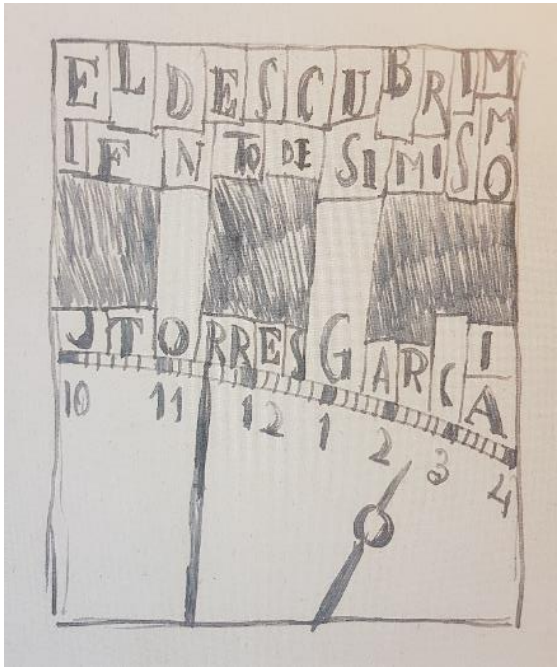

Fig. 104 Joaquín Torres García, Cover for *El descubrimiento de si mismo*, 1917.

I would posit, therefore, that a further, perhaps more relevant source for the 1917 drawings may be found in Torres-García's coeval work in stained glass, characterised as it was by a larger and more irregular fragmentation of the subject matter. To test this, it is worth considering together the various works in question – the stained glass drawing for the Diputació palace, the Badiella grotto mural, the 1917 fragmented urban views from the Barcelona Notebook and the various versions of the cover for the book *El descubrimiento de si mismo*.

A comparison of these works reveals significant similarities (Fig. 105): the fragmentation of drawings 9-10 and 25-26 of the Barcelona Notebook is remarkably comparable to that of the stained glass drawing in both the proportions and the irregularity of the partitions. To a lesser extent, these can also be related to the fragmentation of the Badiella grotto mural. The partitioning in the mural is clearly less geometric and less arbitrary than in the Barcelona Notebook drawings, which has led Diaz to see in the mural an isolated, ephemeral fragmentation exercise. However, considered in the light of the stained glass project Torres-García was working on around the same period, I would argue that rather than an isolated experience the grotto mural

is actually closely linked with the Barcelona Notebook drawings: the former represents a first attempt at transposing the logic of stained glass into painting, an attempt that is further elaborated on in the latter.

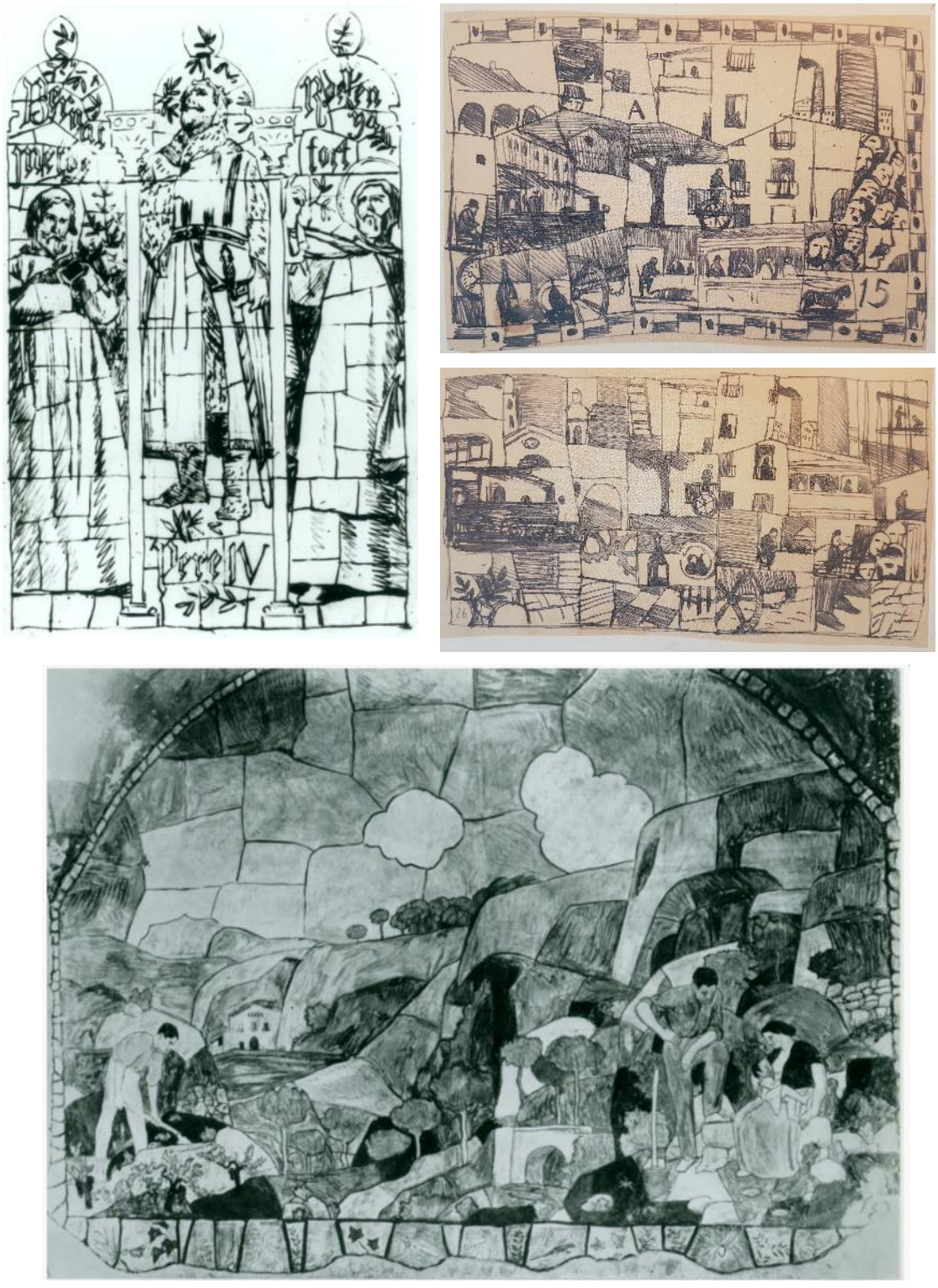

Fig. 105 Joaquín Torres García, similar forms of field fragmentation in the drawing for stained glass window B at Diputació Palace, c. 1912-1917, Barcelona Notebook drawings 9-10 and 25-26, 1917, and Badiella residence grotto mural, c. 1916-1917

Beyond the logic of fragmentation, Torres-García's concomitant or recent work on the stained glass windows may have informed a further aspect of the Barcelona Notebook drawings: the random rearrangement of truncated subject matter. In the construction process of a stained glass composition, individual fragments containing a part of the overall drawing - here, a hand, part of a leg or of a tunic – are spread out on a table, ready for assemblage. In this part of the process, like the pieces of a jigsaw, the partly figurated fragments are moved around, lifted and checked for defects, placed back on the table. Until they are fixed in their final position, they can create random, non-mimetic visual connections. I would argue that this is precisely the compositional logic of the Barcelona Notebook drawings. In them, Torres-García appears to have shattered urban landscapes into a myriad, roughly geometric pieces, and rearranged them in an entirely arbitrary fashion.

The other set of 1917 drawings – the various versions of the cover for *El descubrimiento de si mismo* – suggests a further link with the stained glass work Torres-García had recently been carrying out for the Diputació Palace. This link concerns the treatment of letters. There are at least six different, increasingly elaborate, versions of this drawing (Fig. 106), aside from the final one chosen by Torres-García as the cover of the book, which is very similar to the last one in the series shown here.

Fig. 106 Joaquín Torres-García, six versions of the cover for *El descubrimiento de si mismo*.

The lettering in the first drawing follows a fairly conventional graphic design: author's name above, in one line, title spread out in two lines according to accepted grammatical and conceptual conventions: "El descubrimiento" and "de si mismo" ("The discovery" and "of oneself"). However, this solution is quickly abandoned in favour of a more arbitrary arrangement of letters. The logic (or lack thereof) of this arrangement

appears to be closely related to that of the lettering in the stained glass windows (Fig. 107).

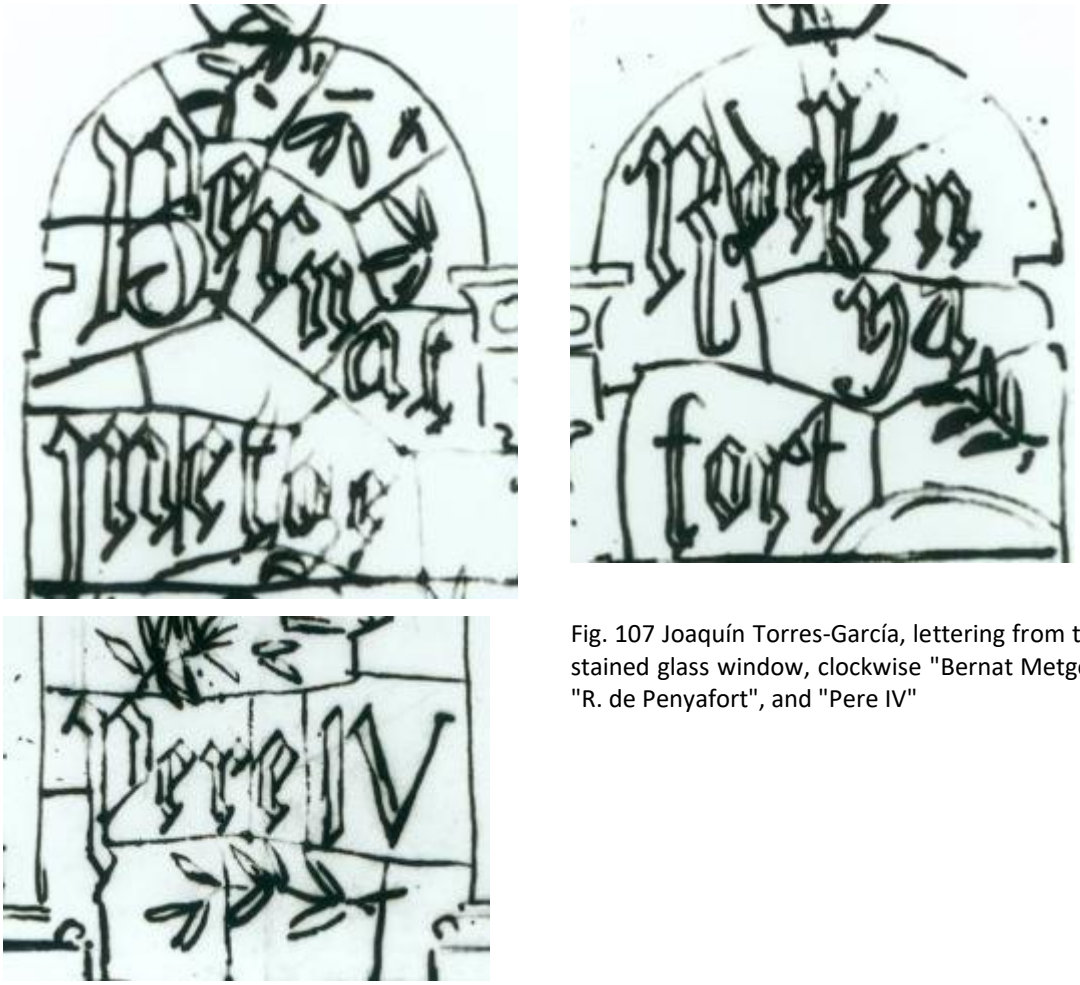

Fig. 107 Joaquín Torres-García, lettering from the stained glass window, clockwise "Bernat Metge", "R. de Penyafort", and "Pere IV"

Just as in the stained glass window drawing, the lettering for the cover of *El descubrimiento de si mismo* becomes haphazard: words are arbitrarily truncated into irregular geometric partitions containing either individual letters or groups of letters that may or not form recognisable syllables, with the partitions arranged in such a way that letters and words appear piled onto each other.

1928 - 1931 Constructing the "cathedral style"

The formal associations traced above between Torres-García's work in stained glass and the fragmented drawings he produced during his '1917 crisis' suggest that the image decomposition he initiated in 1916 in search of a structure is likely to have been

informed, among others, by his experience in stained glass. The 1917 fragmented drawings, in turn, have been amply acknowledged as a key source for the type of partitioned paintings Torres-García began to produce in the late 1920s.[522] This is not to say that the idea of strictly delimited field partitioning disappeared from his work in the intervening years. In fact, what the artist describes is a process of image "decomposition" between 1916 and 1924, revealing of a structure that allowed him to formulate, in 1928 and 1929, the kind of partitioned figuration that he would theorise as Constructive Universalism.[523]

This line of research thus appears intermittently in the years following Torres-García's departure from Barcelona, interspersed with several others. To a certain extent, it can be seen in the 1920 *New York Street Scene*, shown above (Fig. 77), while a more clear truncation of subject matter and lettering, reminiscent of glass shards, resurfaces in the 1925 *Oblique rhythms with fragmented objects* (Fig. 108), somewhat unexpectedly amid the predominantly Arcadian works he produced while in Villefranche-sur-mer.

Fig. 108 Joaquín Torres-García, *Ritmos oblicuos con objetos fragmentados* (*Oblique Rhythms with Fragmented Objects*), 1925, oil on cardboard, 20.9 x 32.4 cm. (CR1925.06) Private collection.

[522] Braun, 'Joaquín Torres-García: The Alchemical Grid', 253; Morse, 'Art-Evolució and Vibracionismo: Torres-García, Barradas, and an Art of Higher Consciousness', 334; Díaz, 'Joaquín Torres García: Integridade da arte', 20; Pérez-Oramas, 'The Anonymous Rule: Joaquín Torres-García, the Schematic Impulse, and Arcadian Modernity', 20.

[523] See quote above, note 518.

Thus, the partitioning concept resulting from fragmentation was extensively explored by Torres-García in his 1917 drawings, only occasionally touched on in painting over the following years, and finally resolved into a satisfactory constructive formula in the late 1920s. It is worth exploring, for a moment, the fact that this latter development took place at a time when he was associated with van Doesburg and Freundlich, whose own pictorial practice, as discussed in Part I, was deeply informed by stained glass. Torres-García's artistic relationship with van Doesburg was particularly close.

Torres-García visited the Dutch artist at his studio and they both wrote on each other's work.[524] This coincided with a period in which van Doesburg was busy with two stained glass projects – four windows for the Strasbourg apartment of André Horn (1928), and a skylight for the house he designed for himself in Meudon-Val-Fleury (1930). From a formal point of view, the designs for these projects were undistinguishable from any of his constructivist paintings (see Fig. 55 in Part I). Freundlich, too, was involved in stained glass projects in 1929 that were equally close to his pictorial enquiries (see Fig. 22 and 23 in Part I).

Torres-García's relationship with Freundlich is less well documented, but both artists took part in the 1929 group exhibition *Exposition d'Art Abstract*,[525] and Freundlich attended the opening of Torres-García's exhibition at Galerie Jeanne Bucher in 1931.[526] Discussions among all three artists must have at least revolved around politics, as Torres-García records his admiration for both of them, as for Mondrian, at the fact that as "convicted communists" they "practice abstract art; that is a non literary plastic art."[527] Given Torres-García's closeness to both artists, the centrality of stained glass to their

[524] Torres-García, *Joaquín Torres-García: historia de mi vida*, 202. Torres-García subsequently published two articles on 'Theo van Doesburg' in *La Veu de Catalunya* (11 and 30 April 1930), while van Doesburg wrote 'Le planisme de Torres Garcia' in 1929, only later published in Spanish as El Planismo de Torres-García' in Removedor: Revista del Taller Torres García, 16 (January-February 1947).

[525] According to the online Catalogue Raisonné, the exhibition was held between 13 July and 2 August 1929, and also included work by John Graham, Kakabadzé, Sollento, Tutundjian, Andréas Walser, Zéro, and Vantongerloo. http://torresgarcia.com/chronology/?name=Paris (last accessed 1 November 2019)

[526] Along with Max Ernst, Pedro Figari, Joan Miró, Mondrian, Vantongerloo, and van Rees. http://torresgarcia.com/chronology/?name=Paris (last accessed 1 November 2019).

[527] From the Spanish "Dije otra vez, cómo artistas comunistas convencidos, from Frendlich [sic] o Théo van Doesburg, practican el arte abstracto; es decir un arte plástico no literario. Y como Mondrian hace lo mismo." In the same article, conversely, Torres-García criticises Diego Rivera's and Siqueiros' narrative approach to painting in the service of power structures. Torres-García, 'Arte y comunismo', 934.

practice, and their involvement in stained glass projects at the time, the possibility must be considered that the medium was also part of their discussions. If that were the case, Torres-García would have become aware of the extent to which stained glass informed the pictorial practice of both van Doesburg and Freundlich. This, I posit, may have been a contributing factor to Torres-García's renewed focus on a line of research he had begun in 1916, including the 1917 drawings, informed as they were, I have argued, by his own work in stained glass.

Whether this was the case or not, it was at this time that the process of "decomposition" initiated in 1916 (incidentally the same word that Freundlich had used to enthusiastically describe the revelation he came upon while working in stained glass at Chartres in 1914)[528] became a process of construction, of orderly arrangement of symbols on a scaffolding of thick black lines. As already discussed, scholarship on the subject has identified various structural sources that inform this constructive process: from façades[529] to geometric urban landscapes,[530] from pre-Columbian constructions[531] to the neoplasticist grid of Torres-García's artist associates.[532] In Torres-García broad, rich world of visual references, all of these were no doubt part of the process; as appears to have been the cathedral which, attesting to his evolving stance towards the gothic, resurfaces at this point in Torres-García's constructive research.

Having vanished from his paintings after the 1910 Saint Gudule fiasco, the cathedral reappeared in 1927 in the form of a view of Notre Dame.[533] This suggests a resumed interest in the gothic at this point, as attested also by his visits to medieval churches in the French capital in the company of his friend the Spanish artist Luis Fernández.[534] Just as the Belgian church, the Parisian cathedral would be again evoked much later in his career: twice in 1941, and once again in 1945[535] together with two

[528] See quote above, note 213.

[529] Pérez-Oramas, *Joaquín Torres-García: The Arcadian Modern*, 30.

[530] Gradowczyk, *Torres García: Utopía y Transgresión*, 52, 58.

[531] Braun, 'Joaquín Torres-García: The Alchemical Grid', 259.

[532] Pérez-Oramas, *Joaquín Torres-García: The Arcadian Modern*, 30.

[533] CR1927.38 http://www.torresgarcia.com/catalogue/entry.php?id=619

[534] Rowell, 'Ordre i símbol: les fonts europees i americanes del constructivisme de Torres-García', 15.

[535] CR1941.06 http://www.torresgarcia.com/catalogue/entry.php?id=1732;
CR1941.27 http://www.torresgarcia.com/catalogue/entry.php?id=1820;
CR1945.07 http://www.torresgarcia.com/catalogue/entry.php?id=2128;

interior views of gothic churches.[536] All of these paintings were executed in a fairly conventional figurative manner, quite different from the symbol-filled grid that characterises Constructive Universalism.

Following this first, apparently isolated instance in 1927, gothic architecture and the idea of the cathedral then appears in several paintings completed between 1930 and 1931 as a means to think through issues of structure. In *Constructive Church* (Fig. 109) and *Church Interior* (Fig. 110) the vertical, horizontal and arched lines of gothic architecture are extended, shortened and repeated at will, creating unlikely constructions, a façade and a nave that no longer depict an actual architectural object but evoke it. Unlike Mondrian, who had used gothic architecture as a study into the strictly orthogonal deconstruction of the motif, Torres-García here used the forms of gothic architecture as a study into the construction of the pictorial field through fundamentally orthogonal but deliberately irregular structures.

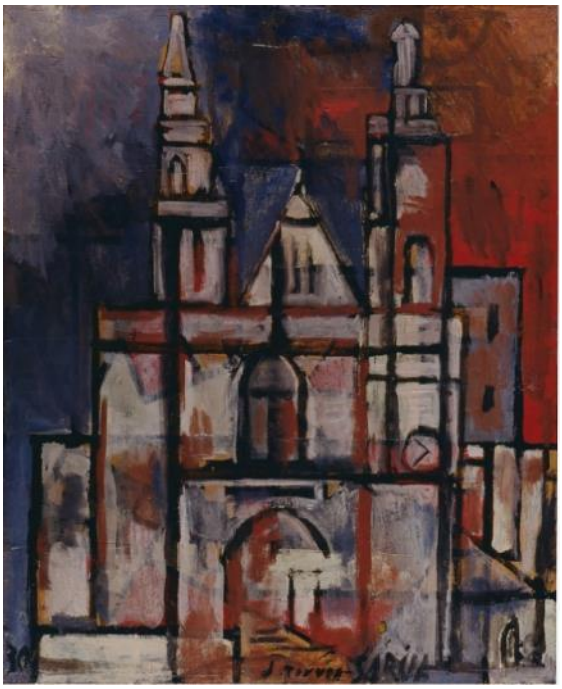

Fig. 109 Joaquín Torres García, *Iglesia constructiva* (*Constructive Church*), 1930, oil on canvas, 75 x 60 cm. (CR1930.14) Montevideo: Private collection.

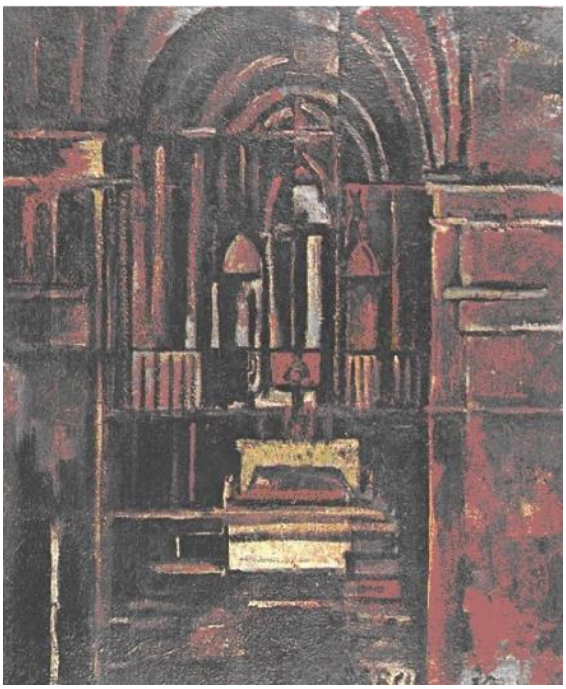

Fig. 110 Joaquín Torres García, *Interior de iglesia* (*Church Interior*), 1930, oil on canvas, 65 x 54 cm. (CR1930.39). Brazil: Private collection.

A further painting from the same year, *Universal Composition* (Fig. 111), already shows the kind of symbol-filled orthogonally-structured solution that Torres-García was

[536] CR1941.17 and CR1941.30 http://www.torresgarcia.com/catalogue/entry.php?id=1823

working towards at the time. Among the various objects that make up this *Universal Composition*, the artist included a recognisably gothic church façade in the bottom-left corner of the canvas: tall pointed towers with narrow windows flanking a central body with an ogival portal surmounted by a rose window under a steep triangular roof. Finally, the presence of the cathedral in Torres-García's repertoire of visual and conceptual references in the crucial early-1930s years is also evidenced in *Constructivist Cathedral* (Fig. 112) where the artist once again deconstructed a towering building into a series of arbitrarily sized orthogonal blocks.

Fig. 111 Joaquín Torres-García, *Composición universal* (*Universal Composition*), 1930, oil on wood panel, 44 x 41 cm. (CR1930.57) Destroyed.

Fig. 112 Joaquín Torres-García, *Catedral constructivista* (*Constructivist Cathedral*), 1931, oil on canvas, 73 x 60 cm. (CR1931.62) Buenos Aires: Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (Gift of Maria Luisa Bemberg).

When, by 1931, Torres-García felt he was arriving at a satisfactory formal resolution to years of pictorial enquiries – the sort of grid composition filled with symbols that was to dominate his production from that point onward – he wrote excitedly about it to his friend the poet Guillermo de Torre. In this letter, he characterised this solution as the style of a "cathedral":

> "Someday when I'm able, I will let you know what I've been working on recently, through photographs or some other means. It's a matter of style that I might call cathedral. Something quite strong, quite mature (a synthesis of all my work),

quite proper, in a constructive sense, and even better, it's something new because as [Jacques] Liptchitz [sic] says, it is the most ancient prehistory".[537]

'Cathedral' makes an interest choice of term by Torres-García to name his newly arrived-at solution, one that he sees as a synthesis of all his work, and that would form the basis of his Constructive Universalism. Torres-García used the term 'cathedral' to designate a pictorial solution that he characterised as having a marked "constructive" nature. Given Torres-García's lifelong attachment to Greek art, it would not have been out of character for him to relate his structural solution with classical architecture; perhaps use the example of the Doric temple, exalted by d'Ors as a constructive model, and recurrently explored by Torres-García himself both in his noucentista days and his subsequent classicist constructions of 1925-26 (see Fig. 80 above).

Instead, he resorted to the analogy of the cathedral as a model for a constructive structure, a kind of scaffolding upon which to organise the elements of a painting, or, in Pérez Oramas' words, a compositional solution that conceived of the painting as a "façade [...] opaque and aniconic, its frontality allowing an unfolding of schematic icons".[538] This kind of engagement with gothic architecture as part of a constructive approach to painting had also informed the practice of the various artists discussed in Part I of this thesis. It is again perhaps no coincidence that in Torres-García's case such an engagement occurred at a time when he was particularly close to three of these artists, van Doesburg, Freundlich and Mondrian.[539] This is not to say that Torres-García somehow 'discovered' the cathedral under these artists' 'influence'. As shown above, gothic architecture had intrigued Torres-García from a very early stage in his career,

[537] Underlined as in the original. Letter from Joaquín Torres García to Guillermo de Torre, 8 November 1931, Buenos Aires, Mario Gradowczyk archive, as quoted in Pérez-Oramas, 'The Anonymous Rule: Joaquín Torres-García, the Schematic Impulse, and Arcadian Modernity', 29. From the Spanish: "El día que pueda, por medio de fotografías u otra cosa, le haré conocer lo que he hecho últimamente. Es cosa de un estilo que podría llamar catedral. Algo muy fuerte, muy maduro (síntesis de toda mi obra), muy justo, en sentido constructivo y, lo que es mejor, algo nuevo porque es lo más antiguo, como [Jacques] Liptchitz [sic], pre-historia."

[538] Pérez-Oramas, 30.

[539] Torres-García met van Doesburg at the 1928 *Salon des Refusés*. The artists became close, visiting each others' ateliers and maintaning a correspondence that would continue until van Doesburg's death in 1931. Torres-García met Mondrian through his associate Seuphor in 1929, with whom he created the group *Cercle et Carré*. That same year he took part in the Exposition Selecte d'Art Contemporain, organised by Theo and Petro van Doesburg. The exhibition included Freundlich, with whom Torres-García also associated at the time.

when he travelled to Brussels in 1910. There, he had painted Saint Gudule cathedral in a way that already showed a focus on the structural lines of its façade, their verticality counterbalanced by cornices accentuated by a layer of snow (Fig. 86 above). What perhaps changed now for Torres-García was the 'acceptability' of the cathedral as an object of pictorial enquiry. That is, while his 1910 views of Saint Gudule had been dismissed as Northern and gothic in the Mediterranean-classicist atmosphere of noucentista Barcelona, in 1920s Paris, and surrounded by artists who had themselves worked unproblematically with gothic architecture in their pictorial practice, the cathedral now became a legitimate object of study for Torres-García too.

Stained glass, or at least the idea of it, also resurfaces at this point in his oeuvre. I am referring here to a 1931 painting titled *Vitral* (*Stained glass*) (Fig. 113). This is a little-known work belonging to a private collection which, according to the online Catalogue Raisonné, has never been exhibited and was only reproduced once in a publication, in 1954.[540] In this reproduction it was listed as *Composition*, rather than *Stained Glass*. The inconsistency in the title is not insignificant. The Catalogue Raisonné does not indicate where it gets the title *Stained Glass* from, but I would argue that this, as opposed to the more generic *Composition*, would have been the title given originally by Torres-García himself to a painting indeed intended to mimic stained glass. In truth, many of his works at the time are very similar to this – a grid-like structure supporting the usual repertoire of pictograms, such as in *Composition symétrique universelle en blanc et noir* (Fig. 114) – and could be said to somehow convey the idea of a stained glass window even if that were not the artist's intention

[540] F. Hazan, *Dictionnaire de La Peinture Moderne* (Paris: F. Hazan, 1954), 291. See entry in Catalogue Raisonnée http://www.torresgarcia.com/catalogue/entry.php?id=1035

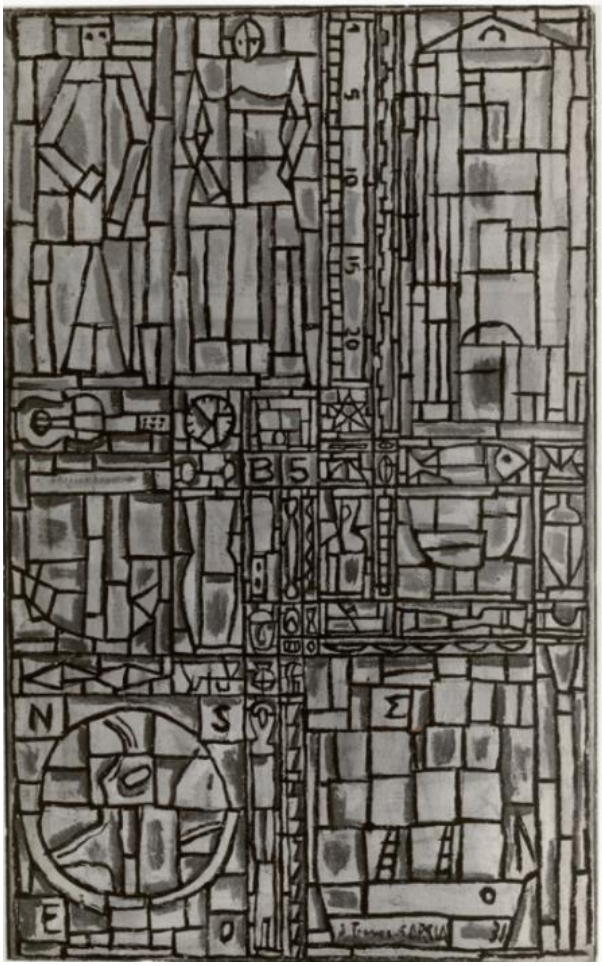

Fig. 113 Joaquín Torres-García, *Stained Glass,* 1931, oil on canvas, 108 x 59 cm (CR1931.12) Paris: Private collection.

Fig. 114 Joaquín Torres-García, *Composition symétrique universelle en blanc et noir*, (*Universal Symmetric Composition in Black and White*), 1931, oil on canvas, 122 x 63 (CR1931.08) Buenos Aires: Museo de Arte Latinoamericano.

However, *Stained Glass* shows a particular form of fragmentation, made up of large irregular quadrangles in the areas surrounding certain motifs – in particular the human figures on the top left and the map and boat on the bottom – that is strongly reminiscent of the treatment around the figures in the artist's stained glass project for the Diputació palace (Fig. 90 above). The uneven, almost haphazard fragmentation is unusually applied to some of the motifs too, like the clock and the bottle. Given that this form of irregular fragmentation in both the background and some motifs is not visible in other coeval compositions, its presence in this particular painting suggests that the title *Vitral (Stained Glass)* may have been a conscious choice by Torres-García; as he had done in the Badiella grotto mural fifteen years earlier, in *Vitral* he was deliberately attempting to reproduce the compositional logic of stained glass in paint. Thus, whether

or not van Doesburg's and Freundlich's engagement with stained glass had played any part in Torres-García's revisiting of the 1917 drawings, as discussed above, he appears to have made a conscious connection himself between stained glass and his own constructive painting at this point. It is no more than a fitting coincidence that the process of decomposition he had begun in 1916 with the help, I have argued, of stained glass, had given way to a process of construction the analogy of which was the cathedral. As is equally fitting that in 1931, when he felt years of work had matured into a synthesis that he termed "cathedral", he produced a painting in such a style entitled *Vitral (Stained Glass)*.

Gothic and romanesque in the 1932 Structures album

From this point onwards, regardless of any reservations Torres-García might have held about the medieval during his *noucentista* years, and however this may have later coloured any written acknowledgment of its value to his practice, there is otherwise ample graphic evidence to support the artist's interest in the art of the Middle Ages from both its romanesque and gothic periods as part of his Constructive Universalism research. An illustrative example of this is provided by the album *Structures*, which he compiled in 1932. In the catalogue to *Joaquín Torres-García: the Arcadian Modern*, Pérez-Oramas rightly draws attention to this hitherto little publicised assemblage that provides a wealth of material for understanding the artist's visual referents.[541] Making up for the album's previous lack of visibility, Pérez-Oramas' essay contains reproductions of the cover, back cover and twenty-four of its pages, two of which are given particular relevance as the essay's opening image (Fig. 115).

[541] Pérez-Oramas, 'The Anonymous Rule: Joaquín Torres-García, the Schematic Impulse, and Arcadian Modernity', 31.

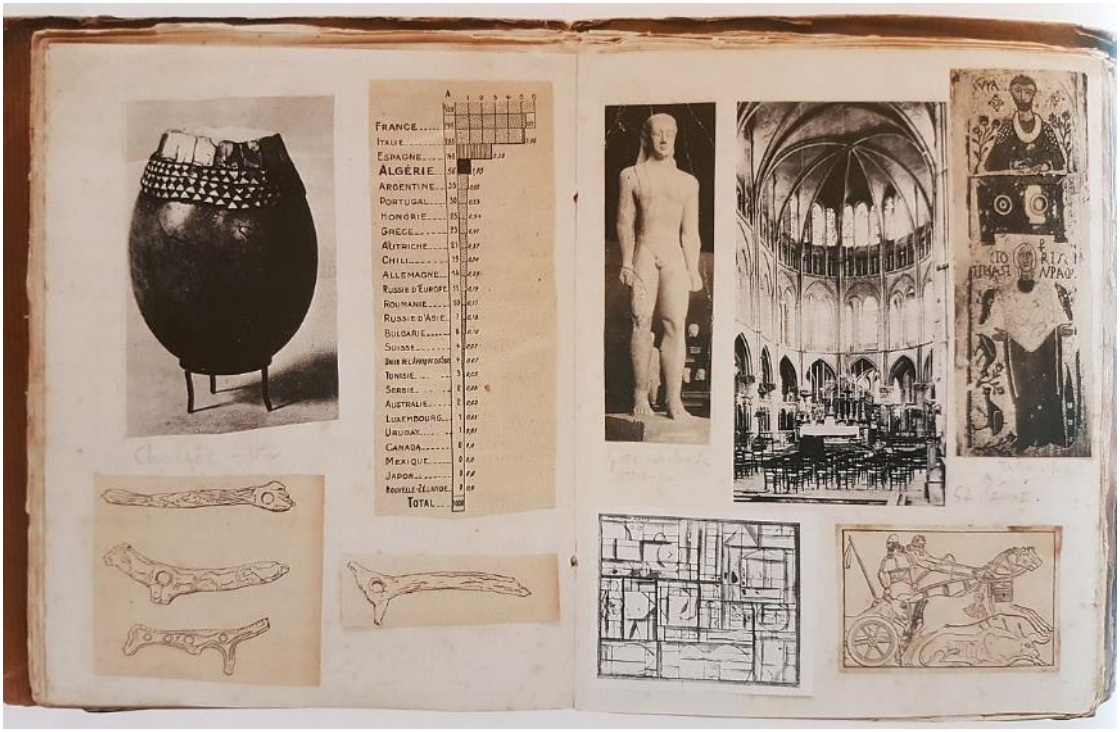

Fig. 115 Double spread from album *Structures* (1932), showing, among others: the gothic choir of the St. Remi church, Reims; a 5th century mosaic of Byzantine style, today at Bardo Museum, Tunisia; a grid drawing by Torres-García. Montevideo: Museo Torres-García.

The album is accurately described by Pérez-Oramas thus:

"More than a study of the meanings of symbols, in fact something other than a book – since it contains not a single mark made or word written by Torres – it is an atlas of images comparable in some respects to Warburg's unfinished *Atlas Mnemosyne*, which, though [sic], Torres could not have known. Like Warburg's project, Torres' atlas, simply titled *Structures*, is a purely visual 'text', an art history without words, idiolectic and deeply personal. Following an analogical syntax, it juxtaposes figures (collages of printed reproductions) that are temporally remote yet structurally similar: archaic forms, steles, stone inscriptions, topographical charts, old maps, diagrams for the making of musical instruments, boundary markers, signs or milestones with historical inscriptions, ocean liners, hieroglyphs, airplanes, alphabets for the blind, Romanesque paintings, and so on. This atlas is impossible to decode. Indeed, perhaps its most significant quality is the variety of visual consonances and dissonances among its images, all brought together under the generic name 'structures'. [...] As an

imaginary portable museum, the album is more than a catalogue of symbols; it is a little diary of fascinations."[542]

Thus, the diversity of sources from different periods and cultures – including the medieval and the contemporary – cited by Torres-García in several passages quoted above,[543] finds its visual counterpart in the photographic material collected by the artist in this scrapbook. Just as in the Catalan modernist magazines explored in the previous chapter, Torres-García's album provides yet another instance of the unproblematic coexistence of non-academic visual referents for modernism sourced from a broad temporal, geographical and cultural scope, including the European past.

The pages of the album reproduced below (Fig. 116-121), once again show medieval objects – such as gothic architecture and romanesque sculpture – sitting comfortably side by side with modernist art – such as a Mondrian painting and a drawing by Torres-García himself. It is also worth noting that, superseding any conflicting feelings the artist may have had towards the Middle Ages, the art from this period actually takes on a significant presence in the album, at least judging from the pages selected by Pérez-Oramas for reproduction in his essay: of the fifty-nine objects displayed, ten are medieval artworks, and a further three are Byzantine, with well-established formal ties to Western medieval art. Owing to space limitations, only the pages containing medieval objects are reproduced here identifying in each case the relevant contents. Attesting also to a fondness for works he must have known from his noucentista years, three are well-known objects of medieval heritage in Catalonia. These include the Cistercian Monastery of Poblet, near Tarragona[544] (Fig. 119), the parish church of Santa Maria del

[542] Pérez-Oramas, 31.

[543] See quotes above, notes 449, 454 and 455.

[544] The Poblet Monastery is a major Cistercian monastic compound and one of two royal pantheons of the Crown of Aragon. Built from 1151, it was highly valued as part of Catalan medieval heritage and featured, for example, in the inaugural issue of *Forma* magazine, February 1904. The Poblet Monastery is the subject of a 1940 work by Torres-García (CR 1940.102) http://www.torresgarcia.com/catalogue/entry.php?id=1723) painted at a time when, from Uruguay, the artist was revisiting in his paintings many of the landscapes and sites of his youth.

Pi, in Barcelona[545] (Fig. 120) and a sculpture of Christ on the Cross, known as *Majestat Batlló* (Fig. 117).[546]

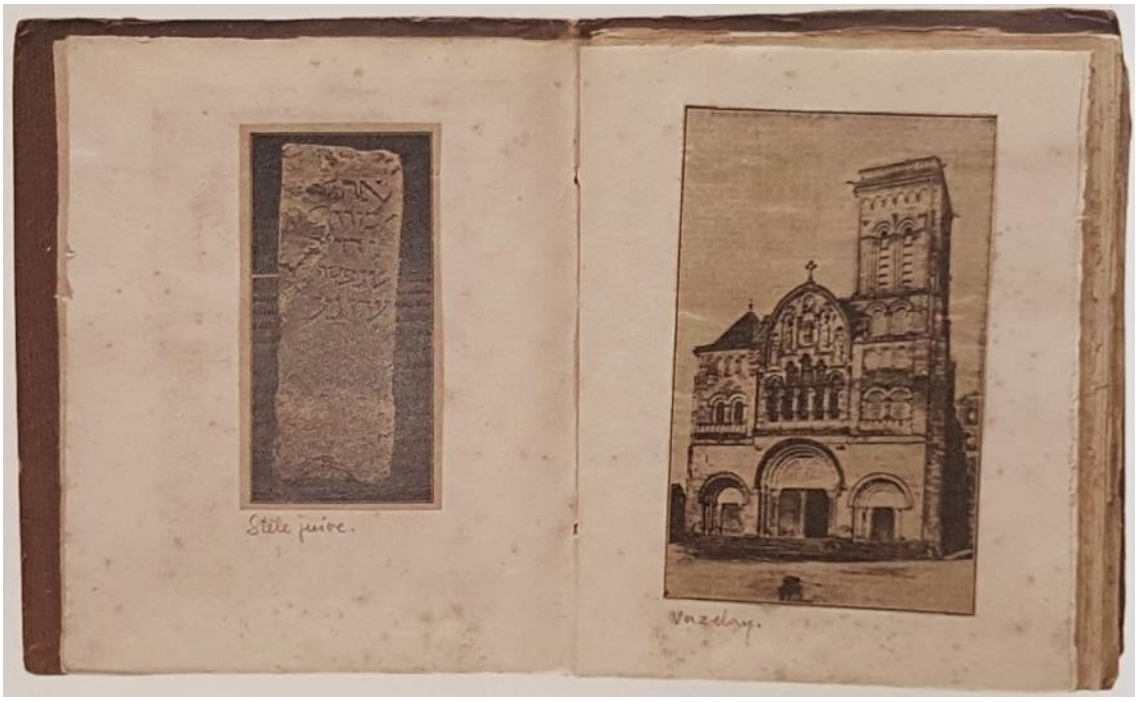

Fig. 116 Double spread from album *Structures* (1932), showing the romanesque Abbey of Vezelay, France. Montevideo: Museo Torres García.

[545] Santa Maria del Pi is a well-known landmark of the Gothic Quarter of Barcelona. Cercle Artístic de San Lluc, which Torres-García attended between 1893 and 1895, was located at Call Street, around the corner from this church.

[546] At 156cm height, Majestat Batlló remains one of the best preserved examples of Romanesque large-scale depictions of Christ on the Cross outside of Italy, where several such specimens have survived, mostly in Tuscan churches. It is today kept at Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona http://www.museunacional.cat/ca/colleccio/majestat-batllo/anonim/015937-000

Fig. 117 Double spread from album *Structures* (1932), showing, among others: an enthroned Virgin and Child from Notre Dame of Paris; the decorated interior of an unidentified medieval church; a 12th century crucifix known as *Majestat Batlló*, Barcelona; the medieval archaeological dig of Comines, France; a drawing of a Byzantine medal. Montevideo: Museo Torres García.

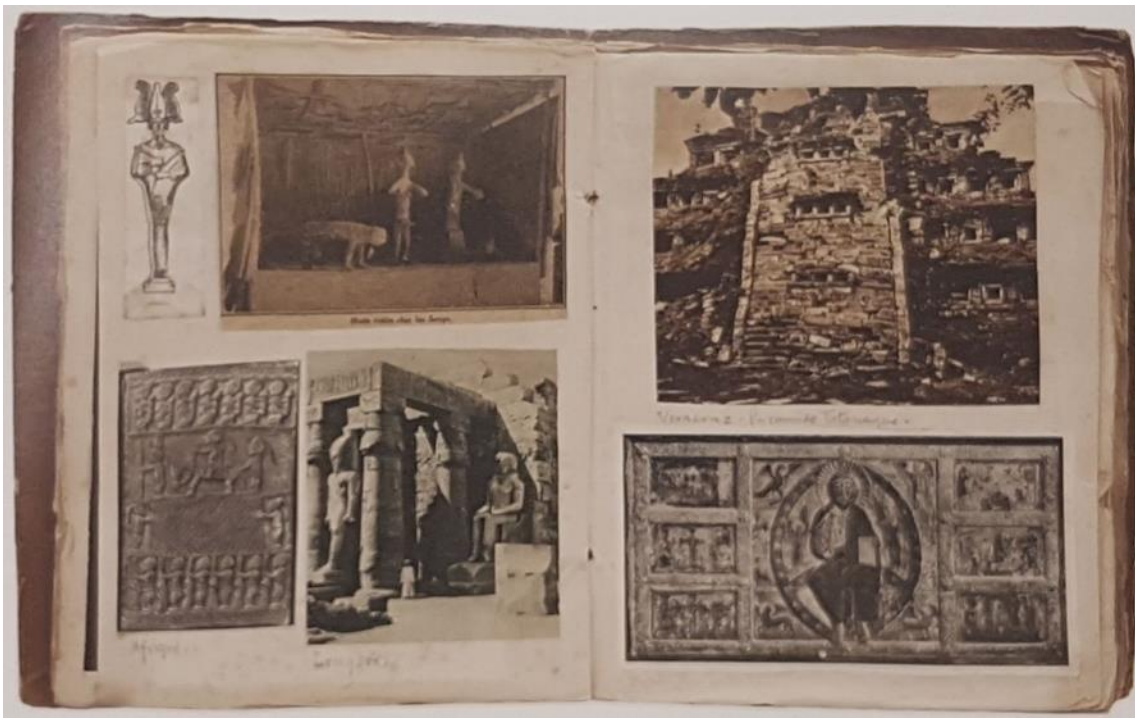

Fig. 118 Double spread from album *Structures* (1932), showing among others, the romanesque altar frontal of the San Salvatore Abbey, Berardegna, Siena. Montevideo: Museo Torres García.

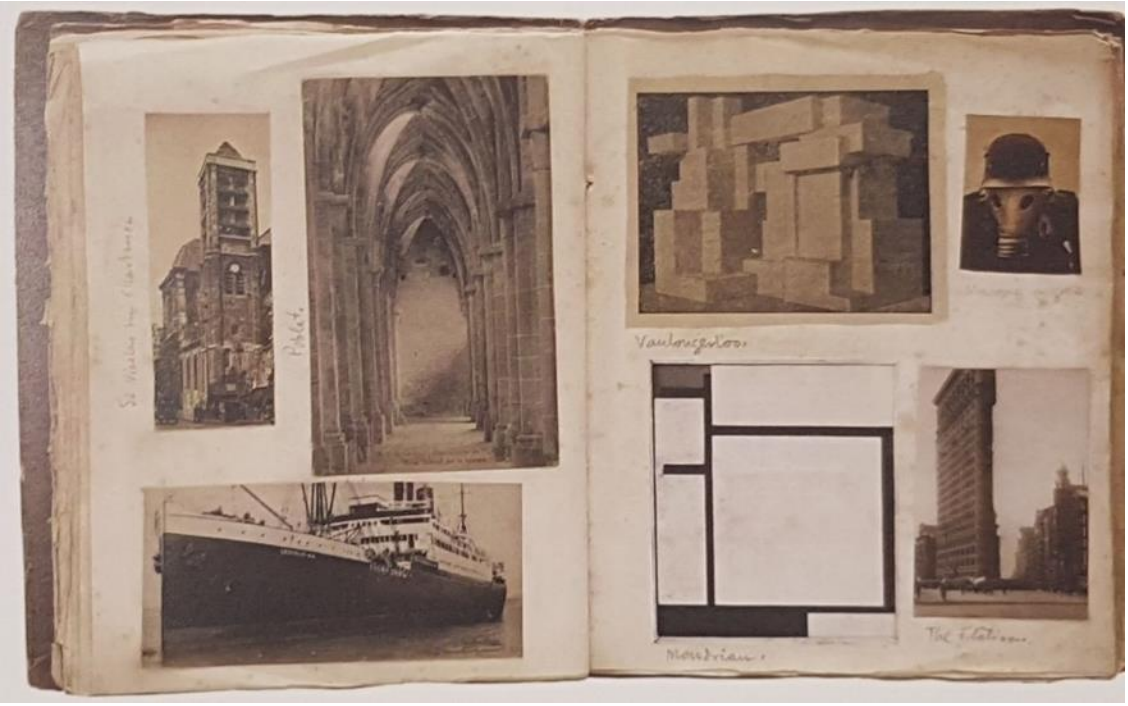

Fig. 119 Double spread from album *Structures* (1932), showing among others: the tower of the St. Nicolas du Chardonnet church, Paris; a side nave of the Cistercian Monastery of Poblet, near Tarragona, Spain. Montevideo: Museo Torres García.

Fig. 120 Double spread from album *Structures* (1932), showing among others, the façade of the gothic church of Sta. Maria del Pi, Barcelona. Montevideo: Museo Torres García.

Fig. 121 Double spread from album *Structures* (1932), showing among others, the Byzantine St. Sophia church/mosque, Istanbul. Montevideo: Museo Torres García.

The cathedral in *Universalismo Constructivo*

Having become established as a legitimate object for his own constructive pictorial enquiry during his years in Paris, the cathedral then appears as a valid reference for his students, too, in Torres-García seminal work *Universalismo Constructivo*.[547] The book brings together 150 conferences (or 'lessons') given by Torres-García, after his return to Uruguay, between 1934 and 1942. It constitutes a summation of his theories that acquires biblical status among participants in his extensive teaching activities in Asociación de Arte Constructivo and Taller Torres-García. *Universalismo Constructivo* is illustrated with drawings specifically created by the artist "as a visual support to the texts and ideas of the corresponding lessons, [reflecting] Torres-García's thinking and

[547] Joaquín Torres García, *Universalismo Constructivo: Contribución a La Unificación Del Arte Y La Cultura de América* (Buenos Aires: Poseidon, 1944).

constructive world".[548] Though the book was conceived by the artist as a "contribution to the unification of the art and culture of America"[549] its visual references go well beyond the expected pre-Columbian, encompassing once more the Ancient, the Classical and the contemporary, as well as the medieval in the form of three 'constructive' renditions of unequivocally gothic buildings (Fig. 122).

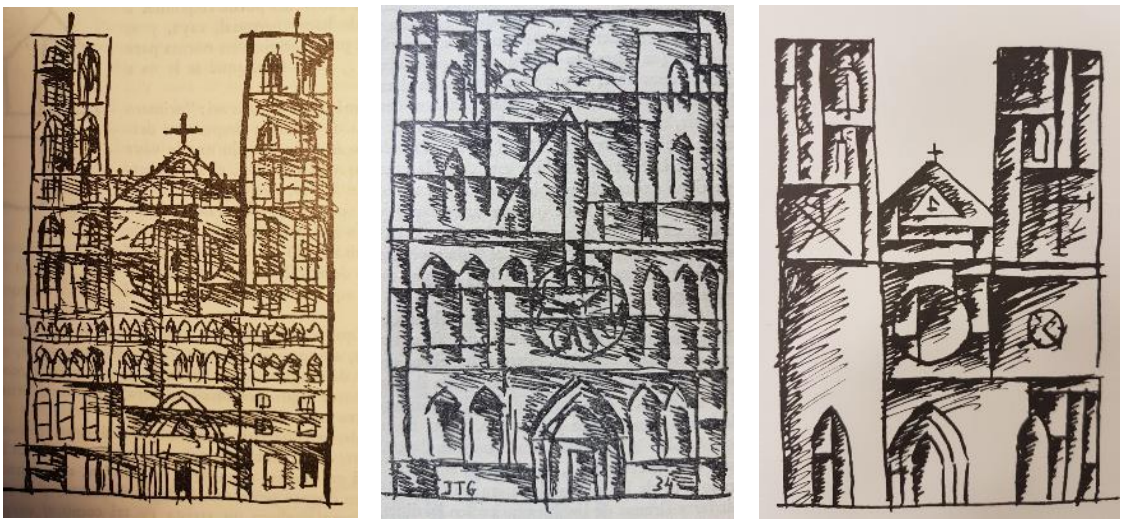

Fig. 122 Drawings of gothic façades in *Universalismo Constructivo*, 1934, (published 1944) pages, 124, 529 and 817

All three drawings appear loosely based on Notre Dame of Paris, a rarity among gothic cathedrals for the symmetrical orthogonality of its façade. Just as in his interpretation of cathedrals in the 1930-1931 constructive paintings discussed above, the lines of the façade are arbitrarily extended, shortened, repeated or omitted in an exercise of structured composition. In one of the drawings the scaffolding of lines making up the façade also runs into the space around it, blurring the distinction between object and background and extending the grid to the entirety of a rectangular field. It is precisely on account of their constructive value that cathedrals are celebrated in a passage of *Universalismo Constructivo*:

> "Constructive art is, therefore, the art of the peoples; and the art of the peoples is therefore the art of Humanity. As such, art thus structured, is within a true

[548] Jimena Perera, 'Introducción', in *J. Torres-García: dibujos del universalismo constructivo* (Montevideo: Casa de América; Museo Torres García, 2001), 12.

[549] Perera, 12.

> Tradition. It is the great geometric art of Egypt and Greece; that of Byzantium and the cathedrals; of the Aztecs, Incas and Oceanians. Art fundamented on rhythm, art that is number, and that will always be based on unity: classical art from all times." [550]

That is, in yet another reference to the Great Tradition, in this case described as constructive, geometric, structured art, Torres-García gives out the list of cultures or civilizations that, in his view, were part of what he calls the "classical art of all time". The enumeration includes the same cultures and civilizations that he lists repeatedly when discussing the qualities of primitive art – Egypt and Greece, Byzantium, Aztecs, Incas and Oceanians – which attests to the indissociability of 'the primitive' and 'the constructive' in Torres-García's understanding of art. As was the case in the quotes discussed further above,[551] the medieval is included in the enumeration but not without a certain reservation; where he might have logically written "Egypt and Greece, Byzantium and the Middle Ages," as equal categories, he selects instead a single manifestation from the latter, its cathedrals, as a legitimate referent for constructive art. It is as if, in the uneasy relationship Torres-García had with medieval art as a whole and with the gothic in particular, its cathedrals were a part whose value he recognised on account of their constructive nature.

Ultimately, it is worth stressing, *Universalismo Constructivo* also shows that Torres-García's appreciation for the cathedral now went beyond its value as a structural referent; in the latter part of his career, Torres-García found in the medieval edifice also a valid object for reflection on the spiritual in art. His concern with the spiritual had been there all along, surfacing time and again in his prolific written oeuvre. At times, it took the form of an interest in the esoteric - numerology, astrology, and hermetic traditions

[550] "El arte constructivo es, pues, el arte de los pueblos; y el arte de los pueblos, es entonces el arte de la Humanidad. Por eso, tal arte así estructurado, está dentro de una verdadera Tradición. Es el gran arte geométrico del Egipto y de Grecia; de Bizancio y de las catedrales; de los aztecas, incas y oceánicos. Arte que se funda en el ritmo, que es número, y que siempre tendrá por base la unidad: arte clásico de todos los tiempos." Joaquín Torres-García, 'Pintura y arte constructivo', in *Universalismo constructivo: contribución a la unificación del arte y la cultura de América* (Buenos Aires: Poseidon, 1944), 343.

[551] See quotes above, notes 454 and 455.

– which he shared with a good number of modernist and avant-garde artists[552].Yet, as noted by Pérez-Oramas, beyond the esoteric, the spiritual dimension of art was explored by Torres-García with one basic motive: "the need to understand what structure – upon which all potential for construction lies – can embody as symbol."[553] It was therefore, a concern with the spiritual that was deeply intertwined with the idea of structure.

This enquiry is yet another line of continuity that traverses Torres-García's entire career, one that is first expressed as early as 1913, when he was fully immersed in Noucentisme, and that we find manifested in a more mature and elaborate form in his 1930s *Universalismo Constructivo*. Thus, in *Notes sobre art* (*Notes on art*) – the most comprehensive written work of his noucentista years – he devoted a chapter to 'The Spirit of the Work of Art'. In it he described the spirit as that which animates a work of art, as something eternal yet revealed by each particular epoch. It was the job of the artist, he went on, to take the "soul of it all, the spirit, the truth enclosed in the symbol, and embody it in the very real forms of his time".[554]

Over two decades later, in *Universalismo Constructivo*, he acknowledged that the words "spirit" and "spiritual" could mean different things to different people – the mystical, the intellectual, the strength of the soul... – and proceeded to describe it for himself as "something that creates and that, therefore, partakes of the mind and the soul. [...] In a way, it could be said that it is *the existence in form*. [...] and that, the spiritual, is the concern of the *artist of today*."[555] In yet another chapter of the same book, this one entitled 'The spirit of the work', he wrote: "I said that *the great creator was the spirit*, and now I repeat it."[556] He went on to assert that such a spirit could be

[552] Pedro da Cruz, *Torres Garcia and Cercle et Carre: The Creation of Constructive Universalism, Paris 1927-1932* (Ystad: Hansson & Kotte Tryckeri AB, 1994), 36; Gradowczyk, *Torres García: Utopía y Transgresión*, 234 and following; Pérez-Oramas, *Joaquín Torres-García: The Arcadian Modern*, 31.

[553] Pérez-Oramas, *Joaquín Torres-García: The Arcadian Modern*, 31.

[554] Torres-García, *Notes Sobre Art*, 17.

[555] From the Spanish: "A menudo empleamos la palabra *espíritu* o *espiritual*, y quien sabe lo que cada cual entiende por eso. Para unos será algo místico, para otros (como en Francia) algo intelectual, para otros algo como fuerza de alma, etc. Tal como you definiría el espíritu sería: algo que crea, *y que por lo tanto, participa de la mente y del alma*. […]. En cierto sentido, podría decirse que es *la existencia en la forma*. […] Y esto espiritual, es el terreno propio del *artista de hoy.*" Joaquín Torres-García, 'Del orden al espíritu', in *Universalismo constructivo: contribución a la unificación del arte y la cultura de América* (Buenos Aires: Poseidon, 1944), 229.

[556] Joaquín Torres-García, 'El espíritu de la obra', in *Universalismo constructivo: contribución a la unificación del arte y la cultura de América* (Buenos Aires: Poseidon, 1944), 114.

found "in the art of a whole epoch, just as in a single work, when it has it". Of particular relevance to this thesis, he gave examples of the kind of works that in his view possessed such a spirit: "a temple, obviously not those made by the dozen or grossly, by mercenary architects, but such as Saint Sophia, or the Basilica of Assisi, or an Indian temple, or the Cathedrals, and such as were the temples of Greece and Egypt."[557]. Thus, among the usual references to the Byzantine, the Greek and the Egyptian, we find once more the cathedrals, this time not for their structural and formal values, but rather as structures endowed with a spirit. The spiritual value of the cathedral, finally, merits the artist's reflection in a further chapter of *Universalismo Constructivo*, one devoted to the subject of modern art and tradition. In this, he advocated the value of works such as the *Divine Comedy*, Rafael's paintings, Michelangelo's frescoes, and gothic cathedrals for their constructive and spiritual dimension. All of these, he claimed, had been the object of scathing critique by Nietzsche, who saw in them monuments to humanity's religious and philosophical errors. For Torres-García, Nietzsche's perception of these works was flawed because the philosopher had tried to apprehend their significance through reason alone, ignoring their spiritual aspect. Arguing his point, Torres-García proceeded to elaborate specifically on the cathedral:

> "I say that the spirit can interpret a Cathedral, but the intelligence cannot. Intelligence can only provide us with relative knowledge facts, that are useful, but nothing else: such distance with regard to another; such element supported by another; such form, etc. that is, the objective real assemblage of the Cathedral, but nothing else. Additionally, intelligence can also tell me that such Cathedral belongs to such or such religion, and that this is based on such or such legend or myth; and, therefore, on something baseless (which is what Nietzsche must have thought...) [...] Destructive spirit! Because the Cathedral vibrates in its entirety, magnificent; and the low-pitch chanting echoes with solemnity in its naves; and the ritual takes place in an orderly manner; and words of fire fly about that are lights for the soul; and every sign, every form (that the spirit interprets)

[557] From the Spanish: "Dije también que el gran creador era el espíritu, y ahora lo repito. […] Un templo tiene un espíritu (naturalmente no uno de esos templos o iglesias hechos a docenas o a gruesas, por arquitectos mercenarios), cuando es un templo como, por ejemplo, Santa Sofía o la Basílica de Asís, o un templo indio o las Catedrales, y como fueron los templos en Grecia y en Egipto. Y asimismo tiene espíritu todo el arte de una época, y también lo tiene una obra, cuando lo tiene." Torres-García, 114.

still says something (incomprehensible to the mind, but clear to the soul) that takes us to our most spiritual self. [...] And it follows that we identify with the whole, and then we can really know the whole. Such building is not a 'Bank' or a 'School': it is architecture (and this, to give but a name to that which cannot be named): we know its surfaces, planes, pure geometrical shapes and... something that emanates from all this, something inexplicable, that is its soul. And this, today, and in ten centuries' time, is true. How did Nietzsche not see this in the Cathedral? Instead, he threw at it vitriol, corrosive acid, intelligence; and he disaggregated everything: stone and spirit. And with that, he deprived himself of experiencing the most beautiful thing."[558]

Epilogue – One final stained glass project

In 1948, towards the end of his life, Joaquín Torres-García produced three last compositions in stained glass (Fig. 123-125). Destined for his own home in Montevideo, these were glass renditions of the line of constructive paintings in primary colours he had been producing in parallel to those in earthy tones shown above. These stained glass pictures were part of a project in which he would revisit the idea of the integration of the arts under architecture. The concept, common to Neoplasticism and the Bauhaus, had also been central to Noucentisme, championed in particular by Folch.[559] Just as van Doesburg had done in 1930 at his Meudon-Val-Fleury residence, Torres-García now set

[558] From the Spanish: "Digo que el espíritu puede interpreter una Catedral, pero no la inteligencia. La inteligencia sólo, entonces, podrá proporcionarnos datos de conocimiento relativo, que tienen que servirnos, pero nada más: tal distancia, con respecto a otra; tal elemento que apoya en otro; tal forma, etc., es decir, el conjunto real objetivo de la Catedral; pero nada más. Por otro lado, también podrá decirme que, la tal Catedral, pertenece a tal o cual religión, y que ésta, está apoyada en tal o cual leyenda o mito; y, por lo tanto, en algo sin base (que es lo que debió pensar Nietzsche…); [...] ¡Espíritu destructor! Porque la Catedral vibra toda entera, magnífica; y el grave canto resuena solemne en sus naves; y el ritual se desarrolla ordenado; y vuelan palabras de fuego que son luces para el alma; y cada signo, cada forma, (que intepreta el espíritu) aun le dice algo (incomprensible a la mente pero claro al alma) que nos pone en lo más espiritual nuestro. (…) Y de ahí se sigue esto: que nos identificamos con todo; y entonces todo lo conocemos realmente. Tal edificio no es un 'Banco' o una 'Escuela': es arquitectura (y esto para dar un nombre a lo que no puede dársele), conocemos superfícies, planos, formas puras geométricas y… algo que emana de todo aquello, inexplicable, y que es su alma. Y esto, hoy, y de aquí a diez siglos, es verdad. ¿Cómo, pues, Nietszche no vió eso en la Catedral? Pero tiró allí vitriolo, ácido corrosivo, inteligencia; y disgregó todo: piedra y espíritu. Y con esto se privó de vivir la más bella cosa." Joaquín Torres-García, 'Arte moderno y arte de tradición', in *Universalismo constructivo: contribución a la unificación del arte y la cultura de América* (Buenos Aires: Poseidon, 1944), 861–63. Text originally written in April 1941.

[559] Vidal i Jansà, *Teoria i Crítica En El Noucentisme*.

out to put into practice in his own home: furniture, stained glass, ironwork, mural decoration.[560]

Fig. 123 Joaquín Torres-García, *Constructivista vertical* (*Vertical Constructivist*), 1948, stained glass, 78.8 x 53.3 cm. (CR1948.08) Estate of the artist.

Fig. 124 Joaquín Torres-García, *Untitled*, 1948, stained glass, 75 x 55 cm. (CR1948.26) Estate of the artist.

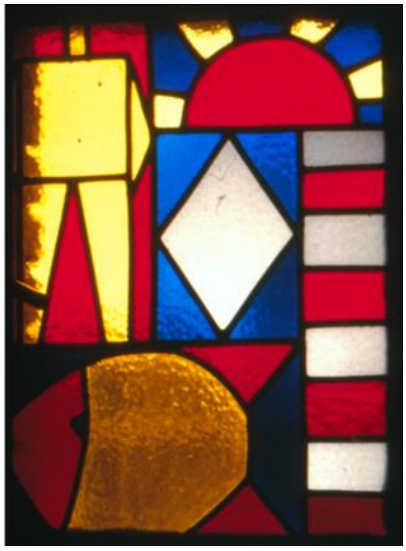

Fig. 125 Joaquín Torres-García, *Stained Glass*, 1948, stained glass, sizes unknown.(CR1948.31) Montevideo: Estate of the artist, on site in Calle Carramuru 5612.

By rendering Universal Constructive paintings in the form of stained glass compositions, Torres-García acknowledged the conceptual common ground between these two media, their virtual interchangeability. He had already translated stained glass into paint in his colourless 1931 *Vitral*. Now, in 1948, he was exploring the process in reverse and in full colour, evidencing in the process how stained glass followed the same basic principle he had been advocating for painting since the early 1930s: painting as construction, as an object built out of colour fields (or glass panes) visually (or physically) held together by a scaffolding of black lines (or lead strips). [561]

[560] Maslach, *Joaquín Torres-García: sol y luna del arcano*, 147.

[561] Joaquín Torres-García, *La Regla abstracta*, trans. Emilio Ellena and Florencia de Amesti (Rosario, Argentina: Ellena, 1967), n.p. Torres-García had described painting as "Building OBJECTIVELY: 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." From the Spanish: "Construir OBJETIVAMENTE: tal como un albañil construye un muro – y que pone – un ladrillo – después cal – luego otro ladrillo – y más cal – y siempre con el nivel y la plomada. Lo mismo el pintor: rojo puro – un ángulo – después azul – una forma – blanco – negro – amarillo."

The analogy between Torres-García's constructive paintings and stained glass has been traced by Pérez Oramas:

> "In 1934 he returned to Uruguay, the unassuming country he had left at the age of seventeen. Back in his land of origin, he would continue to develop variations on his pictorial approach, his universal pictographism, his iconic constructivism. It was as if the man who had worked with Antoni Gaudí on the stained glass windows for the Majorca cathedral were still making stained glass windows but making them with paint, opaque and blind, or as if he were sculpting primal steles hiding the secret of a primitive civilization yet to come into being."[562]

Pérez Oramas' mention of Gaudí and the Majorca cathedral project raises a final consideration on the significance of Torres-García's stained glass compositions for his Montevideo home. The last decade of his artistic practice is described by the same author as one where:

> "he worked eclectically through his own stylistic history. He returned and regressed in every possible way, to the point where on the day he died, he painted a touching little Arcadian scene, a maternity with birds in flight, in the schematic style of the 1920s – as if his last day were also his first, and he had allowed himself the unusual liberty of finishing where he began."[563]

It is also in the 1940s when, as part of these constant returns and revisits, and in the midst of all the Arcadian reminiscing, we find several medieval referents of his youth evoked in a considerable number of paintings. Some have been mentioned above, Saint Gudule of Brussels and Notre Dame de Paris, the romanesque *Maiestas Domini*... Alongside these, a surprising number of Catalan landscapes dominated by small medieval churches, the monastery of Poblet... Only one of these paintings is clearly a copy of an earlier version of the same view.[564] The rest emerge unexpectedly at this late stage in Torres-García's body of work: several views of Vilanova i la Geltrú, Terrassa, Sant

[562] Pérez-Oramas, 'The Anonymous Rule: Joaquín Torres-García, the Schematic Impulse, and Arcadian Modernity', 34.

[563] Pérez-Oramas, 35.

[564] I'm referring to the 1940 *Terrassa Church*, shown in Fig. 89, which copies a 1922 version of the same view (CR1922.14), the dating of which is, in itself, surprising, given that he was already living in New York at the time.

Genís d'Agudells,[565] all without known precedents in his painted oeuvre. Torres-García had not been back to Barcelona for years now, even less to the rural locations these works depict. The paintings are more likely based on sketches he had kept from that time. With their conventional representation, they are of little formal interest. Yet, they suggest that Torres-García's note-taking from medieval architecture while still in Barcelona had been more substantial than his coeval Arcadian classicist production lets on. Moreover, the translation of these sketches into paintings at this particular time, when Torres-García was working through his own stylistic history, also signals that he recognised them as part of the eclectic repertoire of referents he had ultimately synthesised in his distinct constructive idiom.

In this context, the stained glass panels for the Montevideo project might be seen as more than a transposition of constructive painting into glass. While his early incursions into stained glass – with Gaudí in Majorca and by himself in Barcelona – had been without continuity, his experiences in this medium had remained a source of pride. In 1934, already immersed in theorising Constructive Universalism, he had written fondly of the trichromy experience he had carried out almost twenty years earlier for the Gothic Room of the Diputació palace,[566] its distinctly revivalist look apparently not clouding his memory of it. A year later, in 1935, he also recalled the "superb palette" and "wonderful" results of the windows he had worked on with Gaudí at the Majorca cathedral at the beginning of his career.[567] Against the backdrop of reminiscing that envelops so much of Torres-García's 1940s work, when, as quoted above, he allowed himself the unusual liberty of finishing where he began, I would posit that in creating these panels for his Montevideo home he was not simply stating an obvious affinity between constructive painting and stained glass, but perhaps also tacitly acknowledging this medium's place in the early stages of his career, and its significance as yet another contributor to Constructive Universalism.

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[565] *Iglesia* CR1940.11; *Paisaje con iglesia* CR1940.30; *Iglesia de Terrassa* CR1940.71; *Catalan Landscape*, CR1940.87; *Iglesia románica* CR1940.90; *Monasterio de Poblet* CR1940.102; *Manresa* CR1941.23; *Sant Genís d'Agudells* CR1945.17; *Iglesia* CR1945.25; *Paisaje* CR1946.18; *Iglesia de Terrassa*, CR1946.21; *Iglesia* CR1946.22; *Iglesia metafísica* CR1946.30; *Capilla Villa Nova y Geltru* (sic) CR1946.33.

[566] Torres García, *Joaquín Torres García: historia de mi vida*, 103.

[567] Torres-García, 'Mestre Antoni Gaudí', 562.

Final considerations

Over his long career, Torres-García established a rapport with the medieval that was at times conflicted, at times apparently inexistent, but ultimately fruitful. His early views on it were conditioned by the strong classicist mediterraneanness prevalent in the noucentista art scene of 1910s Barcelona where he first developed his practice. In this regard, a comprehensive survey of modernist magazines published in the city in the first two decades of the 20th century, some with contributions by Torres-García himself, has served to characterise attitudes towards the medieval in its art milieux.

This survey has shown a predominant mindset among cultural players in Barcelona in which a belief in progress and a desire for modernity were not at odds with an appreciation for the past and a conviction that it held valuable lessons for the future. Within this valorisation of the past, the survey has focused specifically on the perception of the medieval. It has found that in the earliest modernist publication, still in the late 19th century, the medieval past was generically glorified as a time of greatness for Catalonia, thus feeding into the coeval nationalist discourse that promoted the idea of a distinct Catalan identity within Spain. In subsequent publications, this exaltation of the medieval period is seen to give way to a more concrete appreciation for its heritage. Initially, the perceived value of such heritage is largely archaeological; medieval artefacts are deemed valuable in themselves, as rare objects from a historical period. Already in the first years of the 20th century, however, they gain new currency as actual artworks from which the modern practitioner is encouraged to learn. Yet, for all the visibility given to medieval art in the pages of modernist magazines for the benefit of modern artists, its actual impact on the coeval artistic production is seen to have been limited.

To a large extent, this limited uptake of medieval referents among modern practitioners is explained by the marked classicist noucentista vision championed by Eugeni d'Ors, a key theorist of the movement, who conversely rejects the medieval as 'Northern'. His views are counterbalanced by another influential voice in Noucentisme, Joaquim Folch i Torres, who promotes a more inclusive gaze towards the past, where the medieval is valued alongside the Greek, or rather, just below it. Still, this ambiguous

attitude towards the medieval leaves artists in a sort of limbo as to the suitability of incorporating it into their practice.

Torres-García provides an illustrative case in point of this dilemma; what appears to have been a genuine early interest in medieval objects – manifested in sketches of small romanesque churches and their mural decoration, and in paintings of a 'Northern' gothic cathedral – is soon suppressed and has no visible continuity in his practice for years. His writings at the time signal an ambivalent stance towards the medieval. In some texts he explicitly rejects it, and in particular the gothic, as Northern. In others he admits it into a primitive-constructive line that, in Torres-García's thinking, links the pre-historic, the present and the future. Even when that is the case, however, the gothic is invariably placed hierarchically below the Greek.

While the exclusively classicist line of noucentista art theory championed by Eugeni d'Ors may have muffled an overt curiosity for the medieval in Torres-García, two heritage conservation initiatives provided him with opportunities for a hands-on engagement with it in the form of stained glass commissions for gothic buildings. Having subsequently left Barcelona and lived in New York and Livorno, Torres-García moved to Paris in the late 1920s. There he associated with artists whose own career had developed within a 'Northern' culture that celebrated the cathedral, and whose constructive practice was, or had been, informed by gothic architecture and stained glass. This, I have argued, legitimised his own early interest in the medieval, which now resurfaced in his work. At this point, he resorted to the idea of the cathedral to trace an analogy for the formula of primitive figuration arranged over orthogonal structures that he would theorise as Constructive Universalism.

This constructive solution has been related by scholarship to various structural sources: from urban façades to geometric cityscapes, from pre-Columbian constructions to the neoplasticist grid of Torres-García's artist associates. This thesis has not contested any of these; in Torres-García rich world of visual references all of them were no doubt part of the process. The aim here has been to add to this repertoire, to show that, as attested to by his 1932 *Structures* album, his conflicted stance towards the medieval had evolved to the point where it, too, became part of his constructive pictorial research.

The gothic, or at least the cathedral in it, had been finally admitted to his Great Tradition of the primitive-constructive.

The case of Torres-García illustrates how in the first decades of the 20th century the appropriation of the cathedral by modernist artists placed this medieval object at the centre of a complex web of interrelated tensions: between the modern and the medieval, the forward-looking present and the past, the gothic and the classical, the Northern and the Mediterranean. While pulled in every direction of these dialogical relationships, the cathedral, and its stained glass windows, nevertheless held a common significance to all the artists discussed here, that of an object of study for a constructive pictorial practice.

These artists' concern with the constructive dimension of art manifested itself in different ways. A number of them expressed an understanding of painting as architecture: Torres-García described the work of a painter as that of a mason, placing row upon row of coloured blocks; Kupka established an analogy between the painted work of art and a building, a network of lines that supports what the artist wishes to express; Freundlich, too, conceived of painting as an architecture of colour juxtaposition, and he preferred working with stained glass over painting. So did van Doesburg who, moreover, favoured architecture over all other art forms. In consequence, just as Mondrian and Albers, van Doesburg developed a pictorial practice as part of a collective who worked toward the integration of the arts into architecture. Delaunay's practice, on the other hand, like that of Kupka, was strictly pictorial. That is, unlike the remaining artists discussed here, neither of them worked with stained glass or even created designs for it, nor was either involved in architectural projects. Yet, Delaunay, like Torres-García, Freundlich and Mondrian, engaged with gothic architecture and stained glass as part of a two-phase enquiry involving, first, a process of 'deconstruction', 'destruction' or 'decomposition', followed then by one of 'construction'.

In Torres-García, what he called a process of decomposition initiated in 1916, was informed, I have argued, by his involvement in the design of stained glass windows for a gothic public building. In this project, the logic of building a composition out of glass fragments and integrating it into the fabric of a building fed into his concern for the

notion of construction, of painting as architecture. At the same time, the need to fragment large motifs into smaller manageable pieces, often having to cut through the 'natural' contours of the motif, gave him insights into the possibilities of arbitrary fragmentation. These informed the 'decomposition' that is visible in drawings, and some paintings, produced at a critical time of his artistic development around 1917. Over a decade later, as part of an avant-garde circle in Paris, the idea of the cathedral, and more specifically of its façade, provided Torres-García with a constructive model, a structural device for the orderly arrangement of symbols on a scaffolding of thick black lines in what he would call Constructive Universalism.

Freundlich, too, referred to a process of decomposition while working in stained glass at Chartres cathedral in 1914. About a decade later, his ongoing engagement with this medium would shape his pictorial practice when, while handling the pieces of a glass composition, he came upon the idea of creating paintings based on the juxtaposition of trapezoidal colour fields without dark lines to separate them, a sort of 'lead-less stained glass' paintings. In Mondrian's case, a process of motif deconstruction into horizontal and vertical lines has been well documented prior to his construction of the orthogonal grid that would characterise Neoplasticism. Here I have argued that his choice of Domburg church for the 1914 *Façade* series was not random but rather motivated by his stated wish to capture the sense of elevation produced by a cathedral. That is, his engagement with gothic architecture, also visible in a number of earlier paintings of gothic towers, would have been related to his exploration of the vertical element of the orthogonal equation. Delaunay, for his part, described the period in which he created the *Saint-Séverin* series as destructive, while characterising as constructive the subsequent series on *Simultaneous Windows*. The 'destruction' he operated at the gothic church of Saint-Séverin involved the contortion of architectural form, but also the fragmentation of colour as filtered by the building's stained glass windows. His observation of the latter appears to then inform the construction of semi-transparent, multicolour compositions, in the manner of stained glass, that define his subsequent *Simultaneous Windows* series. His observation of stained glass at Saint-Séverin, I have posited, may also have fed into the enquiries on the optical properties of colour that he would develop in his Orphic discs.

Van Doesburg first became involved in stained glass upon receiving a commission in this medium for a project with J. J. P. Oud, an architect who, for his part, saw in the cathedral a referent for the unity of the arts model he pursued. In a research trip related to this project, van Doesburg declared to have found his "task" of "creating a crystal atmosphere" after a visit to a gothic church and a medieval art museum in Haarlem. From that point on, stained glass would be a central concern in his practice and would remain closely intertwined with his constructive pictorial research. Albers, on the other hand, was intrigued by the medium before he joined the Bauhaus. At this school, that like J. J. P. Oud celebrated the cathedral as a model for the unity of the arts under architecture, Albers found the space to develop an intense enquiry into the creative possibilities of glass. While at the Bauhaus he worked preferably in this medium, ultimately devising a technical solution for building 'glass pictures' that could function as an easel painting instead of being integrated into architecture.

Kupka, as was the case with Delaunay, found a fertile source of pictorial research in the forms of gothic architecture. One of his areas of enquiry was the expressive potential of the vertical; like Mondrian, he explored it in gothic architecture. The symmetrical periodicity of the columns in a cathedral, moreover, gave him material to research the idea of rhythm, also key to his practice. The stained glass windows of the churches he visited regularly in Paris, for their part, provided him with useful insights into the kinetic properties of coloured light, an area of interest that he again shared with Delaunay.

These artists' relationship with the gothic, while motivated by a common constructive approach to painting, signals widely different stances towards the past in general and towards the medieval in particular.

Torres-García, despite his protestations to the contrary during his '1917 crisis', was largely untroubled by the idea of looking at the past in order to build the present and the future. From his early years in Barcelona, the past had held immense appeal, be it as the source of classical referents, be it as a source of primitive ones, which he ultimately conflated. More problematic, all along, had been the medieval section of that past, and even more so, the gothic section within it. Only after leaving Barcelona, and in particular after arriving in Paris, was he able to move away from the identitary discourse

that in Mediterraneanist Noucentisme rejected the gothic as Northern, and include it, or at least its cathedrals, in the Great Tradition of the primitive-constructive. In so doing, he brought the medieval into a compressed temporality of modernity that encompassed the ancient, the current and the future, while leaving out what he saw as the materialist mimetism of the Renaissance.

Freundlich's stance towards the medieval was also coloured by this current of thought (echoed by Worringer too) that associated the Renaissance to the bourgeois. According to this view, the Middle Ages offered a pre-bourgeois model of collective work, skilled craftsmanship and common purpose that modern society could rely on to build a better future. Freundlich found a way to represent such a utopian society through his 'lead-less stained glass' paintings, in which, according to his own description, an unbroken circulation of colour energies signified socialism. The early Bauhaus, too, subscribed to this socialist idealisation of the Middle Ages. In conjunction with Albers' catholic background, this informed this artist's highly crafted work in glass, and unwittingly found expression in his 1930 'glass picture' of a cathedral, a modern reinterpretation of the 'cathedral of the future' that the Bauhaus first set out to build.

In Kupka's paintings, on the other hand, the cathedral acquired an organic dimension that, I have argued, implicitly challenged the identitary interpretation of the gothic put forth by Worringer. If 'true' gothic, in Worringer's book, was to be strictly geometric and therefore Germanic, then Kupka's French cathedral would be organic and therefore 'Greek'. Delaunay's choice of motif at Saint-Séverin may, or may not, have also been conditioned by the identitary discourses surrounding the gothic in France. If taken as an approximation to Cubism, the Saint-Séverin series might be read through the lens of the cubist-symbolist celebration of the gothic as representative of a true French spirit rooted in the country's Celtic legacy.

No such identitary considerations appear to have been at play in Mondrian's and van Doesburg's rapport with the gothic. French-German disputes over the lineage of gothic architecture carried little weight in the Netherlands. If anything, the style was negatively associated with the period of Catholic Habsburg domination of the Low Countries. In consequence, it was neither celebrated for nationalist purposes nor was it endowed with idealist values. For Mondrian and van Doesburg the gothic simply seems

to have offered formal values of interest to their enquiries, a benchmark to compete with. Once they felt they had mastered these values, they moved on and, unlike the remaining artists under study, never felt the need to revisit their medieval referents.

The evidence discussed here suggests that the unequivocal forward-looking stance of these seven artists was no impediment to their sourcing referents in the past. Countering the notion of a rupturist attitude among modernist practitioners, even when explicitly claimed by the artists themselves, this thesis has set out to show that rather than breaking with the past, they devised efficient strategies to bridge the temporal gap between it and the early 20th century. With regard to the medieval past specifically, they brought it into a compressed temporality of modernity, they competed with it, and ostensibly surpassed it, so as to continue moving forward, they idealised the medieval as heralding a utopian future, or they simply appropriated its built legacy as an object of avant-garde pictorial research. In the hands of the seven artists discussed here, the Middle Ages, embodied in the cathedral, were endowed with modern currency, and thus references sourced in the medieval past found a legitimate place in the modernist practice of forward-looking artists.

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