Maite Méndez Baiges

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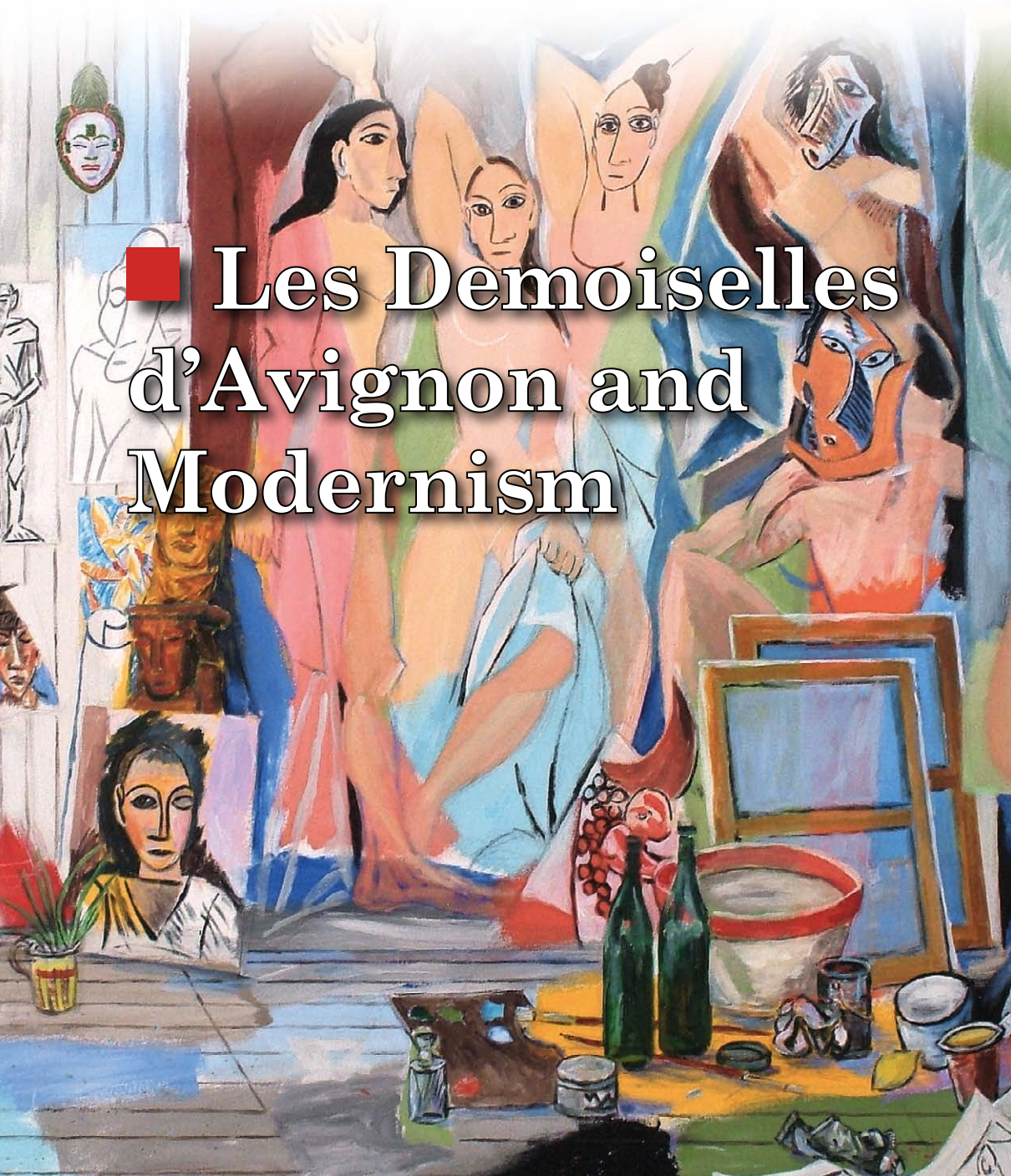

Les Demoiselles d'Avignon and Modernism

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translated by
Diana Mathieson

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For Jorge, *Nunc scio quid sit amor*

While acknowledging, in general terms, the superiority of experimental poetry as what defines an era, I cannot but see in Les Demoiselles d'Avignon *the major occurrence of the start of the 20th century. It is the painting that we would carry in procession through the streets of our capital city as we had done before with Cimabue's Madonna, were scepticism not the dominant feature of our era. […]* Les Demoiselles d'Avignon *defies analysis and the laws of its great composition cannot be formulated in any way. Nay, furthermore, after Picasso, we should bid farewell to all painting of the past.*

André Breton to Jacques Doucet,
12 December, 1924

Les Demoiselles d'Avignon…the perpetually incandescent crater from which the fire of all contemporary art springs forth… Contemporary art and future art emerge from this benign tyranny. Picasso invented it all.

André Salmon, "Picasso", *L'Esprit Nouveau*,
May 1920

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INTRODUCTION

An Archaeology of Modernism

Gazes

> Investment in the look is not privileged in women as in men.
> More than the other senses the eye objectifies and masters.
> It sets at a distance, maintains the distance. In our culture,
> the predominance of the look over smell, taste, touch, hearing
> has brought about an impoverishment of bodily relations…
> The moment the look dominates, the body loses its materiality.[1]

In a black and white photograph published in the magazine *Life* dated 22 May 1939, we see a group of persons standing in front of Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* [Fig. 1], painted in Paris in 1907. The photograph was taken on 8 May 1939 at the exhibition "Art in Our Time" and those portrayed are members of the board of Trustees of the New York Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), an institution destined to become the most powerful centre of modern or contemporary art[2] in the world albeit there are those who have wickedly insisted on calling it the "Kremlin of modern art". In the photograph six persons

[1] That is to say it becomes an image, added Owens 1983, 70, quoting Luce Irigaray (1978).

[2] The meaning of the terms modern art and contemporary art has still not been completely resolved. Although in many cases, languages and contexts nowadays Modern art refers to avant-garde art from the end of the 19th century to the Fifties and Sixties and Contemporary art to that produced from thereon, this use is neither unanimous nor constant. In this book, furthermore, we shall be using many written sources from the first decades of the 20th century that, naturally, use the expression contemporary art to refer to Cubism and other contemporaneous avant-garde movements. Since this book focuses on the theories of modern art, or the modern aesthetic, we shall use, preferably, the expression "modern art" but also interchangeable with that of "contemporary art". We are confident that the context will

Maite Méndez Baiges, University of Malaga, Spain, mendez@uma.es, 0000-0002-0762-7004

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appear to be listening to a seventh, situated in the centre and pointing with a smile at some imprecise detail in the painting. At first he is apparently pointing to one of the nudes, the young lady at centre left but perhaps it might be the one on the far left who appears to be entering some kind of scene. We cannot know what the gentleman is telling the group of people but in any case, his audience is returning his smile.

This photograph shows us a cordial meeting in which, possibly, someone is proposing an explanation of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* to a small, select audience. In the foreground at the lower left corner of the photograph, it is just possible to discern, a slightly out-of focus hand holding a camera, taking another photograph of the scene from a different angle. I would like to propose this image as a type of portrait to illustrate this book because I have written it from the position of the camera, to observe, to show and to examine the different explanations devoted to this work throughout its hundred years of existence. The smiling faces in the photograph can only be a good omen.

The person to whom they are listening is Nelson A. Rockefeller, the then president of the MoMA trustees. And let us look closer at his audience and the gazes of the three distinguished gentlemen and three distinguished ladies.[3] Art history discipline consists above all in an exercise questioning the gaze. The gazes of the five women portrayed in the painting of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* have always aroused attention, mainly because they are directed outside the canvas, focusing on the spectator. Let us consider the gazes of the people in the photograph. The men appear to be gazing at the spot in the painting indicated by their speaker. But what about the women? Are they gazing at the same spot? Strangely enough they are not. The lady on the left is looking at the speaker, not at the canvas as is the lady on the far right. The lady next to Rockefeller has boldly turned her back on the painting: her vision is angled 180º away from the subjects of the painting and she is smiling indulgently at the crowd but not at the young naked women.

Now, let us ask ourselves what each of these persons sees when they gaze on *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*. John Golding (2001), one of the great specialists on Cubist painting, stated that it is one of the few paintings that can appear completely different to the same eyes of each gazer on different occasions. This book will deal with these differences and the various ways of seeing *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* that have existed since 1907. It will attempt to trace the history of the explanations or interpretations that have been offered of the work since it came into existence more than a hundred years ago. But before we delve into this history we should look at some basic historical data on the painting.

make the meaning clear in each case. The term Modernism is superimposed on these expressions and will be clarified in due time.

[3] From left to right: Johan Hay Whitney, Mrs. W.T. Emmet, A. Conger Goodyear, the president of the board Nelson A. Rockefeller, Mrs. John Sheppard, Edsel Ford and Mrs. John Parkinson Jr., photographed by Herbert Gehr, and published in *Life* magazine on 22 May 1939, p. 82. *Life* magazine copyright Time Warner Inc.

Les Demoiselles d'Avignon, Some Basic Facts

Pablo Picasso planned and painted *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* on an almost square canvas measuring 244 by 234 centimetres during the final months of 1906 and the first half of 1907 in his Paris studio, in the mythical Bateau Lavoir in Montmartre. Max Jacob had coined the name because the building reminded him of the floating washhouses that could be seen anchored along the Seine river. Preceded by an enormous amount of sketches, it is generally agreed that the painting was retouched during its execution so that in the end only the two young ladies at centre left conserved their original aspect while the two on the right and the one entering at left were repainted over the originals. From the moment of its rendering the work was moved to a succession of the painter's studios and was not exhibited to the public until 1916. Thus, for almost a decade it was only seen by Picasso's group of intimate friends, including Guillaume Apollinaire, Max Jacob and André Salmon and other close friends, painters, enthusiasts and avant-garde collectors. There were also occasional visits from people like the American critic Gelett Burguess who saw it in 1908 and reproduced it for the first time with the cursorily descriptive title of *Studio by Picasso*, in the article "Wild Men of Paris", published in May 1910 in the *Architectural Record* magazine. This would become an influential essay for the introduction of modern art into the United States. One of the first authors, other than Burguess, to mention the work was the poet and essayist André Salmon in *Histoire anecdotique du cubisme* in 1912. Both he and later, Daniel H. Kahnweiler, the art dealer for the Cubist works of Picasso and Braque in 1920, considered it to be the departure point of Cubism.

In July 1916 the painting was shown to the public for the first time in the Salon d'Antin, the couturier Paul Poiret's private gallery, close to his atelier in the Faubourg Saint Honoré in an exhibition of modern art organised by André Simon. And it was here that it was given its final title, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* to avoid the inherently suggestive names it had been previously given by Picasso and his intimate friends, all of which made more or less explicit reference to a brothel scene and were hardly suitable as a title for that place and time. In 1924 another fashion designer, the patron and art collector Jacques Doucet, purchased the painting on the recommendation of the writer and "father" of surrealism, André Breton who printed it in issue 4 of *La Révolution surréaliste* in July 1925. On Doucet's death, his widow sold it to the Seligmann Gallery who in turn would pass it on in 1939 to the New York Museum of Modern Art, its final resting place and where we have the opportunity of seeing it.

We should mention here that Paris in 1907 had become the capital of avant-garde art, thanks, in the first place, to Impressionism and later, movements that art critics called Postimpressionism (Gauguin, Cézanne, Van Gogh etc.) and Fauvism (Derain, Braque, Matisse etc.) This was the artistic climate in which *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* was brought into being, under the influence of many decisive encounters: with the works of Gauguin, Cézanne, Ingres and El Greco as well as the Iberian archeological remains from Cerro de los Santos

and Osuna and the so-called *Art nègre* which will be discussed in detail later on. Other important works that had an impact were the non-conformist nudes being painted at that time by Picasso's colleagues Derain and Matisse, especially the former's *Bathers* and the *Blue Nude* by the latter, both dated the same year as *Les Demoiselles.* This succession of unconventional female nudes that would become a moment of renewal of pictorial practices and expertise of their painters, was known as *La querelle du nu* (*The nude dispute)* (Joyeux-Prunel 2015, 356). As we shall see throughout this book the critics' evaluation of the impact each of these influences had on Picasso varies but irrespective of this, it is important to bear in mind the precise coordinates of this environment.

Readings for the Young Ladies

In general the work of the critic and of historians of art comprises many different tasks. They may include determining the genesis of a work and its genealogy or the chronology of its execution, researching and analysing the written or visual sources that inspired it or the personification and background of its creator. They may also include another type of interpretative task that is basically concerned with the history of how the work has been interpreted and the reception received by its contemporaries and the following generations. They also pay attention to the critical texts written about a work and the place it occupies in its historical artistic context. This is generally known as the "critical reception" of a work and this book is devoted to a historical appraisal of the successive interpretations that have been made about *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* from its birth until the present day. Here, furthermore, we shall plead the case of the possible readings of this work that are specifically linked to the consideration of modern art itself because almost from the moment of its creation it has been considered one of modern art's masterpieces. In this sense *Les Demoiselles* are a perfect case study. Clearly the interpretations will depend often on the discovery of precise data and decisive details which will be revealed as necessary for understanding the critical discourse on the painting. And, surprising as it may seem, we shall also perceive a moment when the interpretations wrench themselves away from the precise data and instead of referring to the painting itself, they spawn themselves on the shoulders of previous explanations and often erode them. This is also part of the history of critical discourse of Modernism and that of the different perspectives of its evaluation. Its exploration will allow us to observe the confluence of ideas prevailing throughout the different cultural spheres. Perhaps more than a history, we should call this an archaeology of critique of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* because we are presenting an examination of the origin and evolution of the concept of modern art, or Modernism, combined with the analysis of the prejudices or ideologies that have upheld this notion for the last century.

One of the most fascinating phenomena of the Art History is precisely this convergence through which the interpretation of an image will also be a portrait of the subject that originated that interpretation. As Regis Débray observed in *Vie et mort de l'image*, a book subtitled *Une histoire du regard en Occident*:

> The ventriloquist image speaks the language of its observer. And each era in the West has had its own way of reading the images of the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ and its own way of interpreting them. These "readings" tell us more about the epoch under consideration than about the paintings. They are as much a symptom as an analysis. (Débray 1994, 52).

We shall be looking at these "symptoms" of modern art. Because, fortunately, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* have always been considered a paradigm of Modernism in its one hundred years of existence it has been examined from many and varied points of view. Thus they have been read under the spotlights of many different methodologies including the formalist, the iconological, the structuralist and post-structuralist, the semiotic and, in general, all those that derive from what has come to be known as New Art History and those grouped under the more recent label of Global Art History, that include the contributions and propositions of Marxism, feminism, psychoanalysis, post-colonialism and transnational points of view. Such a wide assortment of gazes has fallen on *Les Demoiselles* during the century of time that they have been considered the yardstick of Modernism. Let us not forget that they compete with Duchamp's *The Large Glass* or his readymades for the title of maximum representative of the 20th century modern aesthetic. This is why following the history of the different interpretations that the painting has given rise to since 1907 will allow us to trace the itinerary of the critical reception of modern art or, better still, of the discourse of Modernism. We must bear in mind that all interpretation of art is also, whether recognised or not, judgement and taking sides and that keen and lively debates about art will be present in this book as well as debates of the system of values and ideologies that support these judgements and naturally their corresponding acquittals or convictions.

And as this book examines Modernism discourse we must also warn readers what do we mean with this word. It refers to a critical discourse, and not the artistic practice, of 20th century art that emphasises independence and self-referentiality as essential characteristics of 20th century art, and determinants that guide its history or evolution. Usually Modernism is understood to be a synonym of the formalist focus applied especially to the most innovative art produced at the end of the 19th and first half of the 20th century.[4] This is the discourse, more than modern art itself, to which we have pledged this book. Although English-speaking criticism uses this terminology, it is true that Spanish or German historiography prefer to use the expression "vanguard" for referring to the narratives or theories of the avant-garde. However, in this critical discourse the English-speaking point of view has held sway and thus, we have based our research on it. Throughout the book we shall see how the fundamentals of the "orthodox narrative of Modernism" were being constructed and also demolished.

[4] To understand Modernism as a critical discourse, consult Aruna D'Souza 2002.

Although some interpretations of a work of art may be more satisfactory than others, we shall commence by assuming that there is no single true story, that history is always plural, fruit of debate and conscious of its limits to construct transient narratives and small passing truths. The more complex and enigmatic the work, the more readings it will generate. This book would be meaningless without the firm conviction that a work of art is not something that emerges at a specific time and place with all its meanings in place. We believe that the meanings of works of art are always contingent, never inherent. The work of art also consists, above all, of the countless artistic reactions and critical interpretations that it generates through an extended period of time. The more valuable and interesting the work of art, the more widespread these will be. This is what Duchamp referred to when he talked of a work being a *machine à signifier*. *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* is not the exclusive property of this or that author. It is, rather, an accumulation of reactions and interpretations that have been changing enormously from the moment of its conception. And as we shall see, nor can we listen to just Picasso's declarations on the matter because works of art have meanings that escape the intention and control of their creator.

In this regard Mieke Bal's (1999) idea is crucial; it is the past and not the present that continually changes, or that it is the past that is continually in reconstruction, observed and valued from new points of view. It is a matter of taking works of art as happenings of the present, from subjective points of view, beyond the art historian of yesteryear who only used the third or impersonal person. He who was forbidden to use the terms "I", "we" and "now"… who had to conceal, by every means his own situation, his own biography, his own "optical unconscious vision".

Contexts

We shall begin with the premise that works of art have a life of their own, during which they become charged with new meanings. We have mentioned how different gazes acquire different perceptions. The variety of interpretations generated by a work of art is largely fruit of the contexts it encounters and therefore, our own encounters with it. Works of art are transformed by its continual moves, its relationship with contexts and people different to the author. It will encounter different audiences, different natural spaces, diverse historical contexts and a multitude of different discourses that will continually modify and transform the way it is received. Transnational focus of art history has drawn attention to the fact that works of art or their reproductions are usually subject to constant geographical and temporal circulation, amassing a "circulating capital" that is constantly being give new meaning as Appadurai (1986) suggested. The circulating capital of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* today is globally vast.

We must, at the outset, recognise the fact that the quality of the different reproductions of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* lend it different aspects: more or less Expressionist, more or less Cubist. Let us not forget that most of time art historians have to work with reproductions of works that we have on hand in our

books or computers, rarely with originals. For example, the reproductions where the colours are more saturated than in the original overload it with dramatic accents that would incline us towards a hint of Expressionism. On the other hand, when the colours are less bright and more pastel or if the reproduction in black and white emphasises the form, we would undoubtedly lean towards its pictorial innovations representing volume and space. Then we would perceive it as a clear candidate to join or lead the history of Cubism.

The aspect of *Les Demoiselles d'Avign*on are also different in the rooms at the MoMA where it they reigns in the place of honour that corresponds to an authentic paradigm of Modernism rather than on the pages of a book or the photographs that show it on display in different locations. For example when we see them surrounded by the members of the MoMA board of trustees, the brilliant company and the place itself emphasise their relevance. In earlier black and white photos with Picasso's intimate friends posing in attitudes and attire typical of the start of the 20th century the difference in time that separates us from the moment of the painting's execution is remarkable. The work appears less contemporaneous as it were. In the home of its first buyer, on the staircase of Jacques Doucet's Paris apartment, they share the decidedly *déco chic* decoration that emphasises their character as a cultural and socio-economic status symbol. The impression they produce in the succession of Picasso's studios is also different as in the guise of the tapestry hanging in La Californie, that brings us face to face with the subject of reproductions of works of art. From personal experience I can vouch that they acquire a very different personality if we see them out in the street. In 2006 an initiative sponsored by the Fundación Picasso hung an enormous reproduction on the facade of *La Equitativa* building in the city of Malaga on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the painter's birth under the slogan *Málaga, su mejor lienzo* ("Malaga, his best canvas"). In this open air, public space it upheld a dialogue with other urban icons of the city: the memorial to the Marquis of Larios and his cohorts for example, or at Christmas time with the city Nativity scene. I must confess that the encounter between the most famous prostitutes in the history of art and the images of the Holy Family caused a very deep impression.

Thus, the questionable, if not mistaken notion, that art extends to everyone equally because all human beings possess the same tools of sensitive perception, while among art historians the (false) belief that the historical-artistic discourse is objective, and scientific, neutral and unconditioned, spreads. So, just as the existence of an innocent spectator, un-conditioned even by his minimal knowledge of art and culture is a chimera, nor are there innocent art historians. The more proof of ideological neutrality, of scientific asepsia the defenders of certain, presumed scientific methodologies, try to present, the more suspect they are of harbouring biased values and ideologies on their historical narrative. No matter how much an art historian insists that there is only one true history of art, the more untruthful and mythomaniac they appear, as well as oppressive and authoritarian. For some time now responsible art historians have, fortunately, put aside the idea that their task is based on

the existence of a truth that must be revealed, in discovering this *aletheia* in a sort of search for the Holy Grail. So now, a part of the present focus of art history is consciously accepting the construct character that all historical narrative possesses and therefore, its temporal, contingent, partial and ideologically conditioned nature.

In this book we have been putting together a patient deconstruction of the prevailing historical-artistic discourses on the subject of Modernism. In many cases they are characterised by their firm resistance to any kind of dissuasion, protected as they are by their institutional (read academic) authority although this opposition would never be openly recognised. To accomplish this task I have had to make a selection of texts on *Les Demoiselles* that would be sufficiently representative of the different methodological approaches used to analyse the work and the different proposals on modernity on which these approaches are based. For this reason I have been more interested in the high degree of representativity of the texts, rather than a revision of each. This representativity depends, logically, on my objectives that are to show the transformation of art history discipline and the evolution, throughout the last century, of the notion of Modernism applied to 20th century art. Thus the texts I have chosen represent or are examples of certain methodological positions and we shall show how they involve certain postulates on the notion of vanguard/modernity, or how they contributed to draw up these notions. The majority of the texts come from the English-speaking sphere of criticism that dominated discourse from a particular moment in the 20th century and it is possible to tell a story from them because their authors rebut and respond.

This book does not intend, therefore, to be a contribution to the studies on Picasso. Rather, it is concerned with the genealogy and evolution of the episteme or discursive formation of modern art. It is an account of the interpretation of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* as a means of investigating the critical discourse of Modernism. Although we follow the thread of this account by basing it on the said painting, this book is about writings inspired by this work of art. If the task may seem too theoretical, this is deliberate. Perhaps because, as Jonathan Harris (2001, 27–8) observed, the idea that art historians are only interested in the works of art themselves is not entirely true. Or perhaps it is because any attention paid, description made or vision of objects ultimately requires a language, ideas, values and a conventional means of communication to transmit the sharing of ideas on the work. Any visual attention calls for, previously or simultaneously, intellectual or theoretical specifications.

In fact, I will espouse the arguments in defense of theory sustained by Jonathan Harris:

> Theory was (and is needed) in this sense both to allow understanding of existing traditions of thought and disciplinary practice—the critique of existing 'institutionally dominant art history'—and to allow us to invent and mobilise forms of argument and procedures of description, analysis, and evaluation required in the formulation of alternatives to the dominant practices.

> 'Text/context' fromulations, arguably part of any radical art-historical practice, are *theoretical* in this sesnse. That is, they are based on principles of selection, articulated trough the concepts and values that have ethical and social roots and implications. To recognise the theoretical sense of any art-historical account is to recognise its provisional, constructed, and therefore potentially revisable nature. Theory understood in this way represents a liberation from imposed orthodoxy, in its pedagogic or professional institutional forms, and is thus a necessary part of a politics for social and intellectual change (Harris 2001, 28).

I set out convinced that it is possible to produce a history of art that reveals its own words, its own practices and strategies whether they repress or liberate. It is a vision of history that will bring to light the ideologies, values and prejudices that decide how the historical narratives will be written. Thus it is a plural history that recognises the effervescence of the competing narratives, that we normally refer to in the singular and therefore erroneously, as its history. In summary, this text is about those values and ideologies that build historical and artistic narratives.

It is a reflection on the episteme of Modernism, understanding this to be (as Foucault suggests) the system of interpretation that conditions our way of understanding the aesthetics of Modernism and offers us a codified gaze. It intends to be a reflection on this episteme especially through the responses generated on the ways of making a canonical history of Modernism. We are aware that many of the postulates that encouraged us to tell this story of critical reception of Modernism through *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* originate from the new history of art and global history of art points of view and especially the epistemological field of gender and feminist studies. In this latter field the traditional monograph (or hagiography) on the male genius is substituted by a study of artistic concepts, consideration of terms and artistic practices, production and artistic reception. The claim of the universality of art and the artistic experience is rejected in advance and replaced with "situated knowledge" and the value of subjectivity. In the same way, within these epistemological coordinates, art is understood not as a mirror of reality but as its construction, heeding the performative character of all representation. We understand thus, that historiographical debates or attention to the critical reception of the works must have priority. In other words, they constitute the solid framework of the historical-artistic narrative. Recently the writer Chamananda Ngozi Adichie stated now "is the moment for a range of voices. Not because we want to be politically correct but because we want to be precise. We cannot understand the world if we continue to pretend that just a small part of it represents the whole" (Chamananda, 2018).

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Fig. 1. Members of MoMA New York board of trustees in front of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* at the opening of the exhibition *Art of our Time* (photographed by Herbert Gehr on 8 May 1939) and published in *Life* Magazine on 22 May 1939. © 2022. Digital image, The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence.

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CHAPTER 1

Bodies of Tow and Paraffin

The Alarm Spreads

The first reactions to the *Demoiselles d'Avignon* came from members of Picasso's intimate circle of friends and acquaintances, those who had admittance to the painter's studios since, as we have mentioned, the work did not leave the painter's succession of studio homes until 1916 when it was exhibited to the public in the Salon d'Antin. In fact, it was only in 1924 that the work was moved to the home of its first purchaser, the fashion designer and art collector, Jacques Doucet until it became the property of his wife until September of 1937 when it was acquired by the firm of Jacques Seligmann & Co of New York who sold it to the New York Museum of Modern Art where it can still be seen.

From what we have been able to establish from anecdotes and various testimonies—almost never direct, almost always through intermediaries[1]—, the reaction from this circle of Picasso's acquaintances was more one of alarm and incomprehension, despite the majority of its members being accustomed to the scandals of the avant-garde. The general response of painters as advanced as Georges Braque or André Derain, as well as members of the public who might have seen it at the time, including writers, critics or collectors, seems to have been a mixture of scandal, disgust, apprehension, horror, derision and even affront or outrage. No-one appeared to understand what the painting was about,

[1] Hélène Seckel compiles these testimonies in a detailed anthology from 1907 to 1939 in Elderfield 1994, 145–205.

Maite Méndez Baiges, University of Malaga, Spain, mendez@uma.es, 0000-0002-0762-7004

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what it meant or how it had come about. It was as though Picasso had remained alone with his extraordinary creature, as suggested by Christopher Green. It is surprising to find that this was a type of reaction very similar to that shown by the art critics of the time, whose chronicles on modern art exhibitions published in the general press fell somewhere between scandalised and sarcastic.

For example, one of those critics made the following comment when the work was shown for the first time in public in the Salon d'Antin in 1916:

> The Cubists are not waiting for the war to end to recommence hostilities against good sense. They are exhibiting at the Galerie Poiret naked women, whose scattered parts are represented in all four corners of the canvas: here an eye, there an ear, over there a hand, a foot on top, a mouth below. Monsieur Picasso, their leader, is possibly the least dishevelled of the lot. He has painted, or rather daubed, five women who are, if the truth be told, all hacked up, and yet their limbs somehow manage to hold together. They have moreover piggish faces with eyes wandering negligently above their ears (Bohm-Duchen 2001, 202).

We have before us a work that apparently was disturbing, bizarre and excessive even for the practitioners of the "excesses" of modern painting. Among the declarations which have become legendary are those of Georges Braque or André Derain. Braque, who would soon, together with Picasso, become the inventor of Cubism, supposedly said that the painting had the same effect on him as "eating tow and swallowing paraffin."[2] Generally this quotation is completed with the expression "to spit fire."[3] Many commentaries have been made on such an original exclamation. Some, like Ángel González (2000, 321–30), in a text entitled precisely "Beber petróleo para escupir fuego" have understood it to mean that for Braque, *Les Demoiselles* were a sort of Molotov cocktail, resembling those the anarchists were making for their attacks at that time. Whatever the meaning may be, it is anything but reassuring. On the other hand, Derain who would, it must be remembered, be pursuing a type of painting that would lead to nothing short of Cubism, also left an unforgettable testimony: *Les Demoiselles* would be the rope with which Picasso would end up hanging himself (Kahnweiler 1916, 214); a comment certainly as disturbing as that of Braque. The critic Félix Féneon, for his part, said something that at first sight might appear

[2] Fernande Olivier tells this story, surprisingly, not connected directly with *Les Demoiselles* but about burgeoning Cubism (in particular referring to the landscapes that Picasso had painted in Horta in the summer of 1909) and which, according to Olivier, Braque found incomprehensible. She explained that in a conversation with Picasso "Braque was not at all convinced. He finally replied 'despite your explanations your painting is as if you wanted to make us eat tow and drink paraffin'" (Olivier 2001, 133). Other variations of Braque's comment about tow and paraffin were vouched for by Kahnweiler, Carlo Carrà and Salmon (Elderfield 1994, 228–29).

[3] This is Kahnweiler's version in a text relating the dismay of Picasso's circle faced with *Les Demoiselles*. "Braque declared that for him it was like drinking paraffin and spitting fire" in an unpublished interview dated in 1973, with Claude de Givray (Elderfield 1994, 240).

offensive but that some art historians of the period have come to considered as most appropriate: he seemed to see that Picasso was showing talent for caricature (Parmelin 1966, 37). And, apparently the Russian art collector Shchukin, who would amass one of the greatest collections of modern art of the time, on seeing the work, told Picasso's close friend Gertrude Stein, with tears in his eyes, that "it was a tremendous loss for French art!" (Stein 1984). And here would be a good moment to mention that Henri Rousseau, nicknamed *Le Douanier* (the Customs' Agent), exclaimed in the course of the banquet Picasso held in his honour: "You and I are the greatest painters of our time—you in Egyptian style and I in modern style" (Olivier 2001, 113).

The contrast between these remarks showing disgust, incomprehension, distaste or alarm and the unanimously favourable opinion of the critics and art history during the following hundred years is truly remarkable. And, in fact during the 20th century *Les Demoiselles* has been considered the paradigm of modern art, the most innovative painting since Giotto, the work destined to change the course of the history of painting. André Breton, the surrealist writer was responsible for finding its first buyer, in the person of the art collector Jacques Doucet. Breton managed to persuade the fashion designer to purchase the work because he himself was convinced that it was something quite exceptional, "the decisive occurrence at the start of the 20th century", an unavoidable turning point in art history: "with this painting we bid farewell to all the paintings of the past", he declared (Dupuis-Labbé 2007, 134).

Agreeing on the exceptionality does not, however, curb the controversy that has been its faithful companion for a hundred years. And at times it seems that Picasso himself, by his own declarations, poked the fire of contradictions that presided over the opinions on his work.

Playing to Distract: Picasso's Declarations

Experts on Picasso's work have often advised caution when commenting on the painter's declarations about his own work since an avowal may be contradicted immediately and his fondness for whimsy is apparent. Leaving these warnings aside, some interpretations of his work are based on his comments, confusing, furthermore, intentions with results. In point of fact Picasso himself did not refer explicitly to the *Demoiselles d'Avignon* until the 1930s and that all his pronouncements on it were made in retrospective mode. Whether or not it was his intention to sidetrack and sow confusion, there are many contradictory comments referring to the painting, in particular to the Cubist paternity of the work and relating to one of today's most thorny issues; that of the role *Art nègre* would have played in its conception and development and, obviously, in the final result. It is important to remember that the majority of Picasso's comments on the work do not come from a direct source. They have come down to us through his intermediaries and albeit exceptional witnesses like Kahnweiler, André Malraux, Christian Zervos, Pierre Daix, they are, in any case, indirect testimonies.

In regard to the two matters mentioned, and according to Dor de la Souchère in *Picasso à Antibes,* published in 1960, the painter had stated that "It has been said that *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* was the first painting to have shown signs of Cubism: that is true". But, at the same time, it has been said that *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* was inspired by *Art nègre*: that is untrue" (Bernadac 1998, 133).

However, on an earlier occasion Picasso stated that the Damsels was his first exorcist painting and was linked to his visit to the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro: to wit to his direct experience of what was known in the first decades of the 20th century as *Art nègre.* The exact date of this visit is unknown but in all probability it happened while he was working on the painting, sometime in 1907. From 1882 to 1936 the goal of this museum was to house a collection that would literally illustrate a history of the uses and habits of peoples from every era. Using life-size reproductions they tried to place objects in the context of the people who made them. A lack of resources together with its growing collection—a result of colonialism itself—turned the museum into a Cabinet of Curiosities or Wonder Room. Many of the objects on show had been part of the rituals of different civilisations.

Thus, in the context of the comments to which we are referring, "exorcist painting" must be understood to mean an object with apotropaic or talismanic properties. This well known and quoted phrase is part of a conversation with Malraux. We must quote him literally and be aware not only that it would have been pronounced in 1937, thirty years after completing the canvas and just as the painter was finishing Guernica, but also it was never made public until 1974:

> The masks were unlike any other sculptures. Totally. They were magical objects. But why were the Egyptian or Chaldean works not the same? We hadn't realised. They were primitive but magical. The Negroes[4] were *intercesseurs;* a new word I learned in French. Against everything: like unknown, threatening spirits. I had always admired fetishes. And I understood why I was also fighting everything. I also believe everything is unfamiliar, hostile […] all fetishes serve the same purpose. They are weapons. To help people withstand the spirits, to break free. Instruments. If we give shape to the spirits we become independent. Spirits, unconsciousness (people still do not talk much about this), emotion, it is all the same.
>
> I understood why I was a painter. There, alone in that terrible museum, with the masks, the redskin dolls, the dusty dummies. *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* must have occurred to me that day but definitely not because of the shapes: but because it was my first exorcist canvas, Yes, indeed! […]
>
> This was also what drew me away from Braque. He adored the Negroes but, as I have mentioned, because they were good sculptures. He never felt the least fear of them. He was not interested in exorcisms. Because he did not feel what I call All, or Life or whatever, the World? That which surrounds us but is not part of us; he never considered it hostile, or even, and mark this, strange. He always felt at home, even today. No way did he understand these things: he is not superstitious! (Malraux 1974, 18–9).

[4] "Negroes" was a common expression at that time used to refer to the figures of African or Oceanic art.

Again we must stress that these comments were made thirty years after Picasso painted *Les Demoiselles* and again, as mentioned on several occasions, they cannot be separated from Surrealism and its ideology which, in all probability, influenced the sort of ideas expressed here about the unconscious or the existence of a kind of primordial terror. There is no doubt that they are also an important testimony of a type of automatic association between African art or objects and the mystical spirit of the peoples of that continent that emerged in the first decades of the 20th century in Europe. We will return to this subject below. For the moment, let us keep in mind that Picasso could just as easily say that the figures from Africa and Oceania that he saw in the Trocadero were merely "witnesses" and not examples of the work (Fels 1923, 4) as declare that there was nothing of *Art nègre* in the Demoiselles.[5]

But that is not all; no sooner do we find declarations that assure the presence of *Art nègre* in his work was simply an incorporation of its protection, we find others in which he denies this type of influence and confirms that its impact had a formal character. Thus, for example, in his book on "negro sculpture", written in 1913 and published in 1919, Markov cites in his turn Tungehold (in *Apollon*, 1914) who had written: "When I was in Picasso's studio and saw the negro idols from the Congo I asked him if he was interested in the mystical aspect of these figures. 'Absolutely not' he replied. I am captivated by their geometric simplicity'" (Markov 2003).

Perhaps the apparent contradictions perceived in both Picasso's declarations and the compilation of first reactions to the work could be assembled in a vision that is more synthetic than paradoxical. In his response to the work, another of Picasso's friends, the writer and critic André Salmon, combined calmness and horror: he described *Les Demoiselles* as "naked problems, white numbers on a blackboard" while recognising that they inspired a kind of terror. (Salmon 1912, 43). Salmon went as far as to attribute to Picasso a rational approximation to the primitive: "Those who see in Picasso's work masks of mystery, of symbolism or mysticism, run the risk of never understanding it. Instead of this, what he wants is to give us a total representation of man and things. This was the aim of the primitive sculptors of religious images. Here we are concerned about painting, an art on a surface and for this Picasso was obliged to create something new, in his turn, placing these balanced figures—way beyond the rules of traditional formalism and anatomy—in a space that is strictly coherent with an unusual liberty of movement." (Salmon 1912, 43). This was an affirmation that could have been subscribed by any of the historians or critics who had examined the work with the eyeglasses of formalism. We shall see why below.

[5] Zervos (1942, 10) stated that Picasso reiterated on several occasions the absence of African influence in *Les Demoiselles*, in *Pablo Picasso. Oeuvres de 1906 à 1912*, Cahiers d'Art, Paris, 1942, p. 10. See also Daix (1970).

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CHAPTER 2

"Naked Problems". Origin and Reach of the Formalist Interpretations

Despite the reaction of general alarm and the exacerbated feelings that the painting aroused in Picasso's circle of friends, the first significant interpretation of the work that managed to clear the way did so by completely ignoring the emotional side. It was a purely formalist reading that saw only a series of "naked problems" in the painted women, as André Salmon had called them, understanding this expression as problems about the pictorial fact itself and its extremely intimate nature. This is how *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* was seen by one of the first theorists of Cubism, and Picasso's first gallerist, the German Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, who referred to it as "a large, strange painting with women, fruit and drapery", adding "that Picasso had left it unfinished."[1] He then went on to describe the rigid way nakedness was treated in the work and compared it to that typical of a large marionette with huge, untroubled eyes.

Obviously, Kahnweiler went further because he was seeing the dawn of Cubism in the work but pointed out that this was only present in one part, specifically in the foreground where, "oblivious to the tranquillity of the rest, a figure squats behind a bowl of fruit. There is no roundness modelled by *chiaroscuro*, the lines are angular. The colours are strong blue, bright yellow, pure black and white. The beginning of Cubism! The first outburst". It was his appraisal of the origin of Cubism because he considered that in this particular place "a desperate and passionate struggle was being fought against all the problems at the same

[1] D.-H. Kanhweiler, *Der Weg zum Kubismus*, written in 1915 and published in Múnich in 1920 (1997: 39).

Maite Méndez Baiges, University of Malaga, Spain, mendez@uma.es, 0000-0002-0762-7004

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time. What were the problems? The problems of the painting: representing the tri-dimensional and colour on the flat surface and its bond in the unity of this plane" (Kahnweiler 1997, 41). Hence the German theorist considered the work as if its greatest goal were to solve, once and for all, and boldly to boot, all the basic or essential quandaries of painting. Which ones? Mainly, how to represent the three dimensions of reality on a bi-dimensional surface without impairing the integrity of the pictorial surface that is essentially flat and must remain so; doing so by means of a solution unlike that of Renaissance painters who resorted to perspective to give a false illusion of depth. We must remember that with Kahnweiler the vision of Cubism is coming into being as a radical and irreversible rupture with the Renaissance visual order, based on perspective and modelling. We have here, notwithstanding, the first phase of formulation of this idea that associates the identity of modern art with the integrity of the pictorial plane, expressing a theory that would live long and have many advocates during the 20th century. It is the notion that, many decades after Kahnweiler's idea, in the 1960s, Clement Greenberg would proclaim successfully in New York, linking flatness of pictorical surface to modern art identity. The theoretical discourse that stemmed from this idea aspired to justify or explain the eclosion of abstraction in avant-garde art during the first decades of the 20th century. This would later become known as Modernism.

We must, however, state explicitly that for Kahnweiler, Cubism did not diminish in this trend towards abstraction. Had this happened it would have run the risk of becoming purely decorative. On the contrary it was also either the reconciliation or the maximum tension between the two important extremes of painting: between the representative and the constructive, the alliance of the idea of art as mimesis or reproduction of a pre-existing reality with the notion of art understood as the creation or construction of a new reality. This reconciliation would have brought about the invention of a signic language that would convey the definitive recognition of painting as such a language, complying with previously established conventions and not simply a natural way of copying reality. Thus Kahnweiler could state (1997, 23):

> If I ask myself today, after all, what novelty Cubism brought, I can only find one answer: thanks to the invention of signs that appear in the outside world, Cubism endowed the plastic arts with the possibility of transmitting the visual experiences of the artist to the spectator without the illusion of imitation. Cubism is the recognition that all plastic art is no more than writing, in which the spectator reads the signs and it is not a reflection of nature.

With this avowal, Kahnweiler gave Cubism the merit of having recognised the signic character, or the non-iconic, of painting; a substantial attribute of painting in every place and every time, not exclusive to modern painting. It is a formula that fits the semiotic postulates about art made during the last decades of the 20th century like a glove. Rosalind Krauss and Yves-Alain Bois especially were those who reclaimed Kahnweiler's comments in the 80s and 90s in order to convert them into the very definition of Cubism (Rubin 1992).

This manner of conceiving the artistic action, which will become the characteristic mode of the avant-garde, is sometimes known as "the linguistic turn" in the art world. According to the Kahnweiler's propositions—although he himself would never have used that expression—the first symptoms of this revolution were found in *Les Demoiselles de Avignon*. In other words, exploring possible solutions to the problems of representing the three-dimensional reality on a two-dimensional surface irremediably leads to the effect of moving the centre of gravity of any painting from *what* it represents to *how* it represents it. Thus, from a formalist perspective, the fact (for some as primeval as it was scandalous) that *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* represented a group of naked prostitutes could be considered of relatively secondary importance. The truth is that Kahnweiler never mentioned it in his writings nor did he mention even its title.

In short, the German theorist ignored the content of the painting and this, among other things, was how he allowed himself to situate it as the start of Cubism; it was the first time that this consideration had been made. With it he contributed to founding a critical tradition mindful, fundamentally of the formal problems *Les Demoiselles* presented, with the question of the origin of Cubism in the forefront. He also observed that the canvas was unfinished, in his understanding, for its lack of unity or its incoherent mixture of styles.

Between 1939 and 1972 the perspective used to analyse *Les Demoiselles* roughly followed the path marked by Kahnweiler, the work as the solution to a problem of an entirely pictorial nature, and therefore, as a proto-Cubist work in formalist terms. Furthermore, important authors like Alfred Barr, the first director of the MoMA in New York and John Golding, one of the greatest authorities on Cubist painting would continue to treat it thus.[2]

In accordance with the formalist vocabulary of this type of critique, the most remarkable thing about the painting is its compressed character, leaving no breathing space between the figures and that like them, it is constantly brought back to the surface as soon as there is the slightest glimpse of depth. Together with this, the volumes obtained by means of facetting, are a clear obstruction of the traditional Renaissance *chiaroscuro*. In the same way, so is disobeying the postulates of linear perspective by means of the unorthodox cloning of viewpoints. At the same time there is a proliferation of resources that pushes the nudes, the still life, the draperies and any other element towards the pictorial plane, even including the Cézanne *passage* and in passing, conferring an almost material consistency to the pictorial space. Nor must we forget the peculiarity of the young women's bodies, traced as if they had been cut with the stroke of an axe. Or even, to summarise all these features, the very palpable presence of the brush stroke on the two-dimensional canvas, calling our attention to its genuinely artistic nature. All these would be purely pictorial elements that proclaim

[2] Barr 1939; 1946; and Golding 1958: 155–63. This was the first monographic article on the work and the one that places it for the first time in an appropriate context in the discipline of art history.

here its liberation and in this way, its own independence in regard to its servile secular function to represent and advocate a renewed and freer existence. They are also topics on this pictorial independence that according to the formalist discourse of Modernism, would only be conquered gradually as the history of Cubism and the avant-garde advanced but that could already be predicted in *Les Demoiselles*. This is the best-known story, the story that was told for a long time in a multitude of textbooks on the history of modern art and that Alfred Barr and Golding, following in the wake of Kahnweiler, encoded brilliantly. For all these experts the crux of the work was the compression and flattening of the space and the use of multiple perspectives because they opened new avenues for modern art and involved a radical rupture with the habitual composition and perspective in practice at least since the Renaissance.

Alfred H. Barr Jr. was actually the director of the MoMA when the museum acquired the canvas. In 1939 he wrote *Picasso: Forty Years of his Art,* and then in 1946, he published *Picasso: Fifty Years of his Art.* Both books immediately became compulsory textbooks of reference on the artist. In these Barr had undertaken to set forth, for example, the influence of Cézanne's bathers in *Les Demoiselles* "in which the figures and the background merge into a sort of relief with scarcely any indication of spatial depth or the volume of the figures", by recourse to the *passage*, mentioned above. This tallied with the widespread opinion of the time that *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* should be considered the first Cubist painting because one must consider its content as Cubist. That is, the decomposition of the natural forms in a design of sliding and inclined planes within a space with limited depth. It was Cubism in a rudimentary state, he admitted but Cubism when all is said and done and furthermore, he stated that the work, together with *Le Bonheur de vivre* by Matisse would mark a new period in the history of modern art (Barr 1946, 56). The entrance into the historiographic arena of *Le Bonheur de vivre* by Matisse presented at the *Salon des Indépendants* of 1906, just before the creation of *Les Demoiselles*, is important and caused a notorious *succès de scandale*. And this was because a significant part of later literature came to interpret the Picassian scene as a response or reaction to Matisse's *Bonheur.* Or, in other words, it was considered the source of inspiration for the birth of Picasso's young ladies.

It goes without saying that, according to the formalist perspective, the presence of the African element in the work corresponds to a purely artistic type of reason because Picasso's knowledge of *African Negro art* had offered him a model of freedom to distort anatomy for the sake of creating a rhythmic structure that can merge solids and voids and invent new shapes. To put it in another way, *African Negro Art* offered a model of the antinaturalism because its works were equivalents rather than copies of reality. It was Robert Rosenblum who wrote the above in his book about *Cubism and 20th century art* in the 1950s (2001, 25). In truth, although he never abided by an exclusively formalist examination of the African presence in *Les Demoiselles,* he did also comment that its grotesque character, terrifying power and the suggestion of a supernatural presence must have been a considerable stimulus for a Spanish painter like Picasso.

That said, however much the form was to monopolize the attention of the critics, the painting presented a content that was difficult to ignore completely. Five young, naked women accompanied by a still life and draperies, compressed into a clearly small place (almost like the Marx brothers' cabin) seen head-on, in profile, three-quarters foreshortened, from behind and whose gazes are fixed candidly on the spectator. On various occasions Picasso himself, according to some witnesses, had explained that it was a scene from a brothel, inspired, as he would tell Zervos (1942, 10), in one situated in the *Carrer Avinyó* in Barcelona. Nor was that all. While preparing the work he had drawn many sketches where we can see some solutions that included male personages sharing the scene with our young ladies. The formalist critics were aware of these preliminaries. Kahnweiler commented that Picasso himself had told him that: "According to my first idea, there were going to be men, you saw them in my drawings. There was a student holding a skull. A sailor as well. The women were eating, hence the basket of fruit that stayed. Then it changed and became what it is now."[3]

How was it possible to justify a content like this, so uncomfortable for conventional morality, from a perspective centred on the formal? And again, how could the transformations the work had suffered through the many sketches Picasso made before finishing it, fit the formalist type of interpretations?

The answer of formalism to these questions was given by Alfred Barr himself for example, who was also aware of the earlier steps. He published three sketches in which the evolution of the painting to its present state could be seen (one in the Basel Kuntsmuseum, another in the Philadelphia Museum of Art and a third that has been lost) and revealed the identities of the male figures in the earlier studies that tallies with an explanation made by Picasso in 1939. The centre figure corresponds to a sailor, while the figure on the far left of the canvas, who appears to erupt on the scene, would be that of the man holding a skull. According to the director of MoMA in these earlier sketches Picasso began by conceiving the work as a sort of allegory or riddle, a *memento mori* where vice and virtue are matched against each other (illustrated respectively by the sailor surrounded by flowers, women and food and the student with the skull). The idea was not morally very convincing. And an allegory unworthy of much attention that faded away when the two male figures disappeared from the final version. In the end they had been eliminated to enhance a purely formalist composition that, in the defining process, became more and more dehumanised and abstract.[4]

In his analysis of the evolution undergone by the picture in the sketches, Barr interpreted the step from a scene with various women and a couple of men to another of women only as a desertion of the allegorical and its substitution with a purely pictorial interest. It is as if the disappearance of the men was taken for granted and, with them the moral dilemma of the male personages, and that the women's bodies would be considered and interpreted as forms, as objects;

[3] Kahnweiler 1952, reproduced in Bernadac and Michael 1998: 61.

[4] Kahnweiler 1952, reproduced in Bernadac and Michael 1998: 61.

perhaps as another object in a still life. All things considered, the evolution of the sketches was the proof that the allegory between vice and virtue was being reduced in favour of problems of an exclusively pictorial nature. Barr considered that this scenario could be easily disregarded because Picasso himself had ruled it out but also because its production process or the sketches that led to it cannot be identified nor mixed up in it. Barr's attitude is habitual in the formalist explanation, whose logic establishes that if the key of the painting is made up of purely artistic matters, the progressive transformation of the narrative in the prior sketches do not play, or do not have to play any relevant role. And as we shall see, it is this logic that was fated to confront the iconological interpretation that would follow on from the formalist in the critical discourse of modernity.

Barr also established a link between *Les Demoiselles* and African art, pointing out that the figures on the right appear to be inspired by Ivory Coast art, and in what was then the French Congo, rather than Iberian sculptures. This was contrary to what the painter himself had decisively stated. Namely the impossibility of a *negro* presence in *Les Demoiselles* because he discovered this art after finishing the painting. We should remember that in 1942, when Zervos (1942, 10) published the second volume of his descriptive catalogue of Picasso's art, he categorically denied this influence, emphasising that Picasso was unaware of *Art nègre* in 1907 and that his figures were influenced by Iberian art. Barr (1946, 56) did, however, point out that Picasso may have retouched the two heads on the right after he had discovered African art and that he had simply forgotten because this influence was much more evident than the Iberian in this part of the painting. In *Forty Years*, Barr (1939, 56) qualified *Les Demoiselles* as "masterpiece of Picasso's Black Period", besides being the "first Cubist painting" (1939, 60). In *Fifty Years* he dispensed with the former and just retained the latter idea of the start of Cubism (Barr 1946, 56). The debate initiated here over the presence of *Negro Art* in *Les Demoiselles* continues today. Furthermore, in the last decades of the 20th century and first of the 21st century, it has revived, sparked by the studies on colonialism and the support of the post-colonialist theories, as we shall see below. In any case, the crucial work by Zervos will not alter the predominantly formalist focus of interpretation of the work. He would favour it against positions, possibly sentimentalist or centred on narrative arguments.

John Golding, another of the quintessential historians of the Cubist movement, while also putting forward formalist arguments, did call into question some of the premises established by Kahnweiler or Barr. Furthermore, Golding (1958, 155–63) also holds the honour of being author of the first monographic article on the work. He also was responsible for something of great importance for the discourse of Modernism. For the first time he disassociated *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* from Cubism, removing it from the pedestal that had raised it to the consideration of fountainhead of this movement, by adducinghat none of the fundamental characteristics of Cubism were present in it: neither distance nor intellectual control, nor objectivity combined with intimacy, nor any interest for establishing a balance between representation and an abstract pictorial structure. Cubism had been a realistic art inasmuch

it was interested in reinterpreting the outside world in a distanced and objective way, it was a classical art. Golding considered the work too expressionist, carrying a first impression of violence and restlessness, incompatible with "impartial and objective reinterpretation—classical—of the outside world" proposed by the Cubist painters.

This did not mean that it lost the honour of being "the beginning of a new phase in art history" and the logical starting point for tracing the history of Cubism for, as André Salmon had pointed out, for the first time, painting was presented like algebra (Golding 1959, 51).

Golding would also be charged with examining *Les Demoiselles* in its historical-artistic context, in relation to the works that Matisse and Derain were working on at that time basically *Blue Nude (Souvenir de Biskra)* by the former and *The Bathers* by the latter that no doubt inspired Picasso). He also pointed out the influence that Cezanne's Bathers might have had and finally explained the importance of the two Iberian sculptures that Picasso had bought in 1907. Previously Barr had also pointed out the part played by El Greco in the composition and later, in the sixties, Werner Spies would add the association with Ingres' *The Turkish Bath* while for his part, Edward Fry underlined the importance of Gauguin and his reliefs, as another artistic source (Barr 1939; Spies 1969, 18; Fry 1966, 70–3).

With the formalist interpretation firmly consolidated, in the 1960s no other monographic text was written about *Les Demoiselles*,[5] in contrast, as we shall see to the large number that appeared especially in the 1980s, and we shall understand why immediately. It might be said that the formalist discourse was exhausted long before the iconographic, particularly, if the latter was allowed to be combined with biographical and historical visions as historiography would do in the last decades of the 20th century and the start of the 21st. This may have much to do with the new interpretations that were looming on the horizon and especially Steinberg's famous version of the work—that we shall comment on fully below—which, at last allowed for the establishment of a relation not exclusively formalist on the work. It is indeed worth mentioning an important prior circumstance in the history of the interpretation of the work's content. In 1966 Edward Fry began to focus on the matter of the brothel, comparing or contrasting Picasso's treatment with that of some of his predecessors, especially the Impressionists. This did not prevent him from lingering over, and giving full consideration to, the formal features of the work, according to the critical trend of the time, underlining the influence of the Cézanne *passage*, as we have mentioned, to achieve the fusion of the background planes with the forefront with the aim of attaining the identity of the pictorial surface and the pictorial space (Fry 1966).

[5] In this decade it only appears in works on wider studies on Cubism, Rosenblum 1960; Fry 1966. From 1970 it will be another classic study on Cubism, that of Cooper 1970, whose vision of *Les Demoiselles* that slipped into the formalist wake.

From the foregoing it is easy to confirm that *Les Demoiselles* enjoyed the consideration of being the first Cubist work during the period when scant importance was being given to the content of the work, while the formalist discourse prevailed. Once this was displaced by the iconological, only when the content became the focus of the analyses, suspicion grew about its Cubist connections. Christopher Green (2001) considered that this was an important step towards no longer considering the work as a piece of history and beginning to see it for itself, in its own right and not for its links with the evolution of Cubism and the avant-garde. The moment came precisely in 1972 and was the result of applying "other criteria" to analysing *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* and the whole of modern art.

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CHAPTER 3

Other Criteria. Problematic Nudes

Thwarting Formalism

As soon as attention began to be paid to the content of the *Demoiselles*, and no longer merely to its form, some of Picasso's comments, to which little heed had been given, began to be relevant. For instance, he was supposed to have said the following about the title of the work:

> *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*. This title exasperates me so much! It was Salmon's idea. As you know, at the start it was called *The Brothel in Avignon*. Do you know why? Avignon has always been a name that sounded familiar, that had something to do with my life. I lived a stone's throw away from *Calle d'Avignon* (spelt thus in the original). That was where I bought paper and my watercolours. And, as you know, Max (Jacob)'s grandfather was from Avignon. We made so many jokes about the painting like what if one of the women were Max's grandmother, another Fernande, a third were Marie Laurencin, all together in a brothel in Avignon. (Bernadac and Michael 1998, 60).

In this respect we must remember that there were various different versions of the title. This was a normal occurrence as, until well into the 20th century it was not usual for paintings to have a fixed title. Or, more precisely, the author did not give it a special title until it was purchased or exhibited when it would acquire a merely descriptive title and thus be recognised as a commodity or merchandise. The title of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* was not really established until the work was to be shown publicly for the first time in the Salon d'Antin in Paris in July of 1916 in the exhibition "L'Art moderne en France." This appears to have

Maite Méndez Baiges, University of Malaga, Spain, mendez@uma.es, 0000-0002-0762-7004

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been a compromise invented for this exhibition because until this moment the work invariably appears with the uncomfortable designation of brothel. In fact, André Salmon in *Propos d'Atelier* in 1922, observes that the canvas had been spontaneously baptised earlier as "The Philosophical Brothel" an intimate joke between close friends; Picasso, Apollinaire who was probably the author and Salmon himself (1922, 16). Other sources mention the title as *Les Filles d'Avignon* (The Girls of Avignon) or *Les Femmes d'Avignon* (The Women of Avignon), which, according to Hélène Seckel, were in all probability the names normally used by Picasso when presenting the work to his visitors (Seckel 1994, 250, note 4). In certain books and articles the reference to Avignon appears in Catalan, *Avinyó* and the title is sometimes referred to as *Las señoritas del Carrer Aviñyó* (that is, of Avinyó Street). This designation originated not only from Picasso's reference to the street where he used to bought his painting materials when he lived in Barcelona. It also referred to a quote published by Christian Zervos (1942, 10) where he also said that before World War II, Picasso explained to him "that he painted a memory of a brothel in Barcelona in the *Carrer Aviñyó* that was close to his parents' home." However, in another declaration to Zervos, he denied the canvas was related to the brothel in *Carrer Aviñyó* in Barcelona: "Would I be so pathetic as to search for inspiration in such a reality […] as literal as a specific brothel, in a specific street of a specific city?"[1]

Let us digress for a moment and explain that all these references have produced the confusing babel of names in various languages that naming the work still causes today. As we have mentioned earlier, Kahnweiler mentions Picasso's art supplies shop and the brothel which he had probably visited on more than one occasion in the street in Barcelona in a mixture of French and Spanish, *Calle Avignon*, and at other times in Catalan, *Carrer Avinyó*. However, the most common title in any language, leaves off the word "calle" (street), even in Spanish bibliography and keeps the French spelling of Avignon, as we have done for this book. English bibliography tends almost always to keep the original French title of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* as does the Spanish although less frequently. In any case, it has also been pointed out that the title, only for use by close friends, was probably the name of the French city for its historical links with prostitution. Once upon a time the discontent with the Avignon schism associated the city with the Popes of New Babylon, or with the kingdom of whores, in reference to the dissolute life of the Pope of that See.

In any event, these alternative titles are what inspired Leo Steinberg to entitle his famous article on *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* "The Philosophical Brothel"

[1] Avowal to Zervos in the 1930s, cit. In Bohm-Duchen 2001, 200. The quote continues thus: "The worst thing is that when I am asked about this and I say that it is not true, people still think that the girls are in a brothel in the carrer d'Aviñyó. In fact and everybody knows, this was a story invented by Max Jacob, André Salmon and other friends of our group—it does not matter who—and referred to Max's grandmother who was in Avignon, where his mother had also lived […] We joked that she ran a *maison de passe* (brothel) there. It was all just made up, like so many others".

in 1972 in which he severed all ties of the painting with the evolution of Cubism and its consideration as the first link in the avant-garde movement. Moreover this text represented an authentic interpretative revolution of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* by giving much more importance, even all the importance, to the content and not the form. As a result of this, and as we shall see below, he dealt a final blow at the critical formalist discourse on the work. It was not coincidental that it happened at a historic moment, just when an interpretative climate, doubting authority, legitimacy and even the pertinence of formalist analysis of modern art was beginning to prevail.

The Copernican revolution in the history of the interpretations of the work, subject of Leo Steinberg's text, very probably happened because for decades a series of questions that nobody had formulated openly, floated in the atmosphere. Sooner or later these questions on the formalist studies would have to be asked. They could have been asked in the following way. Is it possible that, when faced with a painting full of naked women who were not pretending to be anything other than the prostitutes they really were, the content should be disregarded? Is it possible that this might be a secondary motive and not given the least importance, as formalism had done with it? If all, or mostly all, that interested Picasso was tackling the formal problems of the painting, why then had he chosen a subject as sensitive as prostitutes? A subject, undertaken here in such a way, attacked the established convention on female nudity, one of the most recorded subjects in the history of western art. This was because it was tantamount to admitting that the naked women who appeared on the canvas this time were not representing goddesses, nor mythological beings, nor allegories… No, they were literally what people were seeing: naked women and, specifically, prostitutes. In 1907, the one place where one could be sure of seeing naked women quite clearly was in a brothel. The operation to desublimate female nudity, that had in fact begun at the start of Modernism and to which some painters like Manet had contributed significantly, went much further in *Les Demoiselles*.

Strange as it may seem, given the pertinence of these questions today, they were not explicitly asked until 1972. This was when doubts about the formalist focus were considered invalid or insufficient to explain the roots of *Les Demoiselles*—and thus the origin and initial evolution of modern art—gave way to "other criteria" of analysis. The new criteria would be charged with converting the "naked problems" that up till then had monopolised the attention of the critics into something that could well be described as "problematic nudes" as we shall see further on.

Before we broach the question of the revolution in the critical discourse on Modernism that Leo Steinberg's "Philosophical Brothel" signified we must pay tribute to an earlier incident of prime importance. On the 24 June, 1970 on BBC Radio 3 John Nash presented a programme about *Les Demoiselles*[2] in an interpre-

[2] The written version was published in Nash 2004: 61–6. There are five versions of the text published between 1970 y 1988.

tation that moved away from the hackneyed formalist clichés. He established a connection with the 19th century tradition of female nudity, centred in the harem; with the myths of Pygmalion and Medusa that, according to Freud, were closely linked to connotations of castration and petrification. In short, these and other matters posed a novel challenge to the idea that *Les Demoiselles* as a painting aimed at solving purely pictorial problems. The critics ignored this text for decades, until first William Rubin and later Hal Foster (1993) and Yves-Alain Bois recovered it (2001, 31–54). It contains the added interest of overtaking some of the most original interpretations of the work hitherto presented, as well as setting a clear precedent for Leo Steinberg's ideas.

In his lecture for the BBC Nash proposed for the first time that the shock *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* provoked in the spectator was not a response exclusively to challenge the formal conventions that it presented but because the women shown are "terrible." He acknowledged the place of honour given to the work but calls attention to the absence of texts about its disturbing violence, as though its intrinsic ugliness and barbarity were only a product of a formal, artistic rupture. Nash is the first to say something that later critics repeated tirelessly: "I have never liked this notion of modern art as a great experiment and the artist as a pseudo-scientist; and Picasso didn't either [...] So to suggest that the *Demoiselles* is ugly and difficult because Picasso was moving toward a revolutionary investigation of form and space begs so many questions" (Nash 2004, 61).

Nash wondered what exactly Picasso wanted to say and why had to be said in such a violent and primitive mode. Beyond whether this work was the source of Cubism, Nash placed it in the context of his production, and in the first place as a replica of 19th century nudes. Here he establishes a very interesting distinction between the tradition of nudity before and after that century. He explained that the earlier nudes normally evoked an action while those of that century referred to a frame of mind, a mood (take for example, the difference between Titian's *Diana and Actaeon* and *The Turkish Bath* by Ingres). It is as if we were to say that previously the nude had always catered to the "demands of the script," until the nakedness of the 19th century dispensed with this pretext. *Les Demoiselles* would be thus both a response and a challenge to the normal 19th century nude genre. Nevertheless, at the same time, it was the authentic successor of *The Turkish Bath*, because of the display of bodies more than its dramatic composition. An exhibition of bodies alludes to the Harem and is responsible for nude genre of the 19th century being characterised by its emphasis on the erotic aspect. We, like Nash, understand that Picasso would have managed this state of 19th century nudity as a window of nude women to a degree of exacerbation that ended by revealing its authentic essence. We might say it forced him to reveal all its flaws.

In Nash's opinion, and those of other commentators of the work, the key figure of the composition is the young woman on the lower right because she is the most extravagant, grotesque, primitive and unhuman. And if the formalism, from Kahnweiler to Golding, had found in her the very origin of Cubism, from Nash's

iconological viewpoint, this young lady played a fundamental role because if, in the sketches, she is gazing and offering herself to the sailor who fills the centre of the scene, when he disappears in the final canvas, "Picasso turned the dramatic focus of the picture on the relation between the *Demoiselles* and the spectator" (Nash 2004, 63). This idea, crucial at the present time for shedding light on the meaning of the work, was revealed two years later by Leo Steinberg, but as we can see, it had been pronounced for the first time by Nash in the article commented on above. It was also Nash who pointed out for the first time the ambiguity of this figure: it is up to the spectator to decide if what he or she is seeing is her back or her navel. In this case the girl would be sprawling with legs apart, showing her genitals to the spectator, posture obviously inadmissible according to the moral and artistic conventions of that time and even of those today. In summary, for Nash, this young lady of the gorgoneion head is an "aesthetic indecency" that metaphorically transports the spectator, frankly and directly to the obscene performance offered initially to the sailor.

Nash is suggesting the possibility of linking the young women to the Pygmalion myths, the sculptor who fell in love with the marble statue of Galatea he had carved and whom Aphrodite, in a pious gesture, brought to life. Or with Medusa, the monstrous figure capable of petrifying with a glance any who dared meet her gaze, unless of course they looked only at her reflection, as did Perseus in order to murder her. In conclusion, Picasso would have been "a Pygmalion who set out to create not a Galatea but a Medusa (in such a way that) the erotic ideal of the nineteenth century was metamorphosed into a threatening monster whose nakedness can be seen only indirectly" (Nash 2004, 64). Nash adds some very interesting conclusions on the content of the painting. With *Les Demoiselles*, art itself became a metaphor for prostitution. The *madame* draws the curtain and the spectator sees a table laid for a hungry man. But he himself is in danger, threatened by ferocious sexual predators whose appetency is too terrible to be seen in the nude. In the painting woman is destroyed, converted into something horrible and reconstructed in a controllable fashion. Medusa may only be seen in her reflection. Nash's ideas persuade us to see it in this way: the women are the beginning of something terrible that must be reflected upon, just as beauty was for Rilke.

Lastly, Nash analyses each figure in the scene as well as the role of the curtain and the mask. The curtain, associated since ancient times with pictorial skill, is also the way to protect a masterpiece, a constant in western art collections. But this painting speaks to us of revelations. Thus, the young woman on the left is charged with drawing back the curtain, with revealing, and because of this it is a surrogate of the painter himself. The two nudes—at centre left—that are a parody of the ancient western tradition of Beauty with a capital B, are docile, inert and pathetic. They are merely creatures of art from whom we appropriate their aesthetic contemplation. One of them has pushed aside the draperies to show her crotch but her genitals, as in any well-mannered art exhibition, are not functional. The two on the right are wearing masks, a powerful metaphor for the genitals, a more revealing fig-leaf than any direct representa-

tion of the female sex organs. It is clear, Nash (2004, 65) assures us that "these women are not, specifically could not be, objects for disinterested aesthetic contemplation—but neither are they mere objects of desire." And in this allusion to Kantian aesthetics, Nash deals the deathblow on the short-sighted formalist view that had seen none of this in *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*. He concludes with a statement that would be proverbial for later feminist critique: "The masks signify that they too have appetites, possibly…, no, certainly, more powerful, more dangerous than the appetite of the male." Woman as the *praying mantis*. *Les Demoiselles* does not reflect. It articulates, it exemplifies. But it does not articulate the author's personal pathologies, rather something that is in itself pathological and crucial in Western culture.

Stories of Sex and Fatal Seduction. The Inescapable Version of Leo Steinberg

As we have mentioned, after John Nash's preparation of the terrain, the honour of having redirected the discourse on *Les Demoiselles* fell on Leo Steinberg in his famous article of 1972, re-edited in 1988, entitled "The Philosophical Brothel." The title alone was an indication of the radical transformation in the interpretation of the work impending. And with the article, published in two parts, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* was converted in a painting about the force of the sexual encounter, a work centred on the relation between the naked prostitutes and the client-spectators of the brothel to such an extent that all its formal characteristics were sexualised too. Their previous status of being the solution to the fundamental pictorial problems would now be considered almost an irrelevant matter. Green said that Steinberg envisaged a Picasso who beckoned to a spectator who was unlike the others, who calibrated the amount of Cubism or Pre-Cubism implicit in the work. Steinberg suggested we tend to perceive what our eyes are trained to see. So, if for the last thirty years we have trained our eyes to jump from *Les Demoiselles* to Cubism, perhaps a different perspective will accustom us to seeing "the naked problems" of Picasso as human figures again" (Steinberg 1972a, 25), as naked women. As Christopher Green (2001, 9) pointed out, after Steinberg *Les Demoiselles* is not so much the inaugural moment of Cubism as a new form of confronting sexuality in an artistic environment, a form whose immediacy had no precedents in the history of painting.

We must bear in mind the prevailing climate when the turning point came in the interpretation of *Les Demoiselles*. Steinberg's appraisal did not happen in a vacuum. On the contrary, it could be considered truly "epochal" as long as we take into account that it was Steinberg himself who was charged with introducing these crucial changes in the articulation of the discourse on Modernism that would put an end to the formalist narrative on it. In the field of historiography of modern art, Steinberg is the equivalent of Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg in the 50s and 60s for their artistic evolution. If the creative attitude cultivated by both neo-Dadaist artists would mark the passage of modern art to contemporary art, Steinberg's position as critic would mean

abandoning the "orthodox narrative of Modernism" that still prevailed in favour of a type of discourse that, when all is said and done, would be qualified as postmodern. The need to set aside the importance of the *how* and begin to appraise the *what* weighed heavily. It is, therefore, not in the least surprising that the turning point implicit in Steinberg's way of seeing things was intimately linked with the positive valuation that he himself would make on the first steps of Neo-Dada movement. It was precisely a paper by Steinberg about Rauschenberg's work that raised the alarm on the pressing need to begin to use new criteria to interpret Modernism.

Steinberg had formulated the pressing need for this change in the critical consideration of the artistic phenomena in another article famous among specialists of 20th century art: the lecture of 1968 known as "Other Criteria" that would be also published in 1972 under the title of "Reflections on the State of Criticism."[3] It contained an audacious and perfectly founded criticism of the idea of Modernism articulated by Clement Greenberg, whose doctrine at that moment had become a true dogma both for the critics and for artistic practice itself. In fact, it had played a fundamental role in the prestige and development of artistic trends such as Abstract Expressionism and Post-painterly Abstraction in the United States. Steinberg's analysis is perhaps the first blow dealt to the hegemony of "the orthodox narrative of Modernism," written mainly, but not exclusively, by Greenberg. It would also be the final blow. Steinberg had detected, furthermore, that for more than a decade there were artists who did not fit in the path drawn by this narrative that contemplated almost exclusively formalist criteria: one of these was Robert Rauschenberg, the subject of study in the article. Both he and Jasper Johns signified the return of a content and meaning in works of art which took them beyond the self-absorption that formalism had imposed on them. This was as liberating for the Neo-Dadas as for the critics of modern art.

Steinberg's article "Other Criteria" opens with the following consideration (2002, 7): "I don't mind the positive work done by the formalist critics but I dislike their interdictory stance—the attitude that tells the artist what he ought not do, and the spectator what he ought not see. Preventive aesthetics I call it." After Steinberg these "preventive aesthetics" were thwarted and with them the authority and legitimacy of the formal discourse. The consequences of the new criteria naturally went beyond the transformation of the meaning of *Les Demoiselles*. The whole of modern art and its interpretations would be affected by this standpoint that, furthermore as we have mentioned, had not established its strengths exclusively here.

We must bear in mind that in the 70s for example, Peter Bürger (1977) published his "Theory of the Avant-Garde" which, from Marxist presumptions dispatched the validity of the formalist understanding of the essence and evolution

[3] First published in *Artforum* 10, 7, March 1972. We use here the edition published in *Robert Rauschenberg. October Files*, n. 4, The MIT Press, Cambridge-London, 2002.

of avant-garde art of the 20th century. And if Steinberg warned about the need to pay attention to the content, Bürger dismantled the idea, so dear to formalism, of avant-garde being equivalent to the autonomy of art, arguing that, on the contrary, any definition of avant-garde would have to be considered for its efforts in merging art and vital praxis and for subverting the foundations of the art-institution. He defined the "art-institution," that avant-garde either denied or criticised, as the "apparatus of production and distribution of art and also of the ideas about art that dominate at a particular time and that essentially determine the reception of the works" (Bürger 1977, 63). This meant that not only did avant-garde artists engage themselves in matters more serious than the mere formal renovation of painting, but that the receptor of the art consequently saw himself conditioned by the ruling ideology. In other words, formalism emerges here as an ideology despite Modernism surrendering itself to its aesthetic deliberations on formal aspects as if there were no room for any ideological constraints in this task that appeared to be simply a question of pure artistic technicism. This was a death blow to the formalism personified by Greenberg, as decisive as that delivered by the American critics themselves. Later we shall examine its repercussions. Now let us focus on the iconological discourse on *Les Demoiselles* that Steinberg had just introduced.

Steinberg considered it pertinent to disobey the unwritten rule of examining *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* with questions that only dealt with formal matters. Thus his departure point rests on the approach and attempts to answer a series of questions concerning key matters on the content of this painting: prostitution in the first place. For example, would the decomposition of volumes in planes and the means of flattening the pictorial space have had the same effect had subject been some men playing cards? The possible significance of the Baroqueness or the extraordinary theatricality of the scene, in second place, for a canvas that could just as well have settled for being the expression of the flat character of the pictorial surface. Consider other matters: the anatomies of the women as possible metaphors of the states of human existence; the intensity with which the painting appeals to the spectator (the largest in history, except for *Las Meninas*); and the significance of two styles clearly recognisable in the canvas. And lastly, Steinberg searched for answers to three more questions. Was the first painting of the 20th century merely a coarse repetition of the hackneyed theme on the contrast of vice and virtue and death as a result of sin? Is it true that faced with Picasso's own motivation, only objectivity and indifference intervened? What does the series of drawings that lead to the final state of the painting reveal exactly? Obviously Steinberg considered that if something merited investigation, this should not be limited just to the final version of a work, according to the mandate of the formalist critics.

We do not intend to summarise all Steinberg's answers to these questions. The density of his text cautions against trying to recapitulate in a way that would do it justice. Furthermore, what interests us here is to point out those that were more decisive or had greater repercussions in the subsequent evolution of Modernism discourse.

If for formalism the idea that *Les Demoiselles* demolished pictorial types of secular deceit was crucial, now from the iconological perspective, it is a work that explores frankly other, more human and even more carnal, types of truth. It was Steinberg who realised and put forward for the first time the idea that "to wear the face of of truth, Picasso's return to nature in the *Demoiselles* must be ironic—not to Arcadia, but to city stews" (Steinberg 1972b, 43). In this type of critical appreciation, the savageness of the young women begins to reveal itself as a brutal response to the Arcadian idyll that Matisse presented at the Salon des Indépendants in 1906 under the title of *Bonheur de vivre.*

Steinberg emphasises, above all, and this seems to me to be the main idea and one with more future in his proposals, the great immediacy of the work in that the spectator is forced to become conscious of himself as he gazes on it. He ventures to say "The unity of the work, famous for its formal, external interruptions, internal stylistic disruptions, resides above all in the startled, consists basically in the astonishing consciousness of a spectator viewer who sees himself seen" (Steinberg 1972a, 21), feels himself observed (by the young women in the painting) in his action of observing. The young women are situated in independent spaces, they do not look at each other nor is there any interaction between them. They simply turn abruptly towards the spectator who is scrutinising them. The naked women have become prostitutes in pursuit of the male client. When we realise this, we are also aware that the spectator has been transformed. He has gone from being the cold reflexive analyst of the painting's problems to being a sexual and implicitly masculine spectator.

Acknowledging the foregoing, the considerable evolution of the sketches will really show the passage of the representation of a sexual subject seen from a distance to a sexual subject that demands the direct implication of the spectator. Contrary to Barr, Steinberg is of the opinion that the sketches are indispensable because, only by following their sequence, is it possible to appreciate that a sailor and a student have disappeared to make way for the spectator, now converted in a client of the brothel: the table, shaped like the prow of a boat, is thrust into the brothel from the spectator's position, sharing the penetrating phallic energy of the client-spectator.

For Steinberg, therefore, the work was never a mere *memento mori,* nor a warning about the punishment of sins but contained the idea of "cold, distant apprenticeship facing the demands of sex." The pivot of the content is the gaze, or if you prefer, the meeting of the gazes.

In the preparatory sketches the personages on the scene (a man and various women) react to the arrival of one of them, the student. And under these circumstances the spectator simply looks on at the scene from outside (as has always been done throughout the history of painting). However, and this is the crucial point, in the final work there is a transformation. The two male figures have disappeared and only the women remain looking not at any figure on the stage but having turned 90º to stare at someone who is directly in front of them, with no attempt to look elsewhere, offering them no way out:

> In the *Demoiselles* this rule of traditional narrative art yields to an anti-narrative counter-principle: neighboring figures share neither a common space nor a common action, do not communicate or interact, but relate singly, directly, to the spectador. A determined dissociation of each from each is the means of throwing responsibility for the unity of the action upon the viewer's subjective response. The event, the epiphany, the sudden entrance, is still the theme—but rotated through 90 degrees towards a viewer conceived as the picture's opposite role. (Steinberg 1972a, 21).

This is somewhat akin to what happened in *Las Meninas* or the portraits by the Dutch group but the painted women who stare at their observer are naked and professional sex workers. I would add that they are, without doubt, related to Manet's *Olympia*. The discrepancies, the absence of stylistic and scenic unity do, in fact, converge in the spectator who bestows unity on the painting: "the crux of the work is the terrible gaze of the Demoiselles, especially the monstrous faces on the right." From Steinberg's point of view the figure of the medical student,[4] in some of the sketches entering from the left and causing a reaction in the gazes of the young women on the scene, acquires a fundamental role. Steinberg allowed himself to doubt whether the skull carried in some sketches was an allegory of death as a result of the deadly sin of lust. Consider, however, that a medical student represents the only member of human society capable of gazing on a skull with thoughts other than death. In any event, entering a brothel whether carrying a book or a skull would seem inappropriate for the time and place. The medical student should be considered, therefore, as a symbol of knowledge or, better still, of theoretical and nonparticipating analysis. And the skull therefore, the lethal effect of the analysis, against the pitcher (*porrón* in Spanish), an ithyphallic and vital element that accompanies the sailor, the other male figure on the scene. Steinberg also points out that in some of the earlier sketches the medical student, on the left, who appeared to be opening a curtain, could in fact be closing it, indicating the end of a session. Be that as it may, his disappearance from the final version of the painting implies, as we have said, that the scene is given a 90º turn and the role previously played by the medical student is now taken on by the spectator. Finally the spectator is invited to be part of the experience of the scene: "The change seems drastic; from an allegory of man meeting woman, to the adventure of a collision with art. As if the whole had been shunted from the subject of sex to that of painting itself—which is, in a sense, what has always

[4] William Rubin specified that Picasso did not identify the figure as a medical student until 1972 in a private communication to Rubin and which Rubin then passed on by letter to Steinberg (Elderfield 1994: 44 note 154). At the same time Picasso would have revealed the unpublished *carnet* in which the student is holding the skull, something that the artist had mentioned in 1939 to Barr but that had never been seen until that moment. And although the number of preparatory drawings in which the student appears with a skull is relatively paltry compared to the number of times he is represented with a book, Rubin considers it significant that later on, Picasso would particularly remember the presence of the skull in both his comment to Barr and to Rubin himself.

been said, that the picture has become 'significant' as painting only" (Steinberg 1972b, 40) as long as the spectator is seen not as an intruder but as a participant.

It is curious that the reasoning about the sexual content of *Les Demoiselles* should lead Steinberg to a conclusion not so far removed from that of the formalist historians who saw zero degree of painting in the work. It is, however, this last condition of the spectator as participant and part of the spectacle or action that strictly speaking, differentiates from the previous critic's discourse. We must remember that he had even compared the pictorial space of the painting with an unmade bed: "Although symbolically proposed for the sense of sight, the space implied by Picasso is a total initiation, like getting into an unmade bed" (Steinberg 1988, 65). Was this like Rauschenberg's *The Bed* or Tracey Emin's famous work?

After reading Steinberg's essay we conclude that we, the spectator, become clients; the prostitutes gaze outwards from the painting and come to rest on us. We stand before a work that involves the contemplator in a more direct and perturbing way than we could ever have imagined. The work seems ready to demonstrate that this place that the spectator had always occupied, outside the canvas, where he/she had felt comfortable and safe, was beginning to suffer turbulences. In other words, it was no longer a safe place. And "the whole picture, form and subject together, strives against educated detachment" (Steinberg 1972b, 41) searching for concurrence between the act of painting and the act of loving. The act of loving is confronted, in its most turbulent, Dionysiac phase, states Steinberg who, at one moment in his essay, defines the painting as "the vision of five bedevilled viragos whose sexual offering, visually inescapable, is decivilizing, disfiguring and demoniacal" (1972b, 43). The encounter with the whores (and now we must begin to use this term openly) in the work is, thus a traumatic encounter that cancels out the grotesque fiction of the emotional distancing of the painter before five naked women. Contrast, continues Steinberg, the painting by Pietro Michis entitled *Zeuxis choosing a model for his Helena from the young women of Croton* where the cold professionality of the painter, by virtue of his proficiency and aesthetic distancing from the nakedness of the female flesh of the five beautiful girls, can be seen (Steinberg 1988, 74).

Seen thus, we appear to be destined to relinquish for ever the sobriety of the art critic who coldly uses his formal tools from that distance to which Ortega referred in his *Deshumanizacion del arte,* to offer us a very different attitude, intended to measure all human, far too human, matters. In the end, the distant analyst is succeeded by someone who tangles himself in the subject of the canvas as if he were climbing into an unmade bed…, another's bed to be sure.

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CHAPTER 4

After Steinberg: Contextualist Interpretations

Steinberg's "The Philosophical Brothel" completely modified the possible ways of dealing with the analysis of *Les Demoiselles* and it could be said that this text marked a turning point in the history of interpreting the work. Steinberg himself mentions this in the postscriptum of 1987 to his 1972 article in which he recognises that then, with formalism in full regression, recognition of the sexual charge in the painting could be considered almost a banality, although it certainly was not so when he pointed it out for the first time: "But such is the nature of my melancholic profession [...] It is in the character of the critic to say no more, in his best moments, than what everyone's lips in the following season repeats; he is the generator of the cliché" (Steinberg 1988, 74). And thus, from him at that moment, *Les Demoiselles* were sexualized to such an extent that in research about them, it is considered out of place to simply abide by the formal achievements of the work. Henceforth, for art historians who confront it, conscious of the force or the gravity of the matters it appears to contain, it will be practically impossible to detach the content from the context, whether biographical, historical, psychological, social or ideological, in which the work was created and its reception produced.

A key question raised from Steinberg's reading, and one crucial to the very understanding of Modernism, is the growing importance of the spectator in the aesthetics process. And if, as we shall see, from the decade of the 60s, one fundamental way of analysing *Les Demoiselles* was examining the condition of the spectator in front of the painting, just as another post-Steinberg approach will take the opposite direction, exploring the psychobiography of Picasso the author.

Maite Méndez Baiges, University of Malaga, Spain, mendez@uma.es, 0000-0002-0762-7004

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Steinberg, however, was openly sceptical about the potential of the biographic theories telling us anything meaningful about Modernism.

These were two paradoxical, and even contradictory, directions. The biographical explored the understanding of the work of art from its title and partly from the idea of "genius" (as an inborn characteristic) while nourishing an immersion in the biography and psychology of Picasso that would consider more than the possible artistic influences that had contributed to shape the work. The other direction would tend towards the spectator and carry, on the contrary, the seed of a strong attack on the sacrosanct figure of the author. It implied admitting that the spectator, apprehensive of the work, endowed it with new meanings as legitimate as those bestowed by its creator. We must bear in mind that moving the centre of gravity from the author to the spectator can be considered one of the inherent elements of Modernism, even before the second half of the 20th century. Dividing the direction of analysis of *Les Demoiselles* is simply the reflection of the directions taken by the historiography of modern art in the postmodern era, once the common enemy that was formalism had been beaten.

Delving into Picasso's Biography

One of the key studies in this new post-Steinberg era is by William Rubin, director of the painting and sculpture section of the MoMA from 1968 to 1988 and author of one of the definitive texts on the painting: "The Genesis of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*", without doubt the most exhaustive study that has been done about the work. It is part of the volume *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon,* shared with authors Judith Cousins and Hélène Seckel (1994).

Rubin's chapter leads with a clear statement of principles: *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* is without question a turning point in the history of modern painting. Until then, there had never been anything so radical in this evolution but what sustained Picasso's perseverance and courage in achieving this feat cannot be measured according to exclusively pictorial patterns. What sustained him came from his relentless confrontation of himself (Rubin 1994, 13). Rubin's study must be included in the contextualist analyses in so far as it is the result of a total relinquishment of formalism to devote himself to the enterprise of revealing all the most hidden details of Picasso's biography when he was painting the work and the creative process leading to it. Thus, he launched the path along which many of the studies focused on the biography would travel. Thanks to the careful compiling and analysis of the documentation available on the work, provided by Rubin, Seckel and Cousins in the volume edited by the MoMA, almost all the later studies are partly indebted to their discoveries. However, although they did use the documentation divulged by him, they did not always share Rubin's methodology as their interpretation tool nor even his conclusions, as we will see further on. Through William Rubin, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* essentially became the mirror of Picasso's emotions during the first decade of the 20th century; of the accumulated complex and contradictory feelings of the painter

about sex and women and also of some of his irremediable fellow travellers at that time. We refer specifically to venereal diseases and prostitution.

According to Rubin, the core to interpreting this work came from the gradual discovery that Picasso made while he worked on the picture: the magic function that from the beginning drove humankind to make images and consequently revealed the power of art to change life. This was a quality that painting had been gradually losing during the 19th century. Rubin considered that for Picasso, the primal matter was not to change artistic conventions but to change life itself, or better still, his own life. A personal and psychological crisis, a profound exploration of his own psyche, induced him to paint *Les Demoiselles* and the many sketchbooks that were part of it are no more than a visual diary of this important existential crisis.

With this proposal, it is natural that Rubin would then devote a great part of his study to delving into Picasso's biography. I maintain that in this way he opened a path that has produced a prolific historiography of the leading characters, almost always male, of modern art in general and, of course, in the work of Picasso himself. It is, therefore, not surprising that in the opening pages of his text, Rubin concerns himself with the crisis in the relationship of the painter with his lover in 1907, Fernande Olivier (which "could be seen coming a mile off", *sic*) and which he considers crucial to the execution of *Les Demoiselles*. To make matters worse, everything was complicated by a possible episode of syphilis and also because the couple had adopted an orphan, Raymonde, whose presence in the Bateau Lavoir hardly helped to calm the situation; the reverse in fact. Rubin published some portraits by Picasso of Raymonde, in one of which the adolescent appears with legs apart, explicitly showing her genitals while she gives herself a pedicure.[1] At this point in time and although Rubin had only just started, the article gives the impression that he is laying out his arguments in a tone more suitable to a soap opera or a reality TV show. One needs to recover one's composure to continue reading in the hope of fathoming out, not Picasso's personal problems but something of substance on the possible meanings of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*. I suspect that I am not alone in this appreciation and that the reservations shown in an important part of Picasso's historiography about Rubin's study, come from the apprehension generated by this kind of art history methodology (Green 2001, 128–50).

In any event, Rubin directs his discourse to the scene of welcome typical of the brothels of the era and from there to the painter's discovery of his own erotic desire, combined with the presence of Iberian art and contact with African art when he visited the Trocadéro. And in his opinion the encounter of the central Iberian and European nude figures that originated from African and Oceanic models, is the confrontation between Eros and Thanatos, between the object

[1] The biographical data used by Rubin to support his thesis come mainly from one of the greatest students of Picasso's life, Pierre Daix, from Fernande Olivier's biography and from testimonies of other people in Picasso's circle at that time.

of desire and death. According to Rubin, the reason Picasso's visit to the Trocadéro Museum aroused such strong feelings in him was seeing the collection that had previously been considered as ethnographic while in a state of fear and trepidation about syphilis (at a time when several institutional campaigns were warning about its terrible secondary effects). The conflict between Picasso and Fernande was also a reason for his strong reaction. This would all lead to his capturing the magical or apotropaic character of the "primitive art" in all its intensity that would give him some form of protection against the mortal danger entailed in sex. This was why Rubin conceded capital importance to what Picasso told Malraux in 1938, saying that this was his "first pictorial exorcism". As we have seen, this declaration, possibly the most popular comment made by Picasso on his prostitutes of Avignon, was not actually published until 1974. Rubin determines that the painter realised the masks he had seen in 1907 in the Trocadéro were magical things, "weapons against unknown and threatening spirits" and also, that giving the spirits shapes was a way of breaking free of them.

When he began the genealogy of the painting, Rubin dealt first of all with the impact of primitivism, first through Picasso's discovery of Iberian art in 1906, then in 1907 that of African and Oceanic tribal sculptures. He points out, and this is an essential point, that the conventional, or bourgeois, taste of that time used the word primitivism in a disparaging way and applied it to any type of non-European or even Medieval art. At the same time African and Oceanic art and artefacts were considered to be exclusively ritually savage or barbaric, never artistic. This even includes the enlightened minority who, since the 18th century extolled the primitive for its closeness to nature by resorting to "the myth of the good savage", using a battery of valid arguments to criticise the problems of "civilised" or modern man. Gauguin was a part of this panorama and must be thus understood. Rubin (1994, 38) states that his primitivism was more philosophical than aesthetical and even asserting that in his work, there is no trace of inclusion or assimilation of the primitive art of the Pacific peoples where he had lived: "The few Polynesian works among his paintings [...] functioned more as contextual symbols and decorative devices than as agents of influence in his style".

Next, the author identifies and analyses the relevance of some other paintings by Picasso in the genealogy of the work, including the *Two Women* that foreshadow some of the formal resources in the *Demoiselles* or that hint at the influence of El Greco and then dwells upon the prefigured medical student and sailor who did come on the scene but were not included in the final version. Rubin rejects the possibility of the work containing a *memento mori,* as Barr had momentarily suggested because he understood that the sexual morality of an anarchistic atheist like Picasso would not be compatible with the idea of presenting "waves or sin" or preaching a sermon through the painting. Steinberg had also rejected this idea as we have seen. Rubin in his turn did not find Steinberg's interpretations convincing, especially the contrast between the implicated (the sailor and his wine jug) and the unimplicated (the student and his skull) in the drama and sexual demands, guided by the idea that *Les Demoiselles* is fundamentally a work about the trauma of a sexual encounter.

For Rubin, it was impossible to disassociate the medical student and his *vanitas* of disease and death, the crucial aspect of the work, as he saw it, from start to finish. And, therefore one cannot detach from it the shadow of castration and death, characteristic of the male psyche when contemplating coitus, implicit in the French description of the male orgasm as *la petite mort*. And furthermore it was accompanied by the threat of a possibly deadly illness. A threat that must surely have been going through Picasso's mind, as in the majority of the minds of men at that time who visited brothels in what was known as the "golden age of venereal diseases" at the end of the 19th and first decade of the 20th century. Rubin (1994, 49) concludes "for me the final painting is less of a Dionysian orgy than a sexual battleground in which both Eros and Thanatos contend for Picasso's psyche". Ultimately, it makes more sense that the medical student is in the brothel to counteract the threat of syphilis than for the philosophical reasons proposed by Steinberg.

That said, it is legitimate to ask if the critics' insistence on the meaning of the male personages in the painting is not out of place, in view of their disappearance from the final version. Rubin argues that in fact Picasso may well have thought that the inclusion of disease (the student) and mortality (the sailor) was too banal or anecdotic but that nobody prevented these allegories being present in the work if the two men are no longer present because *Les Demoiselles* could then assume the onus of the allegory.

Having got thus far, Rubin offers an explanation as to why Picasso redid the canvas after its initial version, the most Iberian: because the reference to death and disease was less clear than in the first version. This is what made him retouch three of the figures (the one on the left and both those on the right) and was crucial to the understanding of the painting because the symbolic narrative present in the preparatory sketches was replaced by stylistic contrasts. The horror felt by Picasso's acquaintances when the work was revealed was caused by the Medusa figure crouched at the right. Rubin, in one of his most controversial passages, stated that her asymmetric distortion conjured up the appalling deformities caused by tertiary syphilis bone damage and the facial disfigurement masks found in all tribal art, are those most akin to the "monstrous face" of the girl crouched on the right (Rubin 1994, 58). We must bear in mind this association with Africa, fright, monstruosity, venereal disease, sex and death that Rubin is tracing here because it will be one of the subjects of the most virulent debates in later criticism, mostly from post-colonialist and feminist adherents, for obvious reasons which we will discuss further below. Although, as we shall also comment, Rubin alluded to the possible concomitance between the face of this young woman and facial disease masks, precisely in order to reject the possibility that Picasso might have been inspired by these.

Rubin considers that the elegant, even pleasing, aspect of the two young, Iberian-inspired, women in the centre of the painting evoked Eros and should be seen as the counterpoint of the two Africanised figures on the right (especially the horrendous squatting figure), who are a synonym for Thanatos. Together they represent the image of Picasso's well founded fear and aversion of the female

body that goes hand-in-hand with his intense desire and his ecstatic idealisation of it. Rubin also recognises that this contradictory syndrome of attraction and repulsion, common in male psychology, was hypertrophic in the painter.

Rubin's text contains the most detailed study of the transformations that the painting underwent in Picasso's sketch and notebooks and during the actual painting of the work. He begins with the two male figures who would be the personification of Picasso and continues with each of the female figures. The two central female figures retain their initial Iberian style and Picasso had cherished the intention of them being attractive in some way. This was not the case of the three on the sides who would bestow the contrast of death versus love, ugliness versus beauty, youth versus its absence and animal versus human (Rubin 1994, 69). The figure on the left would be a sort of outsider on whom Picasso would have wanted to imprint a certain form of primitivism that distinguished her from the others. In any case Rubin did not consider the influence to be African, rather to be after the manner of Gauguin, more Oceanic than African, more "mysterious and evil" and endowed with a certain Egyptian air. Here he contradicts Golding who, in 1958 had associated it with a Dan mask from the Ivory Coast despite the fact that in 1907 no art from the Dan had yet been brought to Europe.

Rubin also rules out other influences that the critics had always maintained, especially the until now unquestioned imprint of Cézanne, who he considers would be a Cubist of the next stage, from 1908, but not with the Picasso of 1907.[2] In his estimation this was because the Picasso of that year could perceive the crucial aspect of the Cézanne revolution as being the conception of the painting as a simulacrum of bas relief (for which the *passage* technique is decisive). He also emphasised, on the other hand, that of El Greco, already mentioned by other historians. For example, and although not the first to point this out, Santiago Amón, in 1973, had juxtaposed reproductions of the *Opening of the Fifth Seal* and *Les Demoiselles* to demonstrate the numerous formal coincidences between the two compositions. In 1907 this work of El Greco was to be found in Paris, in Ignacio Zuloaga's home.

Lastly, the author returns to a subject repeatedly mentioned in his text and now reappears in more detail when he addresses Picasso's visit to the Trocadero Ethnographic Museum and the arrangement of the young women's heads on the left and right of the canvas. Their originally Iberian features were shaded over and indicate a familiarity with tribal art (probably retouched in June and July of 1907). According to Rubin, the Trocadéro visit signified a turning point because it gave Picasso a solution to express in a plastic form his feeling about sexuality and death in a way that the initial composition with its Iberian allusions and El Greco influence, did not allow him to achieve. His acquaintance with tribal art at the Trocadéro was something transcendental, something beyond the purely

[2] For example, he actually stated that Barr gave the impression of having exaggerated the presence of Cézanne in *Les Demoiselles* because without him it would not have been possible to maintain that this work marked the beginning of Cubism (Rubin 1994: 97).

formal features of this art. Now he saw the objects displayed in the ethnographic museum in a different light that enhanced their powers of exorcism, intercession or magic. He could appreciate them in this light and experience this epiphany as he was fully engrossed with painting *Les Demoiselles* and therefore seeking inspiration to express feelings that could not be shown directly and had to be substituted by images that concealed them in the Freudian sense of the word. Rubin was convinced that the presence of tribal art in the work had a spiritual character and rejected the possibility that it had served as the formal inspiration of the painting. We shall return to this subject in the chapter dealing with the problem of *Art nègre*.

Despite this he recognises that of the three retouched heads, the one on the upper right is the closest to the *negro art* masks. However, he insists that it is impossible to find specific examples of masks that may have served as models for Picasso, and that no sketch in his notebooks represents a tribal object. This means that there is no direct inspiration in any particular African art, merely a certain likeness that can be seen, for example in the young woman on the upper right. In fact, the type of shading shown on this face (*hachure* or hatching) which the bibliography invariably associates with the African impact on painting at that time, does appear in sketches of the Iberian heads, but not in those of the Africans.

The face of the young woman squatting on the lower right of the canvas suffered the most radical of the mutations and specially drew the attention of Rubin and the rest of the academics, perhaps because they saw it as the most bizarre and strange of them all, condensing many of the meanings attributed to the painting. And it is not merely her face. The posture of this nude is the most striking of all, as we have said previously. She has her back to the spectator, her legs are splayed out in a somewhat unconventional position for a painting and frankly vulgar if it were found in reality itself, while her head, on the other hand, is turned towards an imaginary observer. Rubin does not hesitate to state that she is backward facing despite Nash and Steinberg both speculating that the splayed legs were open in order to shamelessly show her sex. The torsion she is subjected to lends the painting its greatest impression of violence and hostility. Picasso had wrung her neck as if she were a chicken.

In Rubin's opinion all the transformations made to the face culminated in the "indescriptible effect of violence and monstrosity" of this young woman at the lower right so that even the women in a De Kooning or a Dubuffet appear to transmit empathy. The terrifying effect of this impression was avoided by the formalist interpreters of the painting even though it had affected contemporary observers of the work. And in fact, in 1910 Burguess had labeled them as monsters, ogres, abominable, terrifying, nightmarish, defilers, atrocious and savages. This is what warrants Rubin understanding the painting not as a tribute to Eros but as an agonising relationship with Thanatos since the woman causes an impression that implicitly leads to fear of disease and death. In other words, for Rubin the meaning of the work really lies here, in this young woman who Steinberg called a "harlot" and who depicts the sexually transmitted disease that can

disfigure the face and cause death. As we have seen, some art historians have identified the face of the young woman seated on the right with the head of Medusa, the mythological creature whose gaze would turn to stone anyone who looked upon her. Since this is a narrative that involves the gaze, logically it is one of Ariadne's threads that guides the possible interpretations of *Les Demoiselles*, especially those that favour a psychoanalytic approach. John Nash, in the radio broadcast we mentioned, was the first to put forward the Medusa connection of this figure and we should remember as well that he considered it a type of shift of repressed desires toward the object of a fetish, to put it in Freudian terms.

Considering the genesis step by step and the X-rays of the splayed figure, Rubin concludes by exhibiting his conviction that neither Africa nor any other tribal source plays a part in the morphology of the head, no matter how much the bibliography of the work until that moment had considered it the epitome of "African" influence. And this was not because there are scarcely any masks that show the slightest sign of the asymmetry observed in this figure. It was because the small number in existence did not arrive in Europe until after *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* had been painted and some of them, like the Mbuya disfigurement mask, were carved after 1907. The model for this young woman's face is not Africa. It is that of the disfigured syphilitic faces that Picasso had seen in the Saint Lazare hospital. If there is a similarity between the young woman on the right and this disfigurement mask it is because they were both inspired by the distortions caused by diseases.[3]

Rubin unhesitatingly joined the fierce debate on primitivism in which a certain historiographical line was being firmly upheld: namely that there is no influence of African art, in formalist terms, in *Les Demoiselles*. Accordingly, the models must have been truly disfigured by syphilis which undoubtedly unleashed fear of dying: "We sense the thanatophobia, he states, in the primordial horror evoked by the monstrously deformed heads of the two whores on the right of the picture, so opposite to those of the comparatively gracious Iberian courtesans in the center […] These 'African' faces, I believe, express more than just the 'barbaric' character of pure sexuality invoked by Steinberg; in the first instance their violence alludes to Woman as the Destroyer" (Rubin 1984, 254). As already mentioned, he identifies the two young women in the centre, the seductive Iberians, with Eros against the Africanised, associated with Thanatos; especially the "hideous squatting figure" he specified.

Furthermore, Rubin's article on the "Genealogy of *Les Demoiselles*" that we have just commented on and which has an important repercussion in the history of the interpretation of the work, ends abruptly with no conclusion, denying the artistic influence of "tribal art" in our Demoiselles. From my point of view we should not be surprised by this *discursus interruptus* because it is a truly hard task to fathom out exactly what Rubin's conclusions or even his key ideas are, other than considering *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* a faithful reflection of Picasso's

[3] Rubin defends these arguments both in 1994 and in 1984.

complex and contradictory feelings on women, sex, syphilis and prostitution. Added to this, rather than clearing the way, his aseptic analysis of the concurrences between *Art nègre* and modern art, contribute to leaving the "negro problem" open. We shall deal with this difficult but still current debate in Chapter 5 when we tackle the problem of "African art" in the avant-garde.

Picasso on the Couch

The majority of analyses on *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* from a biographical point of view seem to have been done from a pressing need to lie Picasso down on the couch. And not all, but a majority, are heirs to the "Steinberg effect". There is even an antecedent in the 40s entitled "Picasso. A Psychoanalytic Study" (Schneider 1947-48, 81–95). It is commendable because it does go further than the formalism that held sway at the time with regard to the specific interpretation of the work. The author's departure point is Picasso's famous negation that is generally summarised in the motto "I do not seek, I find". Schneider, the author of this article, places *Les Demoiselles* in the painter's "negro period", as was customary at that time and stated that it was rumoured Picasso was using hashish to get into a "primitive mood". He centres his attention on the pointed belly of one of the young women in the painting and the disfigured faces of the two on the right. He is of the opinion that the former suggested a phallic symbol and that the latter faces referred to primitive voodoo or witchcraft masks, but also of a constant assault on femininity and a way of negating tenderness. In this way he alludes to the matter of motherhood that will occur again in the psychoanalytic studies of the work and considers that the still life is a way to counteract the primitive impulse to suckle at a mother's breast, a scene befitting of cannibals.

In the future the brutality of the work will be analysed by adding more psychoanalytic ingredients. This is especially the case of the "Medusa effect", defended by Bois who associates the paralysing gaze of *Les Demoiselles* with the fear of castration and the rejection of the Renaissance's unique perspective. In other words the intense stare that fixes explicitly on the spectator. In its turn all this will be linked to another of the Freudian topics, killing the father or rather, destroying representative conventions of the past. Bois (2001, 44) asks "can we not suppose that, in *Les Demoiselles*, Picasso was saying aloud what they [his painter colleagues] did not even dare to think themselves, namely, 'if we are brave to kill the father (tradition, the law) symbolically, this is what we will get; this thing so monumentally terrifying in both for its freedom and its constraint.' Not that Picasso would have been the first to defy tradition, but he might have been the first to perceive the libidinal foundation of such a combat."

For her part, Mathews Gedo in "Art as Exorcism: Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon*" of 1980 (72 and foll.) carries out a more detailed psychoanalysis than she would make later on in her book *Picasso. Art as Autobiography*. Her study is diametrically opposed to Rosalind Krauss's famous article "In the name of Picasso" and starts with the premise that it is only possible to reveal the most important secrets of this work through a biographical reading. Her hypothesis is that Pi-

casso concealed, or rather "actively sabotaged all the attempts to reconstruct the exact story of the canvas," not because he was irritated by the discussions on his sources as Pierre Daix had argued but because of a biographical reason. He concealed to preclude revealing things about himself that he preferred to keep secret. Thus the painting will continue, as did many others by the painter, on an autobiographical course. In the spotlight of the psychoanalytical focus in general and that of Mathews Gedo in particular, Picasso conducted himself with respect to this work as the "the great concealer."

Mathews Gedo suggests that the figures of the sailor and the doctor that appear in the preparatory sketches are different facets of Picasso's character (as Barr had speculated and Rubin had defended). She believes that these two figures and also that of the demoiselle, to be different steps in the metamorphosis of Picasso's self portrait. Twenty years after Mathews Gedo's text (2001, 59–65), in an article entitled *Portrait de Picasso en Demoiselle*, Lydie Pearl again proposes a similar hypothesis, even affirming that the truly shocking at the time was, as had traditionally been upheld, neither the representation of a brothel, nor the presence of African masks. It was the transexual and transgender mutation that could be seen in its creation process. Beneath the rejection of aesthetic codes, an even more violent disavowal can be found; the definition of genders and sexes for which Picasso had revisited his childhood when sexual and identity definition takes place according to conventional codification.

But let us return to Mathews Gedo in the examination of various drawings and sketches by Picasso where the author came to the conclusion that he would always have used the theme of prostitution as a way of rebelling against the order of the fathers. The paintings resulting from Picasso's visit to the Saint Lazare prison hospital for prostitutes suffering venereal diseases suggest that he worried about an unresolved problem of dependence on his mother. There is something similar in his self-portraits as a sailor and medical student.

Mathews Gedo's main theory is that Picasso would have used the painting to explore his ambivalent feelings towards women: his mother (*Les Demoiselles* would be a vision of his mother as an irrational and savage being) or other feminine figures of carers and even that of his partner at the time, Fernande Olivier, identified with a prostitute, reveals hostility and resentment about her past as an artists' model. This is what provokes a growing violence in the painting, an invasion of arousal and anger. The author continues to confirm that clinical experience reveals it would appear men who maintain relations with troubled or "severely disturbed" women as Picasso did, had a father, or particularly a mother, who was disturbed (Mathews Gedo 1980, 79).

It is possible to detect that in her icono-psychological analyses, Mathews Gedo overturns the vision of *Les Demoiselles* as a work possessing a universal content. The author reaches the conclusion that the "truth" revealed by Picasso is not universal but rather the story of the genesis and development of his misogyny and his identifying with a mother he perceives as savage or barbaric. The demoiselles and their masks would have been the powerful and magic tools with which the painter hoped to protect himself and maintain his inde-

pendence from his mother. If he had revealed his sources the effigies of the *Demoiselles* would have lost their secret power to control the evil feminine spirits. The masked "damsels" conceal the persona of the artist shaman, destroying his childhood world and triumphing over his private female demons. For this reason *Les Demoiselles* is not simply autobiographical art. It is painting as exorcism (Mathews Gedo 1980, 81).

In my opinion, the problem of certain psychoanalytic interpretations of art works is precisely the risk of overstating the artistic analysis and focusing too much on personal questions about the artist, unearthing the possible universal content or even concluding by revealing in chapter and verse the psychology of the artist at the cost of distancing from the work itself. Mathews Gedo does manage to bring to light several intimate details of Picasso's relation with women and even with friends like Max Jacob. Her psycho-iconological approach gives the impression of wishing to "take photos or make carbon copies of the subconscious" with all the betrayals this implies (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 19).

Certainly Lydie Pearl's analysis, although beginning with proposals similar to Mathews Gedo, tends to put the emphasis on the problem of the separation of the sexes. She contends that *Les Demoiselles* offers us a pictorial equivalent of sensations that might be produced by the unsuppressed ghost of a transgression of basic sexual prohibitions of a "cultural order" (Pearl 2001, 64) and considers that there is something more universal, or less private, than Mathews Gedo's analysis allows for. Pearl maintains that if the work is totally contemporary it is because the deconstruction-reconstruction of the bodies made by Picasso allowed him to account for the divisive violence of a century in which the identities of man and woman began to be obscured. For its emphasis of gender matters this theory bears a certain relation to some of those of the feminist gaze of the moment and that we shall discuss later.

In any case it is worth noting that the idea of woman as the enemy, arrived at by both the psychoanalytic and the feminist analyses, is called into question by other women historians. For example, while leaving aside the questions of the private obsessions Picasso was expressing in the painting, Elizabeth Cowling's revolutionary proposal consisted in regenerating contemporary art through brutality, dissonance and fear. At the moment in time that *Les Demoiselles* was being painted, beauty, and particularly the beauty of the eroticized female nude, had become a falsehood. In 1945 Picasso said that art was not made for decorating apartments but as an offensive and defensive weapon against the enemy. And, according to Cowling (2002, 179) that was also true for *Les Demoiselles*. When Picasso made this statement the enemy he had in mind was fascism and he was using women to express anxiety, fury and resistance during the German occupation. No, women were not the enemy either in 1907. It would be preferable to consider them an *alter ego*.

Among the psychobiographic interpretations of *Les Demoiselles*, lead by that of Rubin, mention must be made of Rosalind Krauss's celebrated essay "In the Name of Picasso" attacking art history based on the famous name. This was an authentic indictment against the biographical comprehension of the work that

she wrote after attending a lecture by Rubin about Picasso in the Baltimore Museum of Art in 1980. Rubin maintained that the changes of style in Picasso's work at the end of the 1920s resulted from his relations with his lovers at that time, Olga Khokhlova and Marie Thérèse Walter, crucial arguments in the 1996 exhibition and catalogue *Picasso and Portraiture: Transformation and Representation* (edited by the MoMA, New York). The article by Krauss was published in issue 16 of the periodical *October* in the spring of 1981 and analyses explicitly this volte face of Rubin on the history of biographical art; a volte face that could be considered extraordinary, coming as it did from one of the most influential formalist critics or art historian of his generation. Rosalind Krauss (1981, 22) attacks the biographical theories, particularly when applied to someone like Picasso, one of the creators of collage because it implies something of a betrayal of the Cubist language as signic language because "it strips each sign of its special modality of meaning: its capacity to represent the conditions of representation." This leads to a massive erroneous interpretation of the signification process and reduces the visual sign to an ostentatious list of proper names. We shall return to this matter, crucial for a true understanding of the critical discourse of Modernism, in the next chapter.

Cultural Contexts: the Fabulous Encounter of Malaga and Cubism

As we have mentioned before, another approach, in parallel to the psychoanalytic and psychological approaches had been unfolding that, while retaining Picasso's personal circumstances, engaged in a study of the cultural context that produced *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*. In a book entitled *A Sum of Destructions. Picasso Cultures & the Creation of Cubism* (2001) the American author Natasha Staller offers a perfect example of this contextualist type of critique. Her intention was the study of what she called "the cultures of Picasso" which in her opinion, were decisive in the configuration of Cubism: the popular culture of Malaga, Corunna, Barcelona and Paris at the beginning of the 20th century.

Her book is the result of an intense investigation into these popular cultures between the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, which undoubtedly the author had studied in detail and with which she was perfectly familiar. It was therefore surprising that a book about Cubism should open with the reproduction of religious images (known in Spain simply as *imágenes*, images) of Málaga. Staller commences with the idea that the influence of this city, often underestimated, was fundamental in the invention of Cubism because it held Picasso's elementary attitudes towards nature and tradition and also his ideas about the meaning and power of images. It was a whole mental and mythical universe of images that the painter would remember and later transform, thanks to his powerful imagination. Although this hypothesis is not entirely unreasonable, the examples offered by Staller may lack conviction and her arguments, in our opinion, do sometimes appear to lose coherence. I will explain my reasons for stating this.

The first chapter of Staller's book presents different aspects of the history and mentality of Malaga at the end of the 19th century. One of these is the series of

catastrophes that desolated the city (phylloxera, earthquakes, epidemics etc.) that, according to the author, would have led to the general belief that nature is the source of all types of calamities and is not a benefactor. On this subject, as with the rest of matters relating to the history of Malaga in the 19th century, Staller made use of the contributions of the specialist scholars of the time. Her sources appear to be impeccable but one cannot say the same of the consequences she extracted from them. In her opinion there is a very direct cause and effect relation between this consideration of nature as the enemy, typical of the Malaga mentality of the 19th century, and the destruction of the mimesis inherent in Picasso's Cubism. To wit, Picasso would be a part of this mentality and this would lead him to dispense with the mimetic or naturalist character of painting. The problem with Staller's argument is that, truthfully, this destruction of the mimesis is also a characteristic of Braque, the other founding father of Cubism whose mentality, however, was not even remotely similar. And, on the other hand, the explanation of the reason for this belief driving Picasso (a painter who in fact left Malaga shortly forever) to forsake naturalism, is left in the air. Furthermore this had not the least effect on the rest of Malaga painters who remained unshakeable in this naturalism, firmly rooted in this city that supposedly mistrusted nature so heartily.

It is surprising, in any case, that there is not a single reference in this book to the text by Worringer, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* which, at the start of the 20th century upheld the thesis that cultures in harmony with nature produce naturalist art while cultures that for whatever reason fear and distrust nature (including primitive and contemporary ones) tend towards abstraction. Staller could have supported her theory by basing it on Worringer, as long as the rupture of the mimesis had been a generalised phenomenon in painting in Malaga at that time and not isolated in one individual called Picasso.

In this first chapter Staller also tackles the worship of religious images, superstitions and bull fighting as fundamental elements in the culture of Malaga during Picasso's childhood. Again, although the author has used excellent sources to explain the function and meaning of the religious images, her conclusions on the use of these images, specifically during the episodes of the burning of churches and works of sacred art during the Spanish Civil War, are somewhat outlandish. She explains, repeatedly, that the people who adored these images and carried them in procession through the streets were also those who mutilated or destroyed them in a reaction to the alliance between the Catholic Church and Fascism. She does not, however, explain that in that period those who processed with the images were part of the proletariat and did so paid by the Malaga bourgeoisie and not from any sense of devotion. On this particular point Staller ignores the fact that agnosticism or atheism had taken root in Spain some time before and did not appear, as one might deduce from her words, overnight as a result of the birth of Fascism. The anti-clerical mindset began prior to Fascism and was opposed to the power that the Catholic church exercised over the population before the Civil war broke out. In any event there is not sufficient evidence for Picasso building his idea of the artistic image and its power from these reli-

gious images as Staller infers. Nor is it possible to support the argument that, had he witnessed the burnings, he could be considered one of those who, according to Staller, had passed spontaneously from their adoration to their destruction.

Nevertheless, the problem with *A Sum of Destructions* would not be so much this interpretation of the facts. It would be that the author attributes the painter, mechanically and repeatedly, with a mentality that prevailed in Spanish cities during the change of centuries. The problem is the determinism that guides her arguments: the automatic step in a supposedly general atmosphere, to the beliefs, ideology and attitudes of an individual, as if one forcibly inferred the other. Perhaps the author is asking too much of the readers: she asks that they firmly believe in the existence and functioning of a collective mentality characteristic of a specific time and place and that they believe this mentality is imprinted indelibly on individuals. At the same time she would have the reader believe that some of these individuals are "geniuses" who transform this legacy in masterpieces; that thanks to their innate character of genius, they convert popular culture into avant-garde culture, out of the blue. In fact, she demands that the reader believe as much in the power and singularity of the groups as in that of the individuals.

Anthropological determinism again becomes the basis of the reasoning applied to the particular examination of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*. Staller maintains that in the work Picasso musters Africa and the Black Catalonian *Moreneta* Madonna and Iberian warriors (naked like Picasso in Bateau Lavoir, *sic*.) and the Virgin of Victory (patron of Malaga), and the crescent moon of the Immaculate Conception or of the Turks, and the Moors and the bleeding Christs (Staller 2001, 324 and foll.). And at this point of her study Staller establishes somewhat superficial affinities and relations that, had they been the fruits of exercising a surrealistic psychic automatism, would have been an achievement but that as a logical way to carry out historical research are not entirely accurate. The *omnium gatherum*, the hotchpotch of data that the researcher absorbed when beginning to work on deciphering the Spanish cultures Picasso had lived in becomes unreal; as if Staller were one of those historians who could not leave out any of the information gathered and had insisted on using every bit, by hook or by crook.

With respect to the African element, that contemporary critics consider crucial in the examination of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, Staller assures us that Chapter 7 of her book addresses "for the first time" the analysis of the legacy of a vision of Malaga's history, saturated with holy wars that glorified the Reconquest of Andalusia from the Moors and rested on the belief that the defeat of the Moors from Africa was what made Spain modern. In short, it was decisive for its passage from the Middle Ages to modernity. Staller appears to be convinced that Picasso's sense of modernity was conditioned by this belief. She reasons that this vision of history is one of the cornerstones of *Les Demoiselles* and was even the catalyst, to a large extent, of the first *papiers collés*. Thus, the idea of Africa that Picasso might have had when he visited the Trocadero Museum in 1907 depended in great measure on this binomial modernity/not Moorish and identifying the African element with the Moor. According to this, in Spain at the end of the 19th and start of the

20th centuries the word *moro*, Moor or Moorish, was used indiscriminately to mean African, Berber, Turk, Mahomedan. This also raises the issue of the popular rituals of "Moros and Christians," the Catalonian Black *Moreneta* Madonna, the sketches of Arabs drawn by Picasso himself or the events where the Universal Expo of 1900 and the ethnographic Trocadero Museum connected or confounded the Arabic and its material culture with the rest of Africa.

Staller even maintains that the painter associated what he saw in the museum (Trocadero) with his childhood memories of "powerful tormented Christ, venerated through incense; and of *imágenes* being carried in procession through the streets at night, illuminated by candles, sooty candles, carried by the *penitentes*" (Staller 2001, 335). Other *penitentes* will follow bleeding from the marks of their flagellations. She offers this hypothesis but never supports this with any proof.

All in all, for Staller (2001, 336) *Les Demoiselles* are "Picasso's personal *reconquista*" of the magic properties of art. Although he would have dealt with the idea of modernity "unlike his forebears, who saw the *pueblo africano* as the infidel Other, who could survive only by defeat and subjugation, Picasso recognised in the magical resonance of Africa's images, a kindred spirit to the awesome images of his childhood."

The Spanish spectator familiar with the Holy Week would be justified in asking, why? To what did the author owe these conclusions? I find it hard to believe that when this spectator sees African masks, he is thinking of bleeding Christs or processions. Nevertheless, the idea of mixing magic, exorcism and African masks with the beliefs of Spanish Catholicism and its mysticism appears to be something deep-rooted in the American academic milieu. Elizabeth Cowling for whom witchcraft substitutes Spanish mysticism in *Les Demoiselles* also states this. She states that for Picasso, a superstitious ex-Catholic, the religious fervor of El Greco differs little from the spirit worship that gave rise to the magic masks and the sculptures found in the museum. A fusion of Christian apocalypse and dark exorcism could have been more appropriate (Cowling 2002, 177). I fear that in certain American academic circles the features of the "other" will turn out to be interchangeable in too precipitous a manner. And thus, in this type of association, topics on cultures of the African continent are being mixed with Spanish stereotypes that suggest the hackneyed mysticism and other elements of the "darkest Spain." This tendency to create an "other" homogeneity is not exclusively American and can be found in Eurocentric criticism and even in some cases Spanish historiography and critique.

But returning to the approaches used to analyse the history of art and its ideological values and convictions, let us concentrate on those that are the basis of studies similar to those of Natasha Staller. The author offers this statement of principles at the beginning of her study: "[this book] is resolutely historical at a moment when the dominant way of understanding Cubism is with a-historical theory. It insists on the importance of individual choice and individual transformations, at a time when many still believe in the so-called death of the author […]. I still believe that individuals matter. History matters. Culture matters" (Staller 2001, xv).

It is indeed a statement of methodological principles and an explicit stand taken against the post-structuralists' theses and more precisely those of the *New History of Art*. But, in the first place, Staller's work is not preaching in the desert as this declaration would have us believe. It is inserted in a context of preference for the historical study of Cubism that David Cottington or Patricia Leighten have been making for years, (with greater distinction, if I may be permitted to say). Secondly, studies of history of art made with the idea of the fictionality of the author (using the popular metaphor of the author's death or disappearance) are still one of historians' options, it is true today. But it is not the only one, and I would venture to say that it is not even the preferred at the beginning of the 21st century when the study of artists' biographies and their subjectivity once again engages the greater interest of art historians. One has only to notice the proliferation of this type of perspective among specialists devoted to the work of Picasso and among art history students. I fear that contrary to Staller's opinion, the theses presented by Rosalind Krauss in "In the name of Picasso", though important at the time of publication for renewing the discipline of art history, are no longer shared by many historians and even less so by institutional hegemonic art history to which, without doubt we could consign Staller's own approach. At least in the Spanish academic context, Staller's complaints against the renovating methods of the discipline are meaningless.

Lastly, individuals mattering seems to be something rooted in American culture and, like everything else, in the majority of present-day studies. However, the importance that Staller concedes to the individual is incompatible with her study of the collective culture of the places she mentions, simply because she mechanically applies the ideas and dominant feelings of the cultures to Picasso the individual. She gives no indication of how the painter might receive these ideas and, more importantly, how he processed them. Staller wants us to believe that Picasso lived religion, bull fighting, Holy Week, prejudice about Africa or feelings about nature in the same way as the general Malaga public. This means that, to start with there must be belief in the certain essence of this body, of "the citizens of Malaga" should such a body exist, without the least consideration of ideological, cultural or class differences that existed in these societies at the end of the 19th century. Precisely the differences that erupted at least during the Civil War without doubt characterised the way in which the different social groups received and processed this general state of mind or the popular culture of the time. Did Staller really believe that Picasso would have lived through the episodes of iconoclasm in the city in the same way as convinced believers or the fearful superstitious? The concept of local identity is very powerful and perhaps in Staller's theories it sweeps aside the influence of other factors (social, economic, ideologic or gender) that should have unquestionably represented an important role in the Spanish cultures experienced by Picasso before he reached Paris of the avant-garde for ever.

No matter how much the theory of the author's death infuriates Natasha Staller, she has done nothing more than invent a new "author's function." Her author is someone who, in the period between the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, devoured the (popular) cultures of Malaga, Corunna, Barcelo-

na and Paris just like anyone else who had lived at this time immersed in them. However Staller's historic account does not appear to have played any role in the cultural or "economic capital" nor the *habitus* and even less in the artist's own individuality and despite assimilating all this as any other component of these cultures would have done, it secretes the digested in only one way, as only a "genius" could have done. There is a curious dissymmetry between how the product of this cultural digestion is ingested and disgorged.

In sum, Staller's proposal to draw the portrait of Picasso's cultures before Cubism is a magnificent idea. Her research into it appears to have been done correctly. Its results, however, leave something to be desired. What really needs to be investigated is the deep relation, and not just the superficial affinity, that links all this with Picasso and Cubism by studying these relations that go further and are more plausible than, for example the simply epidermic coincidences between the clay figures of Malaga and the *collage*, the most revolutionary invention of art in the 20th century. While the small clay figures known locally as "barros" include other elements such as a metal guitar or fabric with fringes or tassels and for this they are fundamental for a greater invention of Cubism, according to Staller, the collage cannot but be interpreted as a mere coincidence unless the deep reasons on which the relation rests is explained. This is something that the author omits to do, merely mentioning that Picasso must have known these little figures. Then, given the importance conceded by Staller to the religious images, these figures must have played a more important role with their combination of both the actual and the modeled. If one decides to establish this type of analogy, one could reflect on the religious origin of the rope used as a frame for *Still Life with Chair Caning, 1912,* Picasso's first collage, something that could appear unfounded and unwarranted. Ultimately perhaps the author's passion for explaining the influence of popular culture in Cubism (and even the importance that is attributed now to this culture in the birth of avant-garde) led to an extra-limitation in establishing elective affinities. Nonetheless some elements of her proposal are suggestive and valid as departure points for the reexamination of Cubism.

Roger Caillois begins his *Méduse et Cie* (1960, 9) with these words: "The progress of knowledge consists, on the one hand in discarding the superficial analogies and discovering the deep kinship, perhaps less visible but more important and meaningful." One might ask oneself if Staller's work is about deep kinships or superficial analogies. Perhaps it would be the former but generally her arguments only appear to account for the latter.

In general all the psychobiographical trends can leave the aftertaste of a limitation, capable of raising suspicions about its genuine historical-artistic importance. Reducing history of art or the senses of artistic creation to the vicissitudes of the life and personality of the author, or in this last case, to a unique, extraordinary and personal way of living certain historic circumstances, infers a risk of impoverishing the very historic-artistic discourse even of art itself. In 1928, Carl Einstein in his book on 20th century art had already reproached some historians who were tempted to isolate Picasso's work from the rest, something that

had been done by a certain historiographical trend for decades: "It is an error to consider Picasso as an isolated apparition instead of having him as a necessary part of a wider trend. It is impossible to examine and judge his paintings individually and aesthetically; nor is it reasonable to build a specific and extemporaneous case on his person. This would only at best serve to disclose the narrow vision of the proposer; continuing like this only serves to diminish the spiritual relevance of his work. Thanks to the idiotic admiration it is subjected to, the art only becomes a hindrance, in a reactionary recourse" (Einstein 2013, 8). The psychobiographic historiography always runs the risk of falling into hagiography.

Nevertheless, the points of view garbed in the new art history's own convictions as well as a censorious attitude, or at least caution before the extra-limitations of the veneration of proper names, will conclude by spurring the direction of discourse about Picasso and modern art in other directions ways as we shall see below.

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CHAPTER 5

"We are all Demoiselles d'Avignon" or the Breaching of the Dominant Gaze

As we have seen, the consequences of Steinberg and the evolution of art history and critique from the 1960s were characterised by the fragmentation of the discourse on modern art. In the presence of these approaches from the 80s, those affiliated to the *New History of Art,* especially those, who in the 21st century belonged to the *Global History of Art*, presently active, took up positions.

The *New History of Art* label (close to the proposals that have also been called social, radical or critical history of art) began to be regularly used from 1982 as Jonathan Harris explains. This referred to a history at odds with the hegemonic approaches of formalism and iconology, and committed to semiotic, Marxist, feminist and psychoanalytic points of view. The new art historians, opposed to the iconological and formalism methodologies they considered passive, uncritical or commonplace, had been offering proposals, in principle linked to left-wing political activism. The routine procedures of an art history as traditional as it was powerful, in the international academic sphere, centred on monographs of prominent male artists—the *Great Male Creative Artist-Genius*—was about to suffer the thrashing by a posture critical of the glorification of the proper name (masculine), his biography or his insight; a posture critical of the course of an iconological discourse that, while born out of the brilliance of its pioneers, in the hands of some of its less wise followers, was falling into an anodyne vacuity. The frames of reference of this new art history, centred on social, political, feminist or psychoanaliytic questions, moved the centre of gravity of the author or creator to the spectator; from the producer to the recipient, as artistic practice had been doing at least since the historic avant-gardes.

In this sense, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* can be seen exactly as an authentic methodological laboratory, a sort of privileged battle field of these tussles be-

Maite Méndez Baiges, University of Malaga, Spain, mendez@uma.es, 0000-0002-0762-7004

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tween the institutionally dominant art history and the new art histories. As we have seen, the interpretations generated about this work, elevated to the category of a canon of Modernism, have converted it in an ideal case study of the debates taking place in the heart of the art history discipline.

We must remember that, as Jonathan Harris, or female historians like Griselda Pollock explained, institutional or traditional art history has a code of subjects that are well-worth studying. And, as a result, the legitimate ways of studying them and a series of forms and contexts that are able to maintain this code should also be considered. In fact, one of the ways in which the discipline has been renewed since 1970 has been the inclusion in the teaching, as well as in research, of objects of study that will not be recognised within the canon or code. We shall have the opportunity of seeing examples of the methodological propositions of this New Art History from the feminist and post-colonialist theories applied to *Les Demoiselles*. This perspective has been extended recently by the addition of the *Global History of Art*, created from the concept of globalisation, coined at the end of the 20th century. It departs from the intense interconnection of the world and is concerned about the relations, connections, transfers, exchanges and appropriations between the different cultures on the planet. On the strength of their theses, the encounter between *Art nègre* and Modernism constitutes one of the favoured objects of study.

Before beginning the examination of the new gazers who emerged in the 1980s it will be helpful to consider the convergence of Steinberg's proposals and certain premises of the semiotic theory, or more in general, that of post-structuralism. Even before Steinberg, the problematics of this relation between art and spectator were being discussed; a relation that had up till then always seemed neutral and natural, and not in the least determined by the myriad constraints between the work and the spectator.

From this perspective, and confronting the traditional points of view, the gender, race, social position, *habitus* or cultural endowment of the spectator are considered constraints that will determine different readings and interpretations of works of art. Even on the sidelines of semiotics, Erwin Panofsky and the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu had made crucial contributions on the impossible existence of a neutral or naive spectator, capable of seeing or judging a work of art without his cultural baggage affecting his appreciation and his sociocultural conditioning affecting his taste. From the semiotic perspective, Cubism was perceived as launching an auto reflexive conscience on the systems of meaning. That is to say, on the codes and languages used by different visual representations and that these codes or languages are linked with the knowledge, social class and gender of the spectator in question. It is clear that this perspective has much to say about a painting such as *Les Demoiselles* where the protagonists' gaze inevitably involves the spectator.

"Nothing for women in this Game", the Feminist Perspective

If we are to believe Steinberg's hypothesis on the crucial role played by the spectator of *Les Demoiselles*, who we must presume to be masculine and hetero-

sexual since he is the client of a brothel that offers female merchandise, many questions as to how gender affects the gazes directed at this canvas will necessarily arise. In fact there is another photograph of the board of the MoMA before the painting that we saw in the introduction. In it all the board members who we saw looking at the painting, have turned their backs and are posing for the cameras. However, the lady who before turned her back on the *Demoiselles*, has now turned towards them with a furtive glance of, perhaps, complicity. I would like to reveal her name: it is Mrs. John Sheppard. What was Mr. John Sheppard's wife seeing and thinking as she gazed at *Les Demoiselles*? This image suggests the need to ask what happens when the person looking at the painting is a heterosexual woman. Is her gaze different to that of the male spectator? And if it is, in what way does it differ? Is it plausible and timely to propose a reading of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* from a feminine standpoint? And is it appropriate to offer a feminist interpretation? For example, what kind of relation does a heterosexual female spectator establish with a painting like this, brimming with prostitutes and therefore rendered extremely sexual? Feminist critics, especially Carol Duncan, Anna Chave and Tamar Garb have tried to answer this type of question. Tamar Garb (2001) in particular, tackles the study of Gertrude Stein's reactions. She was the first well-known woman spectator to see the painting and, apparently, she did find it particularly distasteful; a reaction in contrast to that of her male colleagues.

The feminist critique implicitly proposed the exclusion of the woman in a painting full of women. Or to be precise, the history of Modernism's masterpiece had never taken into account the feminine point of view. There is growing suspicion that women have always been redundant in this type of game. "Nothing for women in this game" could be the feminist critique's watchword.

We must frame these questions within the epistemological renewal of the history of art discipline that came into being in the 70s and 80s, in the heat of which the feminist position, characteristic of gender studies, would force its way into the historical-artistic narratives. Feminist art historians led from the premise that history is always created from a particular stand point, using a situated knowledge in a precise cultural, political, ideological, gender and racial context. Thus, they encouraged legitimacy of the subjective, a form of "fixed awareness" and would bring to light, or rather, would decry the fundamental negativity of the script for figurative painting in the West for women (as part of the structural sexism of institutional art). They also recognised that the supposed avant-garde rupture of the first decades of the 20th century only served to perpetuate this masculine domination. We are now on course towards a head-on collision between Feminism and Modernism, based on the argument that the latter is a biased narrative built on masculinist and patriarchal foundations. In the context of this enmity, one of the most evident oppositions will be the clash between the feminist and gender theses with an art history that revolved around the preeminence of painting over other types of artistic productions (collage, assemblage, photography, design etc.), and the white man as the true culprit of these artistic products by the uncritical assumption of the idea of a "genius". Thus the circum-

stances of the victim of this narrative, the woman artist, would be revealed: the woman artist invariably relegated to subaltern, to a subordinate role, when not totally invisible. And all this, despite the vanguard supposedly no longer exalting the figure of the genius nor underestimating applied arts in favour of fine arts, a fact that should have favoured the development of a historiography disposed towards the role of women vanguard artists.

Before presenting the specific feminist point of view on *Les Demoiselles*, formulated by Chave, we must pause and consider Carol Duncan's articles that openly express this feminist complaint, motivated by the exclusion of the woman as a subject from the discourse on modernist or vanguard art. We are referring especially to the explicity titled article "The MoMA's Hot Mamas", writtten in 1989 (171–78), in which we are witness to the start of the vanguard feminist criticism through the confirmation of history as a narrative of exclusion, told by the white heterosexual male descendent of Europeans for an audience who answers to this same description. The article, that begins by examining the position occupied by the woman in the temple to modern art that is the Museum of Modern Art in New York, warns that although, in theory, museums are public spaces devoted to the spiritual formation of their visitors, in practice they are prestigious and powerful ideological machines that affect, among other things, questions of gender identity. The authority exercised during decades by the MoMA cannot and should not be underestimated when the moment comes to establish the wording of the discourse on 20th century art.

Duncan's text starts by asking this question. How is it possible to reconcile the articulation of a lineal and formalist history of modern art defended and exhibited by the MoMA in 1989[1] with the abundant presence of female figures, especially nudes, flaunted by this same art? In keeping with this historical narrative one would imagine that modern art had incurred in the gradual rejection of the iconic in favour of acquiring the purity of artistic language. We could also put Duncan's question in a different way: the prevailing narrative of Modernism, clearly summarised by Clement Greenberg in "Modernist Painting", a teleological narrative that has as its objective the purification of the arts of all heteronomous elements, does not appear to leave much leeway for the presence of any feminine themes. Or we could say, the articulation and preservation by the MoMA of the orthodox narrative of Modernism appears in principle to be in disaccord with themes such as naked women. Furthermore, portraits of women with a name do not appear. Generic anonymous women do appear, identified only by their social origins, from the lower classes since the majority are prostitutes or models. For this reason, Carol Duncan asks, with barely feigned sur-

[1] We should also take note that it continued to do so in the 21st century despite a "proposed amendment" that took shape in a spectacular remodelling by Yoshio Taniguchi and a profound museographic reorganisation at the beginning of the century. I have written about this (Méndez Baiges 2006), and there is also an article by López Cuenca (2005). In 2019, a new remodelling of the building and the installation of the collection granted entrance to women and artists from non-western nations.

prise: Why then did art history render no accounts of this massive presence of women in vanguard works, of this intense preoccupation with socially and sexually available female bodies? What have naked bodies and prostitution to do with the relinquishing of their representation by modern art? And why is this iconography identified with the greatest possible of artistic ambitions? Clearly feminist criticism consisted, above all, of asking a handful of apparently pertinent questions. And although asking suitable questions at the appropriate moment is a way to provoke the transformation of our historic narratives, Duncan did not restrict herself to this. As one might imagine she was ready with the answers.

The explanation stems from the fact that the recurring images of sexualised female bodies are a way of masculinising the museum, thus organising it around the fears, fantasies and desires of men. And it implies that the spiritual transcendence, on the one hand and the obsession with the sexualised female body, on the other, in reality constitute a whole. Often the images of women in modern art speak of masculine apprehension as they almost always have a dangerous aspect, a potential castrator and devourer. Duncan came to consider the MoMA's collection of monstrous, threatening women as fabulous; among them naturally, apart from De Kooning's *Women*, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, one of the backbones of this collection, tells the hegemonic story of Modernism.

But this still does not explain the supposed contradiction existing between the impulse towards abstraction, characteristic of vanguard art, and the huge number of female nudes in this art. Duncan is of the opinion that there is a perfect compatibility between rejection of the representation and the desire to flee from the spiritual image of the woman and her earthly domination, apparently rooted in childhood notions about the mother. The threatening women would be seeking justification for the spiritual or mental flight; they are darkness and long to escape towards the light. Only the representation of Woman is necessary. As an artist her presence would distort the story (the author also alleges this to explain why so few works of women artists are exhibited in the MoMA and its ilk). In fact there are representations of men but while the women appear represented as sexually available bodies, men are portrayed as physically and mentally active beings, shaping the world and pondering its meaning. Both the *Demoiselles* and De Kooning's *Women* are essential linchpins in the exhibition because they efficiently serve to keep the museum a masculine enclave.

Duncan concludes her article stating that *Les Demoiselles* was conceived as an ambitious declaration of the significance of the woman. Thus, finally the mystery that Picasso reveals about women is a lesson in art history. The women in the painting are not only present-day prostitutes: they go back to an old and primitive past. So Picasso would be using art history to support the following theory. "The awesome goddess, the terrible witch and the lewd whore are but single facets of a many-sided creature, in turn threatening and seductive, imposing and self abasing, dominating and powerless—and always the psychic property of the male imagination" (Duncan 1989, 76). This also implies that authentic art is always the exclusive property of the macho. And the museum installation amplifies all this. In its final state the painting bestows on men and women alike

the privileged status of the male spectator, although only the men may receive the impact of its revelation. Women are allowed to observe from a distance but they may not enter the arena of high culture. *Nothing for women in this game*, as we said earlier. The museum installation underlines the fact that "true art" has always been an exclusively masculine dominion.

"MoMA's Hot Mamas" gave rise to an interesting correspondence between the author and Leo Steinberg, compiled by *Art Journal* in 1990, the year Duncan published the article. The debate between the two authors of the epistolary exchanges catches our attention because we are frontline witnesses to one of the most representative chapters in the breaching of the universalist discourse on modern art.

Carol Duncan is of the opinion that, according to the assumptions of "The Philosophic Brothel" by Steinberg, women would not be anatomically prepared to experience the painting. Steinberg regrets her opinion, to which Carol Duncan replies that, in her opinion, it is a generalised fact that male critics try to conceal the questions of gender that certain masterpieces like *Les Demoiselles* contain. And she adds that Steinberg's article was groundbreaking precisely because it brought to light in great detail the phallocentrism of the work, albeit in an unscientific and somewhat unconscious way. If Steinberg reproached Duncan for being unable to imagine herself as a man when she viewed *Les Demoiselles* (as he is able to imagine himself living the imaginary life of a millionaire) Duncan in her turn asked Steinberg to make another effort: "to ponder on what was obscene and degrading about these 'Demoiselles' that could repel and irritate a woman".

Apart from the clash of the feminist gaze with an opposing point of view, the universality of the gaze lies beneath the dispute between Duncan and Steinberg. At the time of their correspondence and as a result of the semiotic studies and because of post-structuralism in general, this universality had been challenged. In *Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari (2004, 8) expressed this idea, associated with that of the rhizome, in the following manner:

> A rhizome would ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power and circumstances relative to arts, sciences, and social struggles [...] there is no language in itself, nor are there any linguistic universals, only a throng of dialects, *patois*, slangs, and specialized languages. There is no ideal speaking-listener, any more than there is a homogenous linguistic community. Language is, in Weinreich's words 'an essentially heterogeneous reality'. There is no mother tongue, only a power by a dominant language within a political multiplicity.

Both in her article and in the correspondence referred to, Duncan defends, tooth and nail, the nonexistence of one unique gaze on a work of art and the irremediable conditioning of social, economic, political, historical, ethnic, gender and *habitus* indicators. There is no ideal spectator-viewer who will capture the same message from the *Demoiselles,* irrespective of their gender because there is no universal subject speaking in this work. In fact, as paradoxical as it may seem, the "other criteria" considered by Leo Steinberg to alter the interpretation

of this painting in such a revolutionary way, implied in themselves the type of standpoint that interpreters such as the feminist Duncan defended. Feminism is one of the consequences of applying these new criteria, one might say.

The truth is that suspicion about the hardly neutral character of "culture" was not something that was coming into being here and now. It came from afar, as far back as Europe at the beginning of the 20th century, 1911 to be exact, when the sociologist George Simmel argued soundly in "Feminine Culture" that what the West calls just plain "culture" is in fact masculine culture even though it has been clothed with an appearance of neutrality on the subject of genders. Simmel continues:

> It must be confirmed, to start with, that the culture of humanity, even in its purely material content, is not lacking in sex and its objectivity goes no further than a man and a woman. On the other hand our objective culture is, with the exception of very few sectors, predominantly masculine [...] that we believe in a purely "human" culture that does not ask after the man or the woman for the same reason that denies its existence: to the ingenuous identification of "human being" and "man" which, in many languages, have the same term for both concepts. (Simmel 1999, 177).

Furthermore, at the time Duncan was writing, many other institutions were unmasking the idea of the "eternal feminine" as one of the symbolic ways of domination, no less oppressive for being symbolic. This masculine domination is based fundamentally on passing itself off as something natural, practically part of an essential and immutable order. Bourdieu warns that any dominant social group harbours the pretentiousness of universality and objectivity of its own values and ideological assumptions (Bourdieu 1988).

It is precisely this pretentiousness that was being killed at this time and that can been seen in the feminist critique. The need to deconstruct the hegemony of the narrative was one of the driving forces for questioning and substituting these arguments for other discourses based on points of view previously silenced, principally the feminist, closely allied with dominant or subaltern ethnic groups. It is important to understand that this hegemony is the capacity to give the appearance of "natural" or "common sense" to the ideology and values of the dominant class; the idea behind the prevailing historic-artistic narrative. This had been proposed since the 70s by the first feminist art historians like Linda Nochlin, Whitney Chadwick, Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker in their research on women artists and their theoretical proposals on the ways in which the criticism and the newly created feminist historiography should be undertaken. This is how alternative discourses created by the dispossessed, both men and women, were shaped.

Using Carol Duncan's established terms, Anna C. Chave wrote an article on understanding *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* in feminist mode (1994, 597–611). She also began with a skeptical question: Why have art historians converted this insulting image of five bizarre prostitutes, lying in wait for clients, in the decisive example of the current visual regime? Chave starts by warning that in the re-

search by Steinberg, Rosenblum or Max Kozloff, the painting is invariably interpreted as a female attack. In the case of Kozloff, a massacre, a wave of female aggression according to Steinberg or for Rosenblum, an attack of the erotic fluids of the five nudes.

If we return to this crisis of the universalist gaze, evident in Duncan's article, Chave states that all the critics who have taken an interest in *Les Demoiselles* have not only assumed the unquestionable: that the hypothetical spectator is heterosexual and macho. They also decided to consider only the experience of this spectator, as if nobody else had ever gazed on this painting before. Chave condemns these proposals of critics who have stated that *Les Demoiselles* "tell *us* about *our* desires", thus raising male heterosexual desire to the category of universal and naturalising it, as if the painting were a surface especially prepared to receive it.

Thus, we can vouch that *Les Demoiselles* has received sexist, heterosexist, racist and neocolonialist interpretations. This is what Chave proposed demonstrating in her article by articulating an alternative reading that would have room for heterosexual women's points of view. So, the author warns—and it is important to note the use of the first person she adopts here— *I* cannot identify with the observer-client because I am a female, feminist heterosexual viewer. And although I am not a prostitute there are fundamentals that allow me to identify with the protagonists. For instance I share with them the female experience of walking through the streets and being "molested" by strangers who dwell on some aspect of my anatomy and expect me to smile. They may not be mistaking me for a prostitute but the idea that in every woman there is something of a prostitute, and vice versa, clearly lies beneath. Through similar experiences to these, Chave continues, I can look on *Les Demoiselles* with empathy; to me they show, and show up, the patriarchal stereotypes of femininity. I, and all of us women, understand that they feel part of the make-believe, part of the masquerade that they and I know is behind the mask. For women, the price of this strategy is a profound sense of alienation. "The masquerade […] is what women do […] in order to participate in man's desire, but at the cost of giving up (their own)" (to quote Luce Irigaray) (Chave 1994, 599).

The use of the first person in a historic-artistic discourse is essential to understand the change criticism of Modernism is undergoing. It puts into relief the activating of what has been called *situated knowledge,* an epistemological posture that we owe to Donna Haraway and that has extended widely to feminist criticism. According to this she openly recognises that the subject of knowledge and all its determining factors have an irreparable effect on the paths of knowledge. Situated knowledge goes hand in hand, naturally with the breaching of the universal, objective, scientific and neutral subject that is its immediate and logical consequence. It is as if Heisenberg's principle were to be applied to social sciences and humanities. But in addition, in the critical feminist discourse the awareness that all knowledge is situated knowledge will be accompanied by the development of the idea of a rational as well as an organic understanding, through the bodies, one might say. In the art history sphere this knowledge of bodies plays a fundamental role in the interpretations of works of nude female

subjects, as in our case, that produce different results in the bodies of the subject, depending on their gender, sexual orientation or sexual identity.

Anne Chave also expresses the suspicion that *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* lost their status as mothers of modern art, the honour of representing the commencement of Cubism, when the critics began to pay attention to the content and openly recognised that they were prostitutes. Admitting that the mothers of Cubism were a handful of trollops meant that the father was unknown and, far worse, given the *negro* content of the painting, Cubism was converted in a black bastard, since it has always been recognised that in this cradle of Cubism, the women in the painting were dark-skinned.

To sum up, for Chave masculine criticism absorbed "*les demoiselles*" as a species of menacing *femme fatale* that had to be understood as a symptom of men's fear of feminism. At the start of the 20th century the image of this menace challenged the patriarchal order, established the demands of women and, the very presence of "black" in Europe filled the hearts of the Western male with fear and anxiety. Groundless fears Chave confesses that she is amused at the nervous response to this feminine brazenness (of the demoiselles) shown by her art historian colleagues. One of the ways of neutralising the menacing aspect that the female sex represents for many men is to stop concealing it and bring it out to the light. Courbet did this in his *Origine du monde* and we could add, as Picasso himself did so in some of his drawings and paintings. Feminist artist themselves also did this from a different viewpoint in the 70s when they embarked on a "Cunt Art." This entailed giving total visibility to the female genitalia and also the use of this noun, considered totally taboo or at least having degrading connotations, and was done with the intention of neutralising and reversing the negative effects of these connotations. From this moment on, a vaginal iconography began to develop in contemporary art. Instead of keeping the Furies hidden, feminist art proposed exposing the female interior, bringing it out to the light in an attempt to dissolve its potentially menacing character.

It is hard to say if women in general are alarmed by these other women, the *demoiselles*. Probably many women have never felt intimidated or threatened by them and nor do they find them monstrous, ugly, dirty or deformed; on the contrary perhaps women see them more as comrades. Certainly we are more likely than most men to follow the indications proposed in the artistic project *Surviving Picasso* which we shall discuss further on: "We are all *Demoiselles d'Avignon*". I personally find some of the young ladies really beautiful, with their placid coon eyes and tired gazes and also extremely funny in their masks redolent of childhood games where a familiar adult dressed up to make us frightened. Estrella de Diego has even compared them affectionately with fairground oddities like those portrayed by Diane Arbus or the stars of the film *Freaks.*

For the last two decades the neutral critical reviews (in the eyes of the feminists, basically masculine and not neutral) insisted over and over again on considering *Les Demoiselles* as essentially threatening subjects, capable of frightening, ferocious, savage and unhealthy. They have also been associated with the spreading of terrible venereal diseases. And as we have seen earlier in Rubin's

text, their deformations have been linked to syphilis, and a fear of degeneration and regression to barbarism. According to Chave, underlying all this is the fear of a time and circumstances where the hegemony of the male would tumble; a time when their primacy, even their viability and usual ways of perceiving and understanding would begin to appear, not just as something merely dubious but even as something that was no longer welcome.

According to Chave, *Les Demoiselles* represents a danger for the male sex because it shows a group of experienced working women who apparently are not intimidated by nor revere the men that come close; "women whose independence is clearly threatening" (as Daix says). Chave identifies the fear that the *demoiselles* normally cause not only with the fear of a woman and her independence (and thus the crisis of masculinity that was beginning to spread at this moment in Western history) but also of the African, of the "blacks", who in the colonialist imagination are associated normally with a surcharge of savage and uncontrolled sexuality. This is the real threat referred to by the critics, but obviously only as a veiled hint.

And of these two fears, the greater is the fear of the other, of its growing power, autonomy and liberation. Chave believes this is the principle content of the painting. *Les Demoiselles* is a symptom of Western man's fear of losing his hegemony, felt because since the 19th century it is the "realisation and displeasure that the West was being threatened by loss, deprivation and by others" as Hal Foster (1993, 69–102) put it. For this Picasso referred to them as an exorcism; and for this the critics had given them an apotropaic value because it was exorcising this fear of women and by the same token, of blacks. This would explain why Picasso denied this over and over again in a refusal to recognise the presence and power of this threat that was glimpsed on the horizon of Western masculine domination.

So, in Chave's reasonings we perceive how she conciliates the feminist critical discourse with the post-colonial discourse. The feminine and the African, or non-European, appear to be destined inevitably to intermingle in the criticisms of this work. This also peeks out in Duncan who had already pointed out that in the context of the ideology transmitted in the Museum of Modern Art's collection, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* exhibits the use of African art not as a homage to the primitive but as a way of confining and fencing off, to keep the "other" whose animal savagery opposes civilized man, under control.

Briefly, all the epithets directed at *Les Demoiselles* by male critics involve matters of gender as well as race. This gives rise to the post-colonial reading of the work that investigates this fear of the other, or of the non-Western other and even, on occasions, considers the possibility of its assimilation. The post-colonial theory examines the critical discourse on Modernism from the perspective that concurs with the intellectual climate of the research being carried out; from an anthropological and historical viewpoint, in an attempt to fathom out the role played by "tribal art" by vanguard artists at the beginning of the 20th century. It enquires as to the specific type of impact that "the blacks" had in the works of these artists. It asks what was the overriding attitude to the African continent in Europe at the height of colonialism; or what factors and ideology might condition the reception of non-Western, African or Oceanic art by these artists and their immediate circle.

Summing up, female sexuality and Africa are converging territories. In the end both appear in *Les Demoiselles* in the guise of depravity, irrationality, horror, magic and intuition. When examined closely, all these depictions, rather than describing women, the African or the primitive, appear to expose this fear of "the other" and the mentality of the white men in colonial Europe of the 20th century; this was the attitude in which *Les Demoiselles* was painted and interpreted. This is one of the deductions that the deconstruction of the discourses on this painting led to. Clearly both the feminist and the post-colonial approaches are militantly critical, but, in the end, just as ideological as the one they are trying to oppose however much the latter is always clothed in an alleged neutrality. The difference would stem from the hegemonic gaze that shelters the desire for universality and objectivity while that of the "others" does not because they are identified as fruit of a situated knowledge. In any case, a curious paradox might arise from the examination of the critical response to *Les Demoiselles* as Hal Foster pointed out. The phallic, Eurocentric culture may have become the image of its own crisis in one of its great monuments.

The Colonial Question and the Debate on *Art Nègre*

The militant criticism by women would be only the first warning of a frontal attack on the hegemonic interpretive trench of *Les Demoiselles* and would serve as an incentive for a type of analysis that would weigh more heavily on European men's problem with "the primitive, "the other", the Non-European, non-Western other. Remember that African and Oceanic sculpture in Paris at the beginning of the 20th century was commonly referred to as "The Negros", "Negro sculpture" or *Art nègre.*

In the first chapter we mentioned one of Picasso's comments on his experience of visiting the Trocadero Ethnographic Museum in 1907 while he was painting the picture. Now I would like to present another part of the comment not included above. It comes at the start and reads thus: "When I visited the Trocadero, it was loathsome. The Flea Market. The smell. I was completely alone. I wanted to leave. But I didn't go. I stayed. I stayed. I understood that it was very important, something was happening to me, wasn't it? The masks were definitely not just any old sculptures. They were magical things". They are comments to André Malraux (1974, 17).

He continues, as we have seen, referring to the materialisation of the picture and states that *Les Demoiselles* was his first exorcism painting. Certainly in the majority of Picasso's quotes and comments on his encounter with "negro sculpture", or the role played in the direction taken by his painting from 1907, we will only find denial of the formalist influence of this type of art.[2] This is not just his famous reply in a poll to various artists on the matter: *"Art nègre? Je ne connais*

[2] See different texts and comments on various occasions, compiled by Marie-Laure Bernadac and Androula Michael (1998: 93, 116, 134, 136, 138 and 140).

pas!" (Fels 1920, 25), one of his *boutades* from my personal point of view, with which he was merely expressing tedium for a style that had become excessively fashionable. This is not the only example. Picasso reiterated on various occasions that the possible impact of *Art nègre* on *Les Demoiselles* or his art was always marked by a spiritual and emotional side and had something of a superstitious character. This art would have signified an invisible influence more than a visual influence. In some of these comments he even marked the difference with the way Matisse or Braque had received the African aesthetic. According to the Spanish painter they viewed the small figures as an artistic phenomenon, simply as sculptures while he himself could not help trembling before them, or better still perhaps, before what they transmitted, before their symbolic meaning or function. "That is what separated me from Braque," Picasso admitted. "He liked the 'Negros' because they were good sculptures. They never frightened him in the least. He was not interested in exorcisms" (Fels 1920, 17).

The presence of African art is one of the most complex and controversial aspects when it comes to analysing *Les Demoiselles* and the one that has attracted most attention from recent criticism. At present the controversy as to whether or not there is *art nègre* in Picasso's work is still current. As we have seen in previous chapters some specialists on the painter roundly deny this. To a large extent the complexity of the matter arises from the opinions generated by Picasso's encounter with "the others" in 1907 and affects not only Picasso but has repercussions in the characterisation of what we call "primitivism" in modern or avant-garde art as a whole. Our definition and vision of modern art is altered depending on how we define (and value) this encounter. In other words, if we bear in mind that Picasso, Vlaminck, Braque, Derain or Matisse looked upon the "primitive art" of non-Western cultures with the dominant gaze of colonialism because they shared the prejudices of the majority of Europeans of the time, then, modern art as a whole is under suspicion of harbouring racial prejudice.

Although we have already seen the opinions of some art historians on the encounter between primitivism and modern art in *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (see especially the chapter devoted to William Rubin) it is befitting now to present a synthesis of the debate on the presence and impact of "tribal art" on the eclosion of European avant-garde art. We do this in order to place it within its true dimensions and above all, try and identify the ideological prejudices, the assumptions or common areas that might, or might not, be muddying the understanding of this encounter. Examination of the very nature of African and Oceanic art must be at the centre of the theoretical debate and with it, whether the influence of "the primitive" in the renewal of the European visual order achieved by the avant-garde would have had a preeminently formal and artistic character or was, on the contrary, fundamentally magical, instinctive or apotropaic. It is important to ascertain at what point the preference of art historians for one or the other option depends on certain ingrained values and ideas. Studying the interpretations made on the relation between primitive art and European art at the start of the 20th century is a way of analysing the discourse on Modernism (the "orthodox narrative of modernism") that can contribute to a much deeper

understanding of the avant-garde artistic phenomenon as a whole. And, when we refer to the discourse, we do so in the Foucaultian sense, understood as the collection of relations and interests inserted among images and text and their inherent power.

We are aware that Picasso's declarations about the part played by *art nègre* in the gestation and, of course, final result of his famous brothel seem to confound rather than clarify the matter. A summary of those we have quoted earlier produces a confusing, even contradictory, result. There are testimonies where the painter undoubtedly denies any influence whatever of *art nègre* in *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*: "It has been said that *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* was influenced by black art but that is not true", (Souchère 1960, 133), while admitting (in his famous comments to Malraux) that in his encounter with this art, he discovered objects with apotropaic properties that played a relevant role in converting the work in an exorcism painting. His comments ranged from describing the small figures from Africa and Oceania that he saw in the Trocadero as "witnesses" and not models for the work (Fels 1923, 4) to denying any knowledge of *Art nègre* in a survey carried out by the magazine *Action* in 1920 among numerous artists and writers of the moment (Picasso et al., 1920, 25). As we have mentioned, Picasso's reply "*Art nègre*, don't know it" quite possibly was a way to distance himself as one of the happy few who had discovered the virtues of black culture before the 1920s when it became a prevailing or mainstream trend from which the painter wished to disengage himself. We could add to this the answer he had given to Tugenhold who was visiting the painter's studio with its "black idols from the Congo". Tugenhold asked Picasso if he was interested in the mystical quality of these sculptures to which the painter replied "Not a bit. I am captivated by their geometric simplicity (*Apollon*, 1914)" (Flam and Deutch 2003, 63–4).

When reading these comments we must consider the historiographical line that we have been examining up till now, one which weaves along a path that denies or undervalues the impact of African art in *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* and even the whole Cubist movement. This path later opened the way for some formalist historians we have seen mentioning the formal relation between Cubism and Primitivism. Kahnweiler did not tackle the matter directly from the painting but he did come to the point of confirming that non-European art shed light on the anti-illusionist path of the avant-garde. "It was negro sculpture that allowed the Cubist painters to see the problems that the European art evolution was embroiled in and gave them the liberty they sought" (Kahnweilwer 1963, 232) to find a solution that avoided any illusionism and created symbols that renounced any imitation of volumes. During the period of relevant formalism, *Les Demoiselles* was always considered the cradle of Cubism and was still associated with African or "Negro" art in general as well. From this standpoint, as Rosenblum suggests, African art plays a formal role since familiarity with it offered Picasso an example of liberty to distort anatomy with the aim of creating a rhythmic structure that melded solids and voids to try new forms (Rosenblum 2001, 15). In other words, it would have offered modern art an extremely useful model of anti-naturalism with which to create equivalents rather than copies of

reality. In this regard Alfred H. Barr Jr, director of the MoMA spoke of a black period in Picasso's work, and *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* as its masterpiece, mentioning stylistic or formal affinities between the two young ladies on the right and some masks from the former French Congo and Ivory Coast (Barr 1939, 60). That is to say he recognised an inspiration in African art rather than in the Iberian sculptures, contrary to what Picasso himself had categorically stated: the presence of *negros* in *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* was impossible because his discovery of this type of art was made after he had painted the picture. However, Barr also pointed out that Picasso had recently mentioned that the two figures on the right were finished a little later than the rest of the composition and therefore could have dated from after his seeing the African sculptures. The American critic speculated that one could not rule out Picasso having forgotten retouching the two heads on the right after his seeing these sculptures because this influence was far more evident than the Iberian in this part of the painting.

Christian Zervos, Pierre Daix and William Rubin were the next authors, three great Picasso specialists, who attempted to clear the negationist path. In 1942 Zervos would categorically deny any African-Oceanic influence in *Les Demoiselles*, alleging that Picasso himself had assured him he had been unaware of *Art nègre* in 1907 and that the figures did in fact come from Iberian art (Barr 1946, 56). Zervos' crucial work did leave an abundant legacy of authors who, like Pierre Daix, another expert on Picasso's work, denied the presence of African art in *Les Demoiselles*. In fact, Daix (1970) actually wrote an article entitled "Il n'ya pas d'art nègre dans *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*". His contribution served to moderate the terms of the debate by stating that when Picasso told Zervos he was unaware of African art when he was painting *Les Demoiselles*, this must be understood as unawareness of it as art but knowledge of one or two isolated pieces. He considered that the commotion surrounding *Les Demoiselles* and its connection to African art stems from the confusion its savage aspect caused in visitors to Bateau Lavoir. Picasso's brutal formal simplifications led them to detect "something barbaric" that they automatically interpreted as "Negro" (Daix 1991). Briefly, Daix stated that the misunderstanding spread because despite Picasso's denial and Zervos and Maurice Raynal's reaffirmation of the absence of *Art nègre*t in the painting, in the end, Barr's opinion prevailed. It was only later that William Rubin demonstrated that the Congolese masks presented by Barr as Picasso' models had not even arrived in Europe in 1907. The confusion was no doubt fuelled by Picasso himself who gave people to understand that he neither knew *Art nègre* nor had he visited the Trocadéro until after he had finished the painting, in spite of his sketchbooks showing black subjects in June of 1907. Daix insists, however, that these were in preparation for other projects like *Nu à la draperie* and not *Les Demoiselles*.

This section is completed with William Rubin's monograph on the painting in his essay on Picasso in the catalogue for the exhibition *Primitivism in 20th century Art* (1984). In fact the so-called "negro problem" is one of the key themes in both texts. One might say that once again it revealed itself as a problem. In them Rubin applies his energies to showing that any formal similarity between

the demoiselles and the Oceanic or African masks was purely coincidental, and really a problem of conceptual affinities, not the result of pictorial, visual or visible conventions. For Rubin, Picasso's visit to the Trocadero played a crucial role in the rendering of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* because it was not merely a passing glance at tribal statues in the homes of friends. Here, in an ethnographic museum, these tribal objects were seen for their place in ritual or cultural functions in their original contexts, far from a state of aesthetic contemplation. Picasso would have contemplated these objects, seeing them as religious rather than artistic in a new light that allowed him to perceive the powers of exorcism, intercession or magic that they apparently possessed. Rubin did not deny the impact of "black" in the painting but he would not admit the artistic influence in formal terms. As we can see from his investigation in the corresponding chapter, it contains a meticulous formal analysis of each of Picasso's prostitutes and their successive transformations, accompanied by proof that supposedly would serve to reject the possibility of any morphological similarities between them and the African or Oceanic masks. It also gave details of the four types of masks that the historiography has linked to the young women in the work and points out that they have no reasonable resemblance with the young women, nor could they have been seen in Europe in 1907 because they simply had not arrived there.[3] The masks would be, above all, depositories of magical forces and throughout Rubin's texts, the young ladies that the bibliography has always considered Africanised, are continually linked with disease, death, threats or monstrosity. In a nutshell, they were linked with Picasso's fear of death, related as we have seen, with his terror of syphilis. Here it would be timely to repeat the quote introduced in the chapter on Rubin where he states "We sense the thanatophobia in the primordial horror evoked by the monstrously distorted heads of the two whores on the right of the picture, so opposite to those of the comparatively gracious Iberian courtesans in the centre […]" (1984, 254). In all his arguments, and this quote speaks for itself, a chain of ideas can be detected that leads to the notion of the African being monstrous and gruesome and at the same time, to sex, venereal diseases and the idea of the female being a destructive force.

In any event, in Rubin's opinion, the violence transmitted by the most Africanised of the faces hints at woman as a destroyer—a vestige of the *femmes fatales* of the Symbolists—that in the end conspires to something that transcends our sense of civilised experience, something ominous and heinous, described by the author as what Kurtz discovered in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (Rubin 1984, 254) and we have to imagine it referred naturally to "the horror, the horror". This was because Picasso sought to transmit these primordial terrors that served as a source of inspiration directly and not because tribal art supposedly offered a Protocubist morphology. The masks he saw in the Trocadero were useful to him in his search for plastic variables to exorcise his personal psychologi-

[3] Rubin (1984: 262 and foll.) rejects one by one the masks that past historiography had presented as possible models for the faces of the three young women.

cal demons but he never copied nor painted any tribal object in *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* or in any other drawing.

Rubin also points out that neither Picasso nor his colleagues differentiated clearly between the Oceanic and the African. For them there were different connotations because the Oceanic was closer to the myth of the primitive that had inspired Gauguin and suggested carnality in a natural environment while the African connotations evoked something more fetishist, magical and above all something potentially evil, closer to Conrad. It is strange to see that when Rubin refers to the Conradian horror, he is referring to Africa itself, rather than the ravages caused by the European colonization of the Black Continent (something that, incidentally, is conspicuously and systematically absent in Rubin's texts).

Briefly, Rubin admits that the pioneers of modernity's affinities with the African masks reflect a deep identity of spirit with the natives as well as a generic absorption of the principles and character of their art but never any intrinsic formal or artistic assimilation.

Frankly, his arguments could not have contained more controversial elements. They immediately attracted a wrathful protest and rejoinder from the feminist post-colonialist critics whose dissection at once revealed many racial and gender prejudices in a historical-artistic discourse that, in principle, was supposed to gather together the guarantees of asepsis, neutrality and objectivity appropriate in any scientific discourse worthy of its name.

Thanks to these well studied "negationist" authors, the encounter between the *Demoiselles* and Africa continues to be a real problem of difficult resolution. The most recent feminist, post-colonialist and contextualist critics have begun to entertain suspicions on the neutrality and even the asepsis of the technical analyses, to wit, the formal, that have been able to detach the *Art nègre* from the modern and consequently have decided to undertake the task of clarifying what ideological meanings are buried below the historiographical negationist line. We are therefore witness to the birth of a group of studies that, among other things, are devoted to disentangling the African connection from modern art, preferably in two ways. One way is historical research on the prevailing idea of Africa in colonialist Europe at the start of the 20th century and the other, deconstruction of a modernist narrative that shows so much reticence towards the idea of artistic influence of that continent's art at the time of the birth of modern european art.

So, recently, in the present century a contextual type of historical and anthropological investigation has begun the exploration, and finally, connection of the presence of "the negros" and the primitive in *Les Demoiselles* to the political and colonialist mentality of Europe in the first decades of the 20th century, from the moment of questioning if this work of Picasso is the testimony of an integrating attitude or discrimination of the "other" she or he. We must consider the research by Patricia Leighten (2001, 77–103) and David Lomas (2001, 104–27), both interested in clarifying the social, political and ideological conditions responsible for the meaning given to the confluence between prostitution and the idea of Africa in *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*.

For both researchers the association between horror and the primitivising aspect of the work is the key. They do, however, go beyond the male spectator/client of the brothel, imagined by Steinberg or the traumatised Picasso depicted by Rubin to focus on the association between the idea of the primitive and the matter of prostitution discovered in the ideology and mental imagery of the era. From this perspective the general disposition held in France in and around 1907 about prostitution and Africa is vital. Both Leighten and Lomas agree that the opinion of the average European at the beginning of the 20th century with colonialism in fully spate, was reductive and generalised, tending to mix everything up and quite disposed to admit any perturbing or frightening aspect as part of the notion of "the others".

Patricia Leighten's painstaking study of the political context of the colonialism that produced the ideas and image of Africa in France at the beginning of the century underlines the negative implications of the racial prejudices based on the stereotype of the African savage. She then continues with the hypothesis that *Les Demoiselles* suggested a powerful anticolonialist criticism, quickened in Picasso by the cruelty and brutal exploitation of the natives in the Congo and reported in the newspapers and magazines of the time. Someone like Picasso could not remain indifferent to this situation. Furthermore this colonial abuse was severely condemned in some magazines with the same anarchist leanings as Picasso, as Leighten has shown in her other research on the painter (1989), and in which Picasso's close friend Juan Gris regularly published his illustrations.

According to Leighten the supporters of colonialism saw France as having a civilizing mission to fulfill in Africa while the vanguard anarchists considered that African culture and art had the mission to render Europe primitive. This historian's theory proposed that Picasso had decided to Africanize the prostitutes in an attempt to identify them as victims of colonialism and modern society. It was, so as to speak, a way of showing his solidarity with the anticolonial campaigns of the revolutionary left that intensified in 1905 when Belgian brutality in the Congo became known. Both from stylistic and content points of view the "African" figures in *Les Demoiselles* are not only showing antipathy for established European art and lifestyle, they are showing their open enmity, according to Leighten, because at the last resort "the primitivism of Picasso, just like all primitivism, subverts the aesthetic canons of beauty and order in the name of authenticity". For Picasso and other anarchists this was a way of calling into question the rational and liberal political order in which they found themselves. The deliberate ugliness of *Les Demoiselles*, within a self-satisfied modern culture that would prefer to exclude such unpleasant realities, confirms the persistence of the unsightly. The imagery confirms that the "culture of such 'savages' has a power and beauty all its own" (Leighten 2001, 94–5). In essence Picasso reveals a firm anti-colonialism defence together with the ambiguities typical of modern society. The African appears as a grotesque "other" but that does not signify an assumption of the negative stereotypes about the colonised because the artist aligns himself and identifies with this "other" and his aesthetic and ideological canons opposed to "civilized Europe". This was quite appropriate

for an avant-garde artist to do at that time, particularly if he was a supporter of anarchism like Picasso.

Admittedly, at the time some members of Picasso's intimate circle, like André Salmon, maintained that the way of representing nudity in *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* was a way to oppose the classic or dominating criterion in the European aesthetic manner. It was a counter-criterion that acted as a disruption of the hierarchy of Western aesthetic values (Green 2001a, 142).

On the other hand David Lomas's stance is almost diametrically opposed to that of Leighten as he attributes the assumption by Picasso of the colonialist prejudices against "the other" in *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*. He does not admit, so as to speak, that these prejudices be subjected to Picasso's political filter of anarchism and vanguardism. Instead he considers that the painter adjusted feminine nudity in *Les Demoiselles* to a "canon of deformity" that would be the result of transposing the dominating prejudices about other cultures, considered inferior, in colonial France at the time. Lomas believes and wishes to demonstrate that this criterion fundamentally coincides with the 19th century anthropological and criminological portrayal of *dégénérescence* (reverse evolution) or degeneration of Westerners.[4] To curb this danger, medical and anthropometric studies provided the punishment of criminals, prostitutes or non-Western persons with an apparently scientific justification. Traits that evidenced this racial degeneration were summarised as different height, different shaped ear-lobes, a certain cranial measurement, features showing sexual ambiguity and provided a simple yardstick for social stigmatisation. The thing is that according to Lomas, Picasso's young prostitutes showed many of the features considered degenerative traits by the anthropology of the time.

Consequently, Lomas starts out, as did Leighten, by studying the context and the anthropological ideas of the time with the regard to the African and prostitution. He then concludes that the canon of deformity used by Picasso for his Iberian and African prostitutes and the way these deformities suggest, albeit unintentionally, hideousness, are perfectly aligned with the deeply disparaging stereotypes in vogue at the time. Lomas' text contains a strong condemnation as he considers that "at the level of visual representation, Picasso is as guilty of complicity in this process of scapegoating as physical anthropology was" (Lomas 2001, 122) because he indiscriminately applied the array of physical features that the anthropologists of the time were using to define otherness and the abhorrent. He demonstrates through his articles that the transgressive way used to portray the body in *Les Demoiselles* concurs with the deeply disparaging features in the iconography of the prostitute formulated by 19th century anthropology, moved by a true fear of debasement. Ultimately Picasso would have been,

[4] Eugenio Carmona has disputed this deformity criterion referred to by Lomas and has also noted coincidences, in Picasso's sketch book 7, with Greek and Hellenistic art in the semi-reclining figure (second on the left), that Steinberg described as a recumbent dejected figure or in relief "Album 7: Cahier de dessins de Monsieur Picasso" (Carmona 2010).

despite himself, a creature of his time, defined by the rules of his time, defined by the dominant cultural conventions. And the horror his painting roused in its first spectators has to do with fears generated not just by the idea of Africa and its savage fetiches but with the devastating conjunction of negative ideas associated with the Black continent. These fears culminated in a physical fear of the degeneration and debasement of the body, in an alarm focused on the hypothetical threat Picasso's prostitutes posed to the European ideal of beauty. The work would be, then, fruit of the fear of degeneration mixed with a dread of sexually transmitted diseases and their terrible physical consequences.

For the feminists Picasso had violated the classic ideal and opted for a composite likeness of woman according to the misogynistic attitudes of the time. For Lomas this violation led, involuntarily but fatally, to the fabrication of a mirror that registered the pathological, negative and threatening consideration of the "other" held by the Western man in a world colonised by him where the system was starting to show both symbolic and physical fractures. The medical and anthropological discourse would have provided him with the perfect excuse for concealing his contempt of science and using this scientific knowledge to spread out his vigilance and control over what he considered a threat to the prevailing social order.

The feminists' analysis and the one focusing on the non-European other at the height of colonialism both conclude that the painting portrayed elements feared by Europe at the time that threatened the end of its established order. If the feminist criticism cast doubts on male domination and its way of constructing a symbolic universe, the criticism that studied the colonialist mentality of white Europeans at the start of the 20th century questioned the hegemony of the Western white man's point of view. Today this discourse not only sounds reductive and limiting but worse still, oppressive and ineffectual. It also lacks any consideration of other cultures, other worlds, other points of view, the views of those who have always been seen as inferior, subaltern, but who, sooner or later, the West would have to learn to treat as equals and listen to carefully, for their own good.

Post-colonial Criticism and the Question of the Subalternity

The perspective that takes into consideration these other points of view or other sensibilities developed by those thought of as subalterns is what we could call strictly or militantly post-colonialist. It goes beyond the detailed study of the colonial question at the time *Les Demoiselles* was painted to propose the urgent need to "give Africa a voice" in this thread of the critical discourse of Modernism. The feminists, in much the same way, gave the floor to the female spectator with the aim of understanding not merely the essence of the painting but all the preceding interpretations seen up till now.

None of the research on the presence of African art in *Les Demoiselles* examined so far has been done by an African or African descent author. In none of the research has a person of African origin or with a personal link to African

culture expressed their point of view of the encounter between the art of their particular region on the continent and modern art. This may sound strange to a Western art historian's ears. However it is less strange if we propose an inverted approach, as the post-colonial authors did. The crucial encounter between modern and African art at the start of the 20th century had only been examined until now by white, Western Europeans or North Americans, heirs to this modern art and unfamiliar with the cultures of the African continent. In their proposals post-colonialists pleaded for the "African voice" but this would be one of the greatest omissions in the critical discourse on the presence and impact of primitivism in the proposals on modernity. This omission has only just begun to be corrected now, in the 21st century.

Study of the African elements in *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* from the post-colonial standpoint clearly shares the political and impassioned aspect with the feminist focus. This is evident in the essay by Simon Gikandi, a Kenyan born academic working at US universities (Princeton) entitled "Picasso, Africa and the Schemata of Difference" (2003, 455–80). In his opinion only when the floor is given to Africa and especially African or Afro-american women, will the prejudices present in the different interpretations made of this work and Modernism itself for the last century begin to crumble. Probably the whole discourse on modern art (Modernism) rests on the gag that covers the mouths of the subalterns, be they women or Western ethnic minorities and hence Gikandi proposes and partly achieves the need for its deconstruction.

His article begins with an anecdote from which it is possible to extract predictable consequences although ones completely unknown before his study was published. It concerns a meeting between Picasso and Aubrey Williams, the Guyanese artist and prominent representative of Afro-Modernism and black Abstractionism that took place in the mid 1950s, thanks to the good offices of the writer Albert Camus. The artist would later comment that meeting the Malaga-born painter had no special significance for him; he disliked him and then, to add insult to injury, Picasso showed interest in his "fine African head" and said he would like to paint it. Gikandi believes that this demonstrated that Picasso was not considering Williams as an artist but merely as an object that he could make use of in his painting. The bad impression Williams had of Picasso is due in part to this experience of feeling himself treated as an object worthy of being represented on a canvas and not as a subject capable, among other things, of painting a canvas. His disillusionment was increased because Aubrey Williams considered Picasso to be the leading light of primitivism, the "artistic movement where the Other, almost always brown or black, became the catalysts of modern art". Thus greater respect for the cultures and bodies that made it possible would have been expected. Gikandi asks how else could someone convert other cultures and subjects in sources of his art, in the agents of the ruptures that we associate with Modernism, if they do not value the people who produce this art.

It is worth pointing out that in post-colonial criticism, as we can see, "bodies" begin to be spoken of in a more physical sense than before. If, with the exception of feminism, criticism of *Les Demoiselles* had referred to the bodies as

problems of shapes or form in Western painting, from now on the bodies would be important as subjects. We are entering, as it were, into the orbit of a critical discourse of embodyment.

Gikandi uses the anecdote and his deductions from it to give support to his perspective. The present awareness of the relation between Modernism and the "other" is much more complicated than that of several decades ago. Picasso's interest in the "fine African head" makes it perfectly clear that his relation with Africa, or his idea of Africa "was a meticulous attempt to separate Africa's art from his or her body, to abstract, as it were, those elements of the art form that would serve his purpose at crucial moments in his struggle with established conventions of Western art" (Gikandi 2003, 456). Picasso formed relationships with black objects but not with the people. He was not interested in them as human beings and creators of culture. The fundamental proposal of Gikandi's article is to show that this disassociation between bodies and artistic models was the way to strip the African of its inherent danger and allow it to enter in what Aaran affectionately calls the "citadel of Modernism".

One important point before we continue: both the militant feminist and the post-colonialist criticism conducted the deconstruction of the Modernism narrative put together during the 20th and 21st centuries. Its centre of attention was no longer the possible interpretation of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* but a critical examination of the discussions it had generated during its century of existence. This is what in this book we are calling the critical discourse of modernity (or Modernism *tout court*). Gikandi's study thus becomes something more general, an analysis of the control or the censure that historiography has systematically exercised on the role played by the Black in the emerging vanguard movements. And what he condemns is that criticism of Modernism has systematically relegated or minimised the role of Africa in the configuration of modern art. From the moment that Picasso was canonised as the most important painter of that period, the "interpretive institutions'' anxiously took it on themselves to minimise the role of the African, the relation between the black objects surrounding him and his own works. Gikandi asserts that where the influences are evident they are redefined as "convergences'' (Kahnweiler), "affinities" (Rubin) or "connotations" (Bois). Gikandi's arguments run parallel to the feminists' affirmation that the very fact of recognising the *demoiselles* as prostitutes, weakens the conviction that the painting was the origin of the modern, namely of the Cubist movement. In fact, as we have said earlier, there is more than one link between the femininist and the post-colonialist criticism quantifying "the other" both as the female and black. Ultimately we have before us an "other" that is both things at the same time. Actually, it appears the very recognition of the authentic relation of the other and Modernism is under threat.

The Schemata of Difference of Modernism are tangible in the discourses of various critics. For example, in that of William Rubin, who, always according to Gikandi, despite recognising the affinities between the modern and the tribal, harboured the secret intention of minimising the role of the other in the emerging vanguard art. While he recognised that Africa was a source of certain

unconsciously powerful forces, he minimised the significance of the continent as a source of artistry worth emulating. Basing his perception on Picasso's comment that the tribal objects "were more witnesses than models", Rubin sees a radical difference between Picasso's relation with European painting and with tribal sculpture. While Picasso would have assimilated the Western pictorial tradition, African art did not enjoy the same treatment. Gikandi points out here that this type of discourse tends to relegate African objects to the role of formal models, only considered for their psychological significance, unconsciously or magical, as instruments to highlight motives of sexuality and death: "something more of a fetish, magical and above all, potentially evil" (Rubin's quote). Rubin's theory that the African objects did enter Picasso's subconscious but never became formal models, reflects more than any other a fundamental characteristic of Modernism in its relation with the Other, an essential part of its schemata or interpretive parameters. Both Rubin and Modernism categorically refused to admit tribal influences of any formal kind, an artistic standard absolutely crucial to the identity of modern.

This would mean that the canonical discourse of the modernism only admits the presence of the African, or of the Other, unconsciously. This means that its presence is acknowledged but not its visibility. In other words, artistic status is not conferred on African art. Its objects are considered artefacts, tribal items, only capable of psychological influence but incapable of being appreciated as sources of a formalised aesthetic. Gikandi is of the opinion (and with this opinion, he is taking up, perhaps unconsciously, the earliest discourse on the relation of modern Western art and African art) that Picasso preferred these works because they suited his interests and aesthetic sensibilities. His preference for objects over bodies fitted his clear idea of which shapes would be most valuable for him to copy. Gikandi does not just accuse the canonical narrative of the modern of merely identifying the primitive with emotions linked to fear and repulsion. He also maintains the doubtful assumption that the unconscious or subconscious influences are incompatible with the formal. Added to this is the paradox of his avowal that the discovery of African and Oceanic art made Modernism possible and his refusal to admit that these works played a significant part in the shaping of modern art.

Gikandi is convinced that the modern artists and patrons are part of an aesthetic ideology, Modernism, moved by the desire of encountering "the Other" in its ugliness and terror in order to purify it in such a way as to make it suitable to enter modern art. And Picasso is at centre stage in the modernist narrative because he would have been an expert in neutralising this "other".

One can see in Gikandi's arguments just how the idea that Modernism as an ideology came to light, according to a viewpoint that has lately been ushered in by other thinkers. Terry Eagleton, for instance, in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* debates the markedly ideological and political character of the formalist aesthetic that sinks its roots in Kant's third critique.

As we have mentioned, Gikandi's arguments lead to the conclusion that the moment had come for this Other to show itself above the presence of the Afri-

can in the constitution of Modernism for until its voice is heard the narrative will remain incomplete. He follows Farris Thompson who in 1988 criticised the arrogance of historians of Western art for never considering that Africans had something intellectually meaningful to say on the matter. Thompson assures us that the definition of Africa and Oceania's impact on modern art will continue to be incomplete until photographs of works by Picasso, Braque and others are taken to Africa and the comments and reaction of the native Africans are heard and listened to. We do not have these comments. In the few cases where there have been some, they have been denied authority. Similarly, African studies of the mask, and especially the importance of its movement, would be very helpful for understanding and clarifying the role of the African in modern art. I personally believe that at the present time it is vital to add an account of the criticism generated by recent exhibitions of Picasso's work in Africa (subsequent to Gikandi's article) and particularly South Africa or, for that matter, the *Picasso Primitif* exhibition at the Quai d'Orsay museum in Paris in 2017. We will return to the controversies arising from these proposals.

In Gikandi's opinion the role of the Other must now be reconsidered in the creation of modern art outside the ideology of *Modernism.* And to do this, not only must Africans be given a voice but this reconsideration must also transcend the established *doxa* responsible for telling us that "mythic method" or the "mystic mentality" inherent in primitivism made modern art possible. Gikandi is reluctant to identify the African with the mythical and mystical. He even asks himself from whence came the idea, that nobody has questioned nor appears to question; that primitive art emerged from a mystic, preconscious idea and found its ideal expression in the myth. Why, he asks, did the idea of the African fetish dominate Picasso's comprehension of the primitive African in this initial encounter in the Trocadero in 1907? The work of the ethnographers Levi-Bruhl and Sir William Fraser on the primitive mind and its influence on modernist ideology is familiar but little was known about their sources. Supposedly their thoughts came through native informants but this was not so. The primary sources behind the idea of the African primitive were not academic ethnographers. They were a group, who Gikandi calls surrogates of the native informers, made up of European adventurers, missionary ethnographers, and colonial administration officials. They were the first Europeans to write about African cultures and consider art essential to understanding the primitive mind. These surrogates also considered their work to be of extremely vital importance to colonial governability. Basing their authority on the ability to reach sources untouched by foreign ideas, they were the first to spread the notion that the primitive mind was mystical and mythical, untouched by the Western manner of rationalisation and that it was impossible to understand the native mentality or any aspect of their religion or society without understanding the role of the fetish. These very cohesive surrogates reinforced the idea of the existence of a set of uniform beliefs everywhere on the continent and as their very coherent Western discourse was well-received, although Picasso might have questioned colonialist practices, he reproduced the colonialist model of African societies. And this, Gikandi concludes, is the discourse that is brought

out when no-one questions the idea of Africa in modern art; when for example, we forget the brutality behind the arrival of African artefacts in the West or the many bodies destroyed in order to bring these objects safe and sound to a museum in Europe. What the post-colonialist posture condemns about the Eurocentric vision of Africa is its fetishes about native wisdom and its exclusion from history; the obsessive idea of African culture, supposedly never subjected to the onslaughts of history and evolution. This very fact is condemned in some of his Western anthropologist colleagues (Amselle 2020). Incidentally, this also lies at the root of the present-day mystic tourism, devoted to the consumption of psychotropic substances in non-Western countries.

There is no doubt that Gikandi's article on *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* presents some interesting challenges to future research. We can state that, until now, this discourse on the presence of tribal art in modern Western painting has hardly ever been expressed although there is one Afro-American voice that has stated some kind of opinion. But, it is not a purely verbal opinion. It is visual and verbal at the same time. I refer to the presence of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* in the work of the artist Faith Ringgold with whom we shall begin to examine the artistic reinterpretations of the work in the following chapter. In fact Gikandi does ask himself what would happen if *Les Demoiselles* were exhibited next to *Picasso' Studio* by Faith Ringgold instead of next to a traditional mask. We shall bring about this encounter in a moment, with a warning. The most recent reform of the expositive discourse of the Museum of Modern Art of New York, in 2019, brought *Les Demoiselles* face to face with a work by the Afro-American Ringgold and a work by Louise Bourgeois, another woman artist. This would seem to show how the expositive institutions are echoing the shifts in the Modernism critique, specifically in the feminist and post-colonialist proposals. The MoMA also segments in this way the work of the habitual Cubist companions to assume the new postulates of the critique.

Before continuing, we feel it is absolutely necessary to comment on Gikandi's arguments. His deconstructionist arguments are extremely interesting but from my point of view, we can legitimately ask ourselves why the author made no mention of the formalist narrative of Modernism in his text, which contrary to someone like William Rubin, had admitted African objects in Modernism only because of their formal character. If it is true that in Rubin's discourse the ideological reasons detected were brought to light by Gikandi's deconstruction, by the same logic we have to admit that the formalist critics and theorists of Modernism (those who really configured this *High Modernism* discourse so criticised by Gikandi) were more benevolent. That is to say, they contemplated the formal conceptual influence of the African presence in the eruption of Modernism much more than those others contaminated by post-modern trends' own postulates. And these are the ones that have been persistently applied to the task of avoiding any formalist argument like the plague and among other reasons, for refusing to accept the existence of specific African models in the eclosion of Modernism or in *Les Demoiselles* themselves. We must remember that Barr and Golding had indeed presented specific examples that could have served as mod-

els for the masks in *Les Demoiselles* and that it was the later historiography––the post-modern from Leo Steinberg onwards––that insisted on scientifically demolishing these suppositions.

We must point out that there have been authors within the narrative of the modern who did conceive a Picasso-like version of tribal art untarnished by terror. We need to return to the first comments on the work to remind us of André Salmon's words on *Les Demoiselles* (1912): there were formal problems that may have instilled some fear but that "those who see in the masks the dark arts, symbolism or mysticism run the risk of never being able to understand it", words worthy of even Gikandi's blessing. Along the same line, James Johnson Sweeney's text in the catalogue of the MoMA's *African Negro Art* exhibition in 1935 also vindicated the formalist vision of African art in addition to the historical.

Gikandi's post-colonialist arguments, fruit of postmodern thought, are in fact directed against postmodern artistic criticism and not against the previous criticism of the modern. This is one of the numerous paradoxes of postmodernism. Probably Gikandi would align himself with the orthodox—formalist—narrative of Modernism rather than the critical postmodern discourse, despite its deconstruction only being possible from postmodern postulates.

In any case, returning to the thread of Gikandi's article, let us retain the idea of this postcolonialist author convinced that the only way to reinstate a different reading of the primitive, not assimilated in the hegemonic discourse of Modernism and less distorted than usual, is to allow the "other" to voice their opinion on the African presence in the constitution of Modernism. Until this voice can be heard, until the other is given the floor, this narrative will continue to be incomplete.

In this regard, we can confirm that his approaches do not stop with the mere postcolonialist analysis. They can be linked specifically with some of the fundamentals of *Subaltern Studies*.[5] The declared intention of this discipline was "to produce a historical analysis in which the subaltern groups were seen as subjects of their own history" (Chakrabarty 2000, 472) to obviate the design of an elitist history written exclusively from the colonizers' point of view and where there was no room for a version of the historical narrative told by the colonized.

In the field of Subaltern Studies, conceived to be applied to the history of colonial India, authors like Chakrabarty upheld a history based on the idea that subalterns would not have remained in a pre-political state that removed them from any historical action. They would have taken part "to forge their own destiny," or in other words, they would have been agents of their own history. Obviously, the problem is that there are no documents from the subalterns in the archives (a good reason for Foucault to ask what is an archive and how did one create an archive). For this reason the design of this history has to be searched for in other disciplines like economics, sociology and anthropology where the

[5] For history and nature of *Subaltern Studies* see Chakrabarty 2000a: 451-466; Chakrabarty 2000b; and Spivak 2010.

subaltern's experiences can be found without passing through the dominant rulers' filtered version.

In the same way, in the case of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, the history that we are aware of and the documents that support it is the history of the "dominators" and it is difficult to reach the perspective of the subalterns: in this case the African women represented in the painting, because of this, are condemned to be for ever the objects, never the subjects of this story. As we have already had occasion to see, in the context of the critical discourse of the modern, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* would be one of the means of triggering the very existence of the difference. It would be an image that served to construct and also perpetuate the feminine and the African as two categories different to those of the dominant subject. The problem lies in how to give a voice to the subaltern as Gikandi demands, how to make room for other gazes. Perhaps we shall find the answer if we allow ourselves to be inspired by the solution Subaltern Studies found on turning to other disciplines. However, in our case we do not propose exactly to turn to other theoretical disciplines but instead, move out of the theory and history of art field and into the field of artistic practice. From there it will be possible to hear this voice of the "others" in a multitude of alternative versions of the work, including the ironical and the critical, created by artists like Faith Ringgold, Rafael Agredano, Equipo Crónica, Caulfield, Bidlo, Prince, Rogelio López Cuenca and Elo Vega, Francis Alÿs and many more between the end of the 20th and start of the 21st centuries. In fact, it might be expedient to examine these artists because their proposals appear powerful enough to shift the focus of the gaze. As we shall see immediately we might say that they explore ways to destabilize and decentralize the dominant viewpoint; perhaps this might contribute to centering the rest of us. We shall in any case see how the artists unravel this record of the difference that used the painting itself as one of its tools. But before we move on we must pause at one crucial episode in this story — Picasso in Africa.

Ex Africa semper aliquid novi: Picasso in Africa

Let us return to Gikandi's observation on how the definition of the African or Oceanic impact on modern art would remain incomplete until works by Picasso, Braque and others were taken to Africa and the comments and critical reaction of its people heard. Certainly, now in the second decade of the 21st century this has been done. Picasso's works have been taken to Africa and we now have an approximation of the "African" point of view about the much discussed encounter between Modernism and tribal art.

In 2006 the exhibition *Picasso and Africa*, curated by Laurence Madeline, of the Picasso Museum in Paris and Marilyn Martin, collections director of the South African National Gallery in Cape Town, was held in Johannesburg and Cape Town. Some eighty works by Picasso and some thirty African sculptures, similar to those that were part of the artist's own collection, were shown. *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* was not on show but several of his preparatory sketches and coetaneous paintings and drawings were included. It was claimed to be the

first monographic exhibition entirely devoted to the African influence in Picasso and it took place precisely on African soil.

However in 1972 another African country, Senegal, held an exhibition on Picasso in the Musée Dynamique de Dakar and justly holds the honour of being the first exhibition of the artist on this continent. The then Senegalese president, the poet and intellectual Léopold Sédar Senghor was behind this initiative. He had had the opportunity of meeting Picasso and other Spanish painters in Paris during the Occupation. It was not exactly a retrospective centred on the links between sub-Saharan Africa and the Spanish painter's work but, naturally, this was the centre of attention and Léopold Sédar Senghor referred to it in his inaugural speech in April of 1972 (Senghor 2006, 145–48). There is an extremely interesting three-minute long video in which Sédar Senghor relates how Picasso recounted his opinions on primitive African art. The video also contains testimonies about Picasso's work from half a dozen visitors who attended the exhibition. Sédar Senghor also vouched that Picasso had spoken to him of primitive African arts during one of the visits made to the crowded studio in Rue des Grands Augustins, in the company of Pedro Flores who he mentions as an Andalusian painter. "He had an opportunity tell me how much inspiration Negro art had brought him," adding that he remembered one occasion when Picasso was reminding him and Flores once again of the strength of *art nègre* when he turned to Flores and said "*il faut que nous restions des sauvages*" (we must remain savages) (INA 1972), a comment as intriguing as it was perhaps enlightening.

The final part of the video gives us some brief impressions of the Senegalese public in front of Picasso's work. Some use the words admiration and inspiration but the most interesting might be one spectator who confessed his admiration for Picasso's ability to see the reality, exclaiming "*c'est la réalité même!*" ("it is the real truth"). When asked if he had seen other works by Picasso he replied that he was familiar with the *Guernica* "*un tableau, selon moi, très réaliste qui peigne tout ce qu'il y a de l'horreur dans la guerre*" ("a very realistic painting, in my opinion, that paints all the horror of war"). The observations of the Senegalese who saw this pioneer exhibition in the 70s on the whole detected the transmission of African art to Picasso's art and the undoubted realism of his painting. *Les Demoiselles* were not on show in this exhibition nor in the other that we shall mention below but at least the presence of works by Picasso on African soil contributed to partially reinstating the demands of the post-colonialist critique: a rapprochement at least to the African point of view of Picasso's painting and, *in extenso*, on the decisive encounter of Western modern art with the art of that continent.

We must remember, before continuing, that before these proposals were created in the present century in the Western world, there had been two important exhibitions in the last decades of the 20th century on modern/contemporary art and African art. The first of these was *Primitivism in 20th Century. Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, at the MoMA in New York in 1984, curated by William Rubin who, as we have already seen, despite curating this exhibition in which 150 vanguard works were contrasted with more than 200 works from Africa, Oceania and North America, ruled out any formal influence of primitive art on modern

art. As a result of this some of the tribal objects on show were even denied their prestige as art. The second exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* held in the Pompidou in Paris in 1989 and curated by Jean-Hubert Martin was a turning point in the important exhibitions or biennales of contemporary art held subsequently from the 90s. It marked the beginning of globalisation in the field of contemporary art and, in its attempt to correct some of the ethnocentric errors of the MoMA exhibition, it appeared to auspiciate a new attitude towards non-Western art by Western intellectuals. Its goal was to rectify the unfair situation where 100% of the exhibitions in the world ignored 80% of the planet. In spite of the good intentions it became the target of a certain type of criticism by the vestiges of a colonialism that could still be seen, starting with its name *Magicians of the Earth* that appears suggestive of the generalised pre-rational state that the Western subject tends to attribute wrongly to non-Westerners. The combination of magic and earth (instead of world) seems to perpetuate the idea of the African culture detained in a natural state previous to all civilisation, closer to a savage state than a culturally developed one. We have seen from Gikandi's accusation that these types of assumptions are recurrent stereotypes in the European vision of the African. Prejudices, we must point out, that blossom every time a Westerner tries to escape into the dream of these primitive paradises, vaguely situated in Africa, gardens of Eden and Promised Lands that supposedly will cure the wounds inflicted on him by modern neuroses.

These two important African art exhibitions were complemented by two others held at the end of the last century. One was *Seven Stories about Modern African Art,* curated by Clémentine Deliss for the Whitechapel Gallery in the 90s and the 1991 exhibition in New York (and two years later shown at the Tapiès Foundation in Barcelona): *Africa Explores*: *20th Century African Art* curated by Susan Vogel. Both wanted to present contemporary African art in its true context without passing through the Western filter, with artists being themselves and not introduced by the European institutions that usually depersonalise and objectify them.

Let us return for a moment to Picasso's South African exhibition of 2006 and look closely at the points of view presented in the 21st century around the debate on the relationship between Western Modernism and African art. Laurence Madeline the European curator of the exhibition said at the press conference: "We have to spell out Picasso's name when we talk to the South African press. They have no idea how valuable a painting like *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* is for art history and even less that that canvas is the outcome of Picasso's discovery of the fetishes from the Congo or the Dogon sculptures" (Martí 2006). This is a comment worthy of our attention because it shows the crumbling of the dominant gaze referred to on several occasions. Perhaps the Western subject was overcome with incredulity on discovering that in the 21st century the names of Picasso and *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* had to be spelt out to the South Africans. This shows, however, that the measure of the encounter of the artist whom the West considers universal with the continent that probably furnished the fundamental inspiration for the modern aesthetic revolution is still a pending matter.

It should not merely be atoned for but, as the post-colonial critique suggests, listened to what the non-Western points of view could offer to this encounter.

The specialist in African and Afro-American art, Julie McGee wrote a review that presents an interesting state on the matter of the critics' reception of Picasso's South African exhibition. Among other things it highlighted that narrative of the double-headed French and South African curatorship differs and at times even contradicts, or at least do not support each other. Her article opens with a sentence that could serve as a motto for the present debate: "classical African art and Modernism have been intertwined in a more confusing way than perhaps any other entities in art history" (McGee 2007, 161–67).

McGee considers that the inversion of the normal order of centre and periphery in the installation was an excellent idea as having the central area occupied by African art and Picasso's works situated on the margins was a meaningful way of reversing the normal order of historical artistic discourse. Even so she criticised other aspects of the exhibition, especially the fact that while the aesthetic muteness of African art, inspirational for the painter, was present, the active role it would have played was not clear. There is a basic dichotomy that is often repeated in this type of exhibitions or discourses where Picasso's work is compared with anonymous African art (often with no chronology). In this way the encounter unbalances the intended dialogue between both parties and I believe there is a need to clear up some misunderstandings. First of all there is the presumption that anonymous art is inferior to a recognised work by a well-identified author especially one who is considered a hallowed genius. The history of Western art encompasses centuries, or millenia, of anonymous art without detriment to its quality (consider the Greek temples scattered the length and breadth of the Mediterranean).

Apart from this McGee also offers a couple of reproaches that recur in post-colonialist critique. On the one hand she dislikes the semantic field used by the European curator of the exhibit to refer to the art of Picasso inspired in Africa which includes the expression "primitive style" or terms belonging to the semantic field of savagery. And on the other, she rebukes the exhibition for perpetuating a discourse that does not recognise African art as an agent of European art, implicitly denying its capacity to affect Western art: "Here the 'primitive' did not appear to be an active subject, engaging in defining and changing the course of modern art history," she wrote (McGee 2007, 162). This viewpoint is shared with African critics, like Corrigall, for whom this exhibition not only did not contribute to situating African art as one of the main actors of the modern movement, but for whom it would only serve as a painful reminder of just how insignificant African artists were for Europeans (McGee 2007, 163).

For her part, the African curator's text would have been focused on three matters: reinforcing Leighten's theory that Picasso was a critic of colonialism, calling attention to the racist version that the art history discipline had often maintained in the face of African art and lastly, reaffirming the belief that the history of Africa will continue to be "a European narrative" until there is more support for the work of Africans working within Africa to renarrate their own history.

The press cuttings devoted to the *Picasso and Africa* exhibition confirmed that it was a huge success with the public but they are also proof of the bitter controversy that can arise from this type of initiative and thus, reflect accurately the tension that still today is apparent. The extent of the controversy can be seen in the somewhat alarmist headlines of *The Telegraph* of 12 March 2006: "Picasso stole the work of African artists," the accusation made by Sandile Memela, a member of the government no less, spokesperson of the South African Department of Arts and Culture, in a letter addressed to the *City Press* newspaper, upbraiding the persons responsible for exhibition for underestimating Picasso's debt to the artists of the continent. Memela's letter was eloquently titled "Unmasking Picasso and finding Africa beneath" and was inspired, among other things, by the signatory's opinion that the Europeans believed themselves to be the only authority to talk of art. In this letter Memela claimed among other things that "Picasso is one of the many products of African inspiration and creativity who lacked the courage to admit its influence on his consciences and creativity;" or "The work itself, especially the African masks makes a very profound statement that says there is a profound and strong connection between African art and Picasso;" or "At the Standard Bank Gallery in Johannesburg, the truth hangs naked that Picasso would not have been the renowned creative genius he was if 'he did not steal' and adapt the work of anonymous (African) artists'" (Kleynhans 2018).

These accusations, made in the climate of the so-called "African Renaissance" demands, had a clearly political slant that involved the government's own actions and were answered by other voices who slated them as black Fascism. The idea of the African Renaissance must be included as one of the key phases of post-colonial Africa which, at that time, was part of the South African president Thabo Mbeki's political and ideological agenda of external affairs policies (between 1999 and 2008). Mbeki was known as the "philosopher king" and was implicated in several questionable matters of political corruption. On his agenda was an incentive campaign to recover Africa's collective self-esteem and self-confidence after centuries of slavery and colonialism, involving the promotion of a political, economic, social and cultural renewal of the continent to strengthen its own identity. Thabi Mbeki started his speech before the United Nations quoting Pliny the Elder "*Ex Africa semper aliquid novi*" ("Africa always brings something new"): an emphatic declaration of principles.

The arguments of this dispute also reveal just how some Africans felt Picasso's denial of the African was an open wound, abetted, as we have seen, by part of Western critics who stood firm by their perfectly scientific, and therefore true convictions, irrefutable with rational arguments exempt of ideology. Unsurprisingly, some web sites at the time presented the debate as a genuine confrontation between African chauvinism and European arrogance.

There was no lack of voices who, given the openly hostile and political tone of the debate, tried to restrain these feelings, arguing that rather than bewailing that Picasso had appropriated African culture, the exhibition offered a golden opportunity for a productive use of Eurocentric deconstruction as a way of African self-affirmation, as was explained by Goniwe (McGee 2007, 166).

Ultimately, as McGee (2007, 166) stated "Among the exhibition's flaws was believing that Picasso's relationship to or with Africa countered a history of continental disparagement by Europe, or that such provided a genuine reappraisal of African art, South African art or a significant paradigm shift in the modernist art discourse." However, for my part I believe we should ask ourselves if all this, more than a defect in the focus of the exhibition, was an error in its reception, in the expectations it could have created in its recipients or its visitors. Furthermore, we need to consider if all this could have been resolved in the context of an exhibition on Picasso and Africa or if it should be addressed in a wider and more complex way in a different arena.

Nevertheless, there is still much to be said in this debate on primitivism and 20th century art. And in this sense I concur with Jack Flam's point of view. He maintained that although in the last decades Modernism had been considered a monolithic entity that functioned as a mirror of colonialism, it must be remembered that we are now more conscious than ever of the extremely hybrid, varied and diverse face of modernity. Even accepting its faults, not always exempt from racial prejudice, one cannot ignore that the first moderns were those who opened our eyes to the art of the dispossesed of the world (Flam and Deutch 2003, 20).

In any case, the controversy created by this presence of Picasso in Africa gives us the measure of its complexity, of how any understanding of "the primitive" in art affects both the question of artistic dynamics as well as relations of domination and power (Amselle 2003, 974–88). The desire to reduce the merely aesthetic or artistic terms may today be no more than a chimera. The controversy surrounding this exhibition does, however, allow us to hear the voices of the subalterns silenced for so long. As we see, one of the reproaches is the inherent problem of the disparaging connotations of the notion of "the primitive," inevitably charged with ideological prejudice and the accusation of the West permanently leaving the "Other" on the outside of history.

Recently, in 2017, the exhibition *Picasso primitif*, curated by Yves Le Fur was held at the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris where visitors could see the most up-to-date and best documented exploration of the painter's relations with non-Western and not just African art but art from Oceania, the Americas and Asia in an attempt to decipher a relationship based on admiration, respect and trepidation in equal parts that the museum offered in its presentation. The exhibition that included detailed documentation of these links through photographs, letters and objects tried to avoid the past excesses of Eurocentrism by showing Picasso's works and the works of non-Western artists on the same level of intensity with the aim of demonstrating that their problems were the same (nudity, sexuality…) and that they solved them in the same way through parallel plastic solutions (disfiguring or destructuring of the body, for example). In this way "the primitive is understood not as a state of non-development but as the access to the deepest, most intimate and basic levels of humanity" (Declaration of intent, Picasso Primitif 2017). The most striking feature of this catalogue, compared to others is, effectively, the unbiased treatment of the images. The African, Oceanic and American works bear their authors names when these

are known, and the dates, lifting them out of the historical limbo and generic character where they had been confined in Western publications for decades. The catalogue itself showed works from different periods of Picasso's work simultaneously with works from the cultures of those other continents, organised by subjects, themes, concerns or technical problems (including the body, sex, techniques of mixing objects and different materials) that gave a clear idea of its formal affinities and its content. It is clearly an exhibition that heeded previous errors and had no desire to repeat them and finally, I would say, acknowledged the critics' reasons against Eurocentrism that previous proposals had acquired. Ultimately it is a critical discourse that frankly admitted the inherent ideological weight of all historic-artistic discourses and decided to put aside European arrogance and condescension towards others to become more encompassing and thus, more unbiased. One might say that this was a discourse made to the measure of our time. A time that sometimes, nevertheless, can look back to recover the best of its legacy.

Carl Einstein Revisited

The need for an integrated discourse without the habitual arrogance and condescension had been perceived by a far-sighted Carl Einstein, no less than in 1914, in the opening lines of his *Negerplastik*, written in that year and published in 1915. He admitted quite frankly that the study of "African art" by Europeans was impossible and stated:

> Perhaps there is no other art that Europe approaches with so much wariness as African art. First of all it is denied the category of "art." With this it marks a distance between these creations and the European position, showing a lack of consideration that, in its turn, has given rise to a derogatory terminology. This distance and the prejudices arising from it, make any aesthetic appraisal difficult, even impossible because, in the first place, such an appraisal presupposes a certain familiarity. From the start black people are considered to be inferior beings who should be treated without consideration and their proposals are condemned *a priori* as insufficient (Einstein 2002, 29).

Georges Didi-Huberman, who raised this question, explained that these words of Carl Einstein went beyond a mere condemnation of the European colonialist prejudices. Just as we have seen in Gikandi's post-colonialist theory, they were aimed at the epistemological bases of the ethnography of the time that had established their exclusively functional and ritual character, thus obviating their inclusion in the art history discipline (Didi Huberman 2000). The challenge proposed by Einstein was to admit African art as art and part of history, presenting the problem that either of these facets was a challenge to the legitimate and prevailing notions of art and history in Western epistemology. Avant-garde art presented the same challenge in the first decades of the 20th century. A new idea of art, a new idea of history, a new idea of art history were the new imperatives (Einstein 2002, 30) that loomed over European culture of that moment.

So, it is the discipline of art history that must be revised. And, in fact, perhaps it is time to return to the moment in its history when authors like Carl Einstein and other German intellectuals were constructing it on foundations that tragically would crumble a few years later. Had they not been overcome by a fatal destiny, they would have shown their power in supporting the arguments the "subalterns" would brandish against the indulgence and European prejudices a century later.

One of Einstein's convictions governs our book: that the judgement passed on the black races and their art defines he who judges more than the object of his judgement. It must be remembered that it was contemporary art, works like *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, that brought about a new and more scrupulous rapprochement to the art of the African peoples and gave rise to the first collections of African art as art in Europe. There is so much truth in the saying "when something acquires historical importance it has always been an activity of the immediate present" (Einstein 2002, 31).

Einstein is, therefore an excellent reference for this post-colonialist condemnation of the Eurocentric vision of Africa (expandible to other latitudes) for his fetishism of native wisdom and its exclusion from history; for his fixed notion of African culture, supposedly unyielding to the assaults of history (Amselle 2020). He makes two alternative points of view that contribute to correcting the Westerners' bias. A bias that should immediately take a note of Kalama's explanation in "Le paradigma 'Art africain': de l'origine à sa physionomie actuelle" (Kalama 2018, article 3). He explains that an African art does not exist, or again, that the notion is based on the invention of Africa by Western culture, or likewise again, the African continent is not a geographic reality but more like an idea with its corollary of stereotypes and clichés, determined by its supposedly uncivilised character, determined by its colonial past and its origin in a continent that is also considered "under-developed."

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CHAPTER 6

After Picasso: Reinterpretations and recreations of *Les Demoiselles D'Avignon* in Contemporary Art

The artworks are, in general, the first interpretations of the artworks.
They come from the nonchalance and anachronic
impertinence of a shift in history.
Georges Didi-Huberman (2000)

We referred earlier to the possibility of finding interpretations of *Les Demoiselles* that do not originate from critical or historical-artistic discourse but come from artistic practice itself that we are anxious to explore in this chapter. In fact there are numerous versions of *Les Demoiselles* made after Picasso's version (or *d'après Picasso* in French). They include homages, copies, adaptations, pseudo-plagiarism, versions, replicas, commentaries, interpretations, apostilles, recreations or appropriations. We will take just a handful in order to try and clarify, above all, how far they are able to present new arguments on this masterpiece of modern art, especially the versions that have not been explored before in the conventional critical discourse.

In 2007, on the occasion of *Les Demoiselles* centenary, the Francis N. Naumann gallery in New York held an exhibition entitled *Demoiselles Revisited* to which they had invited some twenty artists to produce works based on the painting or to come up with new versions of the same (Gersh-Nesic 2001, 1–16). The result was an extremely peculiar homage. Viewing the outcome, it is startling to see, on the one hand, the unashamed degree of sexualisation that Picasso's young women were subjected to in almost all cases. The general wish to underline the obscene character of the work predominated and even added more obscenity to the original. Nevertheless, along with this, the irreverence and even aggression the contemporary artists displayed towards the object of their "homage" cannot be ignored. The questions of race and gender inherent in the work are the order of the day and steal the spotlight. The general tone of these renewed versions of *Les Demoiselles* is ironic, grotesque, caricatural, as if none of the art-

Maite Méndez Baiges, University of Malaga, Spain, mendez@uma.es, 0000-0002-0762-7004

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ists had wanted to miss an opportunity to inflict their sarcastic and even angry criticism on the masterpiece of Modernism. More recently, the exhibition *Picasso.Mania,* held in the Grand Palais in Paris from October 2015 to February 2016, with works by Sigmar Polke, Jeff Koons, Richard Prince, Mike Bidlo, Faith Ringgold also revealed once again the repetition of motives involving questions of gender and race (Ottinger 2015).

It is easy to infer that the hypersexualisation opted for by most of the contemporary versions of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* stems from the fact that once this aspect was unveiled, there was no going back. Its sexual content had inevitably become the vein to explore at any price since it was virtually impossible, both for artists and art critics, to ignore or disregard it. As we have seen, it took various decades for the art critique to consider that its true interest lay in its content, but it is also possible to see that, once interest in the work was centred here, it did not budge an inch. Leo Steinberg, responsible for the state of the affairs and author of "The Philosophical Brothel," predicted in a *post scriptum* of 1987, seventeen years after publication of the first version of his famous article and height of the regression of formalism, when he said "my argument for the sexual charge of the picture seems almost embarrassingly banal. But such is the nature of my melancholy profession: […] It is in the character of the critic is to say no more in the best moments than what everyone in the following season repeats; he is the generator of the cliché" (Steinberg 1988, 74).

On the other hand, the humorous animadversion perceived in the collected works of this exhibition is, in some ways appropriate for several generations of artists who had only ever received modern art as its official culture: thus, their reactions went from mockery to parody to aggression and, who knows if, in some cases, guided by a real instinct to put the father to death. Modernism and in all probability, its personification in Picasso, only seems to elicit an open antipathy and even aggressive instincts in these generations. And the aggression of this type of reaction to Picasso's young ladies serves to reinforce even more the equation that identifies *Les Demoiselles* with the aesthetics of Modernism.

The artistic versions of the work are, in their own way, an extension of the critical discourse on modern art using other means: an extension that takes place using tools other than those of the critic or the art historian. They are no longer the only professionals, with the encumbrances and advantages of their speciality, who pronounce authorised interpretations of modern art's masterpiece. Now it is the artists, as we shall see, who shape this criticism in their own visual language terms, and through this, allow other types of discourse and other voices to be heard with all the nonchalance and anachronistic impertinence that Didi-Huberman mentions in the title quote of this chapter.

The artistic variations of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* emerge from the ranks of Pop Art, Appropiationism, Action Painting and Performance, from the Queer, the feminist and other standpoints. As we shall see, their strategies are mostly a game of gazes and counter glances that precisely underline the subjective and culturally conditioned character of all visual perception and interpretation of art.

All these *Demoiselles d'Avignon after Picasso* have in common an openly critical nature. The majority appear to concur with the arguments that we have seen in the last two chapters, those of feminism and post-colonialism that confirm the relevance of these two focal points in the critical reception of the painting today. Elsewhere they contain reflections on the notions of authorship, copying, authenticity, counterfeiting and, naturally, genius.

Pop Art Recreations

Let us begin with some examples of Pop Art recreation of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*. They are usually the result of subjecting the original composition to a graphic and chromatic style similar to that of the comic which gives the painting an aspect of an image made by mechanical reproduction techniques. There is something in these that clearly shows a wish to foster the idea of the mass culture icon that Picasso's painting had become over time but it is also a peculiar way of "commenting" on the meaning of the original.

Examples of this pop treatment can be seen in the work of several Spanish artists such as Eugenio Chicano who transformed the scene into a still-life or Equipo Crónica in their *Monsieur Cézanne en el carrer Avinyó* 1980-81 where the perfectly copied "young ladies" are suitable for a comic strip and intensify the caricaturesque aspect of the nudes in the original version. The corner of the table that appears at the bottom of Picasso's canvas is replaced here with part of a round table, apparently of marble, that might be considered to feminise the scene, were we to agree with Leo Steinberg that the corner triangle of the table had a phallic connotation, referring to the spectator's penis. Might it be possible therefore that the transformation of the table includes a proposal for a transformation of gender in the spectator gazing at the canvas? The still-life of fruit previously placed on the table is now substituted by the personal effects of the visitor to the brothel: an African mask, a bowler hat and cane, belonging to Monsieur Cézanne, we suppose.

The title and the personal effects point to an evident sarcasm about Cézanne and Cubism, the two pillars of modern painting according to the canonic narrative: here we have the staging of a visit by the father of Cubism to a brothel in the Barcelona street of Avinyó.[1] Ultimately, the scene recreated by the Equipo Crónica from the Picassian *Demoiselles* could infer the following: if the young ladies are the "mothers of Cubism" as the orthodox narrative of Modernism has always insisted, at last we would have found the father in his legitimately corresponding place, the brothel where these young ladies worked. And what about the mask that lies on the table? Does it belong to one of the young ladies or did the painter leave it with his personal effects? Should we presume that the

[1] It must be remembered, as mentioned in the first chapter, that part of the Spanish and Catalan historiography has understood the "Avignon" or "Aviñon" in the original title (named thus by André Salmon and not by Picasso) to be *Carrer* (or street) *Avinyó* in Barcelona.

painter was wearing an African mask or is it on the table merely to show that the nuptials taking place here that gave rise to modern painting, are sponsored by *Art nègre*? Or, perhaps Cézanne had disguised himself with an African mask to hide his identity and go unrecognised in the most famous brothel in the history of painting?

None of these questions are trivial if we consider the historiography of the painting and, particularly, the important truth stated at the time by Chave (1994, 597–611)—author of one of the principal feminist criticisms of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, as we have had seen. Let us remember that according to her, the painting was no longer considered officially the origin of Cubism (and with it avant-garde art) from the moment it was openly recognised as a scene in a brothel.

In Equipo Crónica's proposal neither the visitor to the brothel is who he was, nor is the spectator whom we expect, and nor do we know where and with whom we are exactly either as spectators (or visitors to the brothel) or as frequenters of modernism itself. That is to say, because of the destabilization of the gaze, Equipo Crónica's version is probably the most perceptive of all the pictorial interpretations done of *Les Demoiselles*.

In 1999, another Pop artist, in this case British painter Patrick Caulfield, painted his *Les demoiselles vues de derrière (The Young Ladies seen from behind*) that showed us the scene from a diametrically opposed point of view to the one of normal spectators. By showing us the backs of the young nude women, the painting proposes the spectator place himself (or herself) among them, as if they belonged. Caulfield's Pop style resembles that of the Equipo Crónica to such an extent that, sometimes, more than a version of Picasso's *Demoiselles,* it appears to be the reverse of *Monsieur Cézanne en el carrer Avinyó.* The spectator, situated behind the women, can choose between two alternatives, two types of gaze that put them in two opposing subjectivities: if they prefer the role of voyeur, they can gaze especially at the backs and buttocks of the nude women; or if they opt for the other role that allows them imagine themselves as another of the prostitutes, they will experience the condition of the women in the painting, the prostitutes presenting themselves as goods for sale. An infrequent experience but one that is not alien to the feminine condition under the patriarchal patterns that had prevailed for centuries (men act, women appear), although in all probability, the majority of men invited to try this alien point of view would be totally unaware of this.

One of the most remarkable aspects of Caulfield's work is precisely the possibility given to the spectator to choose their role, throwing suspicion on the existence of a universal gaze.

Ultimately Caulfield focuses on the fundamental: in the end the core of the interpretations of *Les Demoiselles* rests on the multiplicity of viewpoints offered to the spectator, both in its pictorial versions and its historiography. Let us remember, furthermore, that according to Steinberg, *Les Demoiselles* are related to another coetaneous work by Picasso entitled *Two Women* painted in 1906. Steinberg ventured the hypothesis that these other young female nudes were

from behind the scenes of *Les Demoiselles* or even perhaps the women themselves before they took centre stage. Thus, Caulfield's painting might also be interpreted as the conversion of the spectator in those *Two Women.*

Lastly we have another valuable Pop example of *Les Demoiselles* by Derek Boshier, clearly a transexual version from its title: *Les messieurs d'Avignon*, dated in 2003 [Fig. 1]. The painting actually consists of a scene in which various open books can be seen. A full-page illustration of one shows the "messieurs:" all the figures have been masculinized, four of them are exhibiting their genitals to the spectator. The figure on the left has acquired undeniably negroid features, the one at his side has grown a beard and the seated figure on the lower right settles, once and for all, the debate as to whether it is facing or has its back to the spectator: legs are splayed wide unashamedly showing his male genitalia to his audience. We should probably consider Boshier's work as a queer version of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*. It is something unknown and unseen so far in the work's literature. It is, nevertheless, being purposefully explored by artists. We will return to a similar version below but for the moment let it suffice to say that if the field of criticism or artistic historiography is moved to that of artistic practice, new questions will arise.

All these recreations of the painting particularly emphasize the iconic character of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, comparable to *Guernica*, or the *Mona Lisa*. It was massively reproduced and circulated to every corner of the planet and the extreme familiarity we feel in its presence makes it an ideal candidate for losing the aura and, so to speak, becoming something so familiar as to become invisible or go unnoticed. This is consideration of the emblematic image, subjected to massive and uncontrolled circulation that is stressed in the versions of the Demoiselles created by the contemporary artists. When a masterpiece becomes a celebrity it is no longer to be gazed at. It just has to be simply recognised (Gersh-Nesic 2007, 13). This is something mentioned already by Robert Rosenblum (1973, 45): "In the case of world-famous masterpieces that circulate literally in millions of reproductions, familiarity nourishes the indifference of invisibility."

Appropiating Picasso

Some of the earliest versions of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* date from 1958 in the form of tapestry wall-hangings by Jacqueline de La Baume Dürrbach. They can be seen decorating Picasso's studio at La Californie in the photographs taken by Edward Quinn or Paul Popper around 1960. The collaboration between Picasso and Jacqueline de la Baume Dürrbach dates back to the 1950s. The weaver's workshop in Cavalaire (that had once belonged to one of Picasso's mentors, the Cubist painter Gleizes), produced 27 tapestries based on works by Picasso. In the majority of cases, three copies were made of each one, and, as was the case with *Les Demoiselles*, Picasso kept one for himself, as well as overseeing the product from the first cartoon sketch to the final result. These tapestries pose interesting questions about authorship, originality or the

multiple problems inherent in collective works. Therefore, truth to tell, they are precisely that: multiple personality works that are the fruit of a collaboration between various artists. This leads us to reflect on the copy and the original as well as the adaptations and interpretations of Picasso's works. In short they are just one more of the interpretations of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* because Jacqueline de La Baume's tapestries are always different to Picasso's originals. In fact, as Godefroy assures us, that of *Les Demoiselles* was not approved of by Alfred Barr, the former director of the New York MoMA who considered the weaver had taken too many liberties with both the colours and the composition while Picasso himself not only approved of it but hung it in his studio at La Californie and, according to different testimonies, considered it better than the original (Godefroy 2015, 4). In general one perceives that in the tapestry the brushstrokes become lines of colours that endow the whole with a more decorative aspect than in the original. Curiously, as in the case of the more Pop interpretations of the work, its character of a comic strip or drawing and the asymmetries of the faces as well as the transition between the different shades of colour is accentuated. In addition, the dimensions of the tapestry are slightly larger than the original. In the authenticity certificate of the tapestry both the name of the weaver and the painter are included. It is, therefore, an example of artistic collaboration that by implicating the creator best embodies the notion of 20th century genius (with all the connotations of the ineffable and inimitable character associated with this notion) and signifies also an authentic challenge to the cliché of the genius.

Many of the questions raised by Jacqueline de La Baume's tapestry on authorship, authenticity, interpretation, falsification, the copy, the original and more, are those on which the artistic activity of one of the outstanding trends at the end of the 20th century are centred: Appropriationism. And if we observe this trend, we can see that the works of artists like Mark Bidlo or Richard Prince, based on Picasso, underline precisely the open character of the work of art through a strategy of dethroning the "author" in order to snatch away the monopoly of the work's meaning and offer it, in part, to the spectator.

In 1972, the critic Leo Steinberg had ventured to suggest that *Les Demoiselles* could become the paradigm of Modernism because it was inclined to grant the spectator, not the author, the responsibility for the cohesion of the work. At the end of the 20th century, the literal copy, stroke by stroke that Bidlo made of this key work in his *Not Picasso (Les Demoiselles d'Avignon, 1907)* in 1984 short circuited any attempt to give the work an original meaning. Neither Picasso the painter, nor his person and biography, nor even the historical moment when the work was painted, 1907, would serve as clues to puzzle out a meaning that now would be considered misleading if not nonexistent if it emanated from these causes or factors.

Bidlo's version is so literal that some would have no compunction in describing it as plagiarism. However, all appropriationism implies a modification in the way of perceiving what had been perceived before. Bidlo himself comments: "These works of art (celebrity masterpieces) are like found objects

and a lost visual vocabulary waiting to be unearthed, and reassessed and renegotiated for the present day and time" (video cit. by Gersh Nesic 2007, 13).

It is widely known that the theoretical basis for Bidlo, Prince and other appropiationist artists in the 80s and 90s was to be found in French post-structuralist phlosophy, specifically in the theories on the absence of the author formulated by thinkers such as Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault. In the famous essay by the former, "Death of the Author" he affirmed that positivism, summary and result of capitalist ideology, had given the greatest importance to the "persona" of the author when interpreting a work of art, dragging the common culture with it to convince it that the author tyrannically dominates its centre with his person, history, tastes and passions and it should search for the explanation of the work almost exclusively in its author who was divulging his secrets while creating it (Barthes 1984).

In the field of plastic arts in the 70s and 80s the climate propitiated by the French theory could be detected in art criticism as well. This was especially true in the case of someone as influential as Rosalind Krauss who, as we saw in the previous chapter, would take the specific example of texts about Picasso as the paradigm for a critique devoted—wrongly—to the author instead of centering on the work. As we have seen Rosalind Krauss (1981, 5–22) was sufficiently explicit and critical in an article eloquently entitled "In the Name of Picasso," about the type of historiography based on the biography of authors and it is precisely what has been preferably applied to the work of this painter. We have seen how, in earlier chapters, Picasso not only lay down on the couch. His erotic, sentimental and sexual inclinations have been explored to almost obscene extremes in an attempt to discover the ultimate meaning of *Les Demoiselles* and much of his artistic production, proving what Krauss, Barthes and Foucault may have suspected: that the reduction of a work of art to the biographical vicissitudes of its author is one of the most fruitless solipsistic ways of understanding art. According to Foucault, the author's request, not as the individual who writes, speaks or pronounces a text but as the origin of the union of the discourse which reveals the hidden meaning of the work, articulated from his private life is no longer relevant (Foucault 1971). Both Mark Bidlo and Richard Prince explore the same type of arguments in their artistry; the author as a succession of masks or even as a dissembler. Ultimately, the author will be he who claims for himself the spoken word, the written word, the painted but not its owner, let alone its best interpreter.

With the author dead, a whole series of considerations open around the spectator, as we have been seeing. For Barthes (1984, 66), the rebellion against the author's tyranny is a rejection of God and the trinity of reason, science and the law. It requires forsaking only one sole point of origin and explanation of the work. Thus, on removal of the author figure, a whole constellation of elements previously silenced emerges: chance, recognition of the multiplicity of meanings and the importance of amending the work through the eyes of the recipient, questioning the truth and beauty of the content and so on. Then the work becomes an *opera aperta*, a "meaning machine" as Octavio Paz wrote about Duchamp. The work now depends on the spectators because they set in motion the mechanism of the signs that comprise the work.

> At the present time, Barthes adds, we know that, rather than being a line of words that conveys one divine meaning as if it were a message from the Author-God, a text is a multi-dimensioned space in which different scripts are reconciled and contrasted, none of which is the original. The text is a fabric woven from quotations and citations from a thousand cultural sources. (Barthes 1984, 65).

From the literal copy proposed by Bidlo, in a task akin to that of Borges' *Pierre Ménard* with Quixote, we must add the variations of the same theme that some of Richard Prince's series gathered and which were shown at the Picasso Museum in Malaga in the spring of 2012 (Lebrero 2012). Notions such as those of Barthes can be observed in the recreation that Prince made of the female figure from Picasso's works. His series comprise works that are a collage of images of women, or more precisely, of nudes, combining photographs with painting, to which he added graphic details such as fragments of bodies (especially disproportionate legs or hands) or faces. These latter are superimposed on the bodies like masks and were, undoubtedly, inspired by the female faces Picasso created at different moments in his artistic life and offer an almost complete repertoire of the artist's work. When contemplating some of Prince's compositions, the spectator feels urged to remember the different Picassos (the painter appears multiplied) and accept the nude not as a natural item of reality but as an entirely artistic genre referred to in recreations that can be traced back through the history of painting. Thus the fact that Picasso resorted to Ingres, Delacroix, Cézanne and many other painters to give shape to his nudes is in the forefront just as Ingres and classical painting, who in his turn accomplished this by copying, whether real nude women or statues from Greece or Rome. Furthermore, Roman sculpture in its turn came via the statues from the classical Greek civilisation, as far back as the first classical female nude, the Afrodite of Knidus. And having returned thus far, we must admit that the creation of this first female nude in Greek sculpture, long-lasting sign of the sensuality and voluptuosity of the woman down the centuries of Western culture, might be considered, judging by some patterns of femininity, as an unusual female body. Her relatively small breasts, her child-like pubis or the almost rectilinear silhouette of the trunk, waist and hips might make it difficult to find her model in a real woman.

Thus, the reference for Prince's bizarre bodies is not a real or tangible woman but one who has gone astray or is lost and shows that the images can only be explained through other images that arise from an immense, previously prepared catalogue. A catalogue that admits, furthermore, that this imagery is not composed exclusively from a repertoire concocted within the too-narrow framework of high culture. It also includes mass media communication and cultures, other than the European that has been called "primitive" for so long. Barthes wrote "a text is constituted by multiple writings—as the Prince/Picassos demonstrate, we might add- from various cultures that together establish a dialogue, a parody, a questioning" and all this abundance of diversity is gathered up in the reader/spectator, in the space where all mentions of the work are inscribed and reveal

that the unity of the text resides in him, whose birth was made possible by the death of the Author (Barthes 1984, 67).

In the case of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, the recognition of this brings about two immediate consequences: on the one hand, the absurdity of trying to explain the work through Picasso's biography (which may affect questioning of the painter's huge bibliography); and on the other, recognition that as there is no sole origen, there is also no sole gaze which, in turn, signifies the opening for other meanings of the work from a multiplicity of gazes. Or, in other words, challenging the universal, natural and objective validity of the gaze through which the work had been considered and evaluated previously. As we have seen in a previous chapter, everything was now prepared for the emergence of gazes that did not conform to the hegemonic and would even occasion a fierce questioning of it, especially a condemnation of the universalist claim of an interpretation that now, unmasked, revealed the overly-narrow attitudes that the feminist critique had been disclosing since the Sixties. It is also a seam frequently exploited by artists.

The Emergence of Other Gazes

We have already seen that within the critique of Modernism, the gender and post-colonialist approaches had already raised these questions and opened the way for the problematization of the relation between work and spectator that, up till then had seemed, neutral, natural and not subject to conditions such as the "identity" of the gazer. There are examples of artistic practice within these same parameters that even Picasso himself made use of.

The painter Damien Elwes, specialised in recreating the studios of famous contemporary artists (like Calder, Warhol, Frida Kahlo, Miró, Matisse, Yayoi Kusama and so on) made a series of Picasso's successive studios from different periods. In the one corresponding to the beginnings of Cubism he captured the inside of Picasso's studio in the Bateau Lavoir building [Fig. 2] showing *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* together with other period pieces like *Three Women* and other drawings from his sketchbooks of the time. He also includes the small Iberian figure from the Cerro de los Santos. Nevertheless, I really want to point out the many allusions to tribal art in the works that we normally see in photographs of Picasso or his group of friends at that time. For example the *Mukuyi* mask from Punu in Gabon that appears in the photographs of Picasso's studio in Boulevard Clichy, is hanging on the wall. There are also a pair of male and female 19th century *Kanak* sculptures from New Caledonia, a royal tom-tom drum from the Congo c. 1900 and a 19th century *Kele* harp from Gabon which, from photographs, was also in the studio at Bateau Lavoir. In his own way, Damien Elwes's painting establishes a strong link between Cubism and non-European or tribal art.

But, the combination of the post-colonialist and feminist positions on the prostitutes of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* can be seen, above all, in the work of Faith Ringgold who we must place in the framework of the Subaltern Theory. At the start of the 1990s, Faith Ringgold, an Afro-American artist born in Har-

lem in 1930, made the series *The French Collection*, a collection of *story quilts*.[2] These works combine visual language with verbal narrative in a story made of scraps of fabric surrounded by a band telling a tale. It is a creative process traditionally associated with a labour considered appropriate for women.This type of quilt, typical of popular culture in the United States, was a sewing task usually bestowed on females. In fact, it was a way of representing and conserving a memory of the family's own story and customarily was inherited by the female line so that the continuity of the story and the conservation of the family memory was guaranteed down the years.

Ringgold conceived the idea for her story quilts in 1980, after deciding to focus her artistic career in the direction of Africa, instead of gazing towards Greece (Graulic and Witzling 2001, 184–209). In one of the quilts in the first part of the series, *Picnic in Giverny* the artist establishes "the role of women (above all Afro-American women) in art" as one of her basic themes. The quilt depicts a group of colourfully dressed women, picnicking on the grass—*déjeuner sur l'herbe*. There is only one representative of the male sex, in the lower left corner in a doubly eccentric situation: he is a copy of the naked woman in Manet's *Déjeuner* although his face is that of Picasso, taken from a well-known photograph, wearing a typical Cordoban *sombrero*. The women, on the other hand are clothed and they are not generic, nor are they symbols or allegories of anything as they have normally been depicted throughout the history of Western painting. They are portraits, in the majority of recognised feminist activists, some even friends of the painter. The key to this work is the presence of women who are neither generic nor symbolic: who are there representing themselves in their singularity as individuals, speaking with their own voices. In fact, the "painter-genius" Picasso assumes the passive role of the model (even to the point of having a naked female body) while the active function of the creator is entrusted to a woman, the protagonist of these tales, called Willia Maria, who we can identify on the right, painting and "immortalizing" the scene on canvas. It is clear from this that Ringgold's work has to do with questions of gender and ethnic minorities, specifically Afro-American. Her work embraces, unambiguously, her condition of a black woman artist, moved by the need to speak with her own voice (Graulic and Witzling 2001, 186). We should also remember that Ringgold, as well as an artist, has also published children's books and other narratives.

This series of quilts tells the fictitious story of Willia Maria Simona, a young woman who decides to go to Paris to study Fine Arts during the 1920s as a way of inserting Afro-American presence into the heart of Parisian Modernism, in other words, into one of the bulwarks of male artistic hegemony. Hence the presence and humorously ironic allusions to the illustrious painters of modern art like Picasso, Manet or Degas. The story quilts of the *French Collection* always

[2] Patchwork quilts that tell family stories, typically traditional in the USA, made by women and according to legend, linked with the history of abolitionism although at the time some might have been made by supporters of it.

include a masterpiece of Western modern art and Graulic and Witzling assure us that "her quilts are a solid affirmation of Afro-American women's creative authority and their potential redeemer" (Graulic and Witzling 2001, 188).[3] Willia Maria, Faith Ringgold's *alter ego,* explores the possibility of these muses and models being subjects talking of their own lives.

In one of the works of the series, *Picasso's Studio, The French Collection, Part I: #7,* we can see an interesting reinterpretation of *Les Demoiselles*. The scene depicts Picasso's studio: on the lower left corner the artist, in underpants (his usual wear) is painting. The portrait he is painting on the blank canvas is presumably the portrait of Willia Maria who is posing, nude, in front of him, holding her arms on high, hands on her head and surrounded by African masks and Picasso's canvases, including *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* among them. Willia Maria is sitting with her back to the canvas and appears to be surrounded by the young women, as if they were her faithful companions. There is no doubt that she identifies with the models and not with the artist-painter, despite the fact that according to the narrative of the series Willia Maria is a painter or she is studying painting in Paris. The texts of these quilts, that tell us of the protagonist's adventures in the capital of avant-garde art, transcribe a correspondence between Willia Maria and her aunt Melissa. This correspondence is used as a resource for relating the aunt's advice, for recounting the young painter's life in Paris and uses this medium to offer opinions on art and especially the role of a black woman in this milieu. Willia Maria shares her feelings on posing in the nude with her "Aunt Melissa" and tells her that while she posed, she heard the voices of Picasso's masks although over these she was hearing her aunt referring to the ancestral role of artist's model as she tells her, among other things in an inscription on the quilt itself:

> 3. Europeans discovered your image as art at the same time they discovered Africa's potential for slavery and colonisation. They dug up centuries of our civilisation, and then called us savages and made us slaves. First they take the body, then the soul. Or maybe it is the soul, then the body. The sequence doesn't matter… (Cameron 1988, 137).

Willia Maria continues telling her aunt that she became an artist because it was the only way to free herself: "*N'importe* what color you are you can do what you want *avec ton art*", just as Picasso did. She adds "the European artists took a look at us and changed the way they saw themselves". And above all, sitting there in Picasso's studio amidst the *demoiselles*, "It's the African mask straight from the African faces that I look at in Picasso's studio and his art. He has the power to deny what he doesn't want to acknowledge. But art is the

[3] In this same interview, with regard to the presence of French artists in her work, Faith Ringgold explains that she was formed as an artist copying these artists whom she had to emulate and adds: "these artists were inside me and I had to cast them out because they could have become lethal" (Graulic and Witzling 2001: 189).

truth, not the artist. Doesn't matter what he says about where it comes from. We see where, everytime we look in the mirror" (Cameron 1988, 137). To wit, a declaration of principles on the debt owed by the work to African art. In this manner Ringgold's work underlines the reproach Gikandi directed at the authors of the modernist narrative for denying the crucial role played by African art in the eclosion of modern artistic forms that we associate with the varied and contradictory declarations by Picasso on the matter in the phrase, as famous as it is offensive: *"Art nègre? Je ne connais pas."*

This is the moment to remember an earlier-mentioned fact. In the present installation at the Museum of Modern Art in New York that was completely remodelled in 2019, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* is no longer surrounded exclusively by Cubist paintings as it had been before. Now it shares the space with a canvas by Afro-American Faith Ringgold entitled *People's series #20. Die*, from 1967 and a sculpture, *Quarantania 1,* by Louise Bourgeois. The name of this room, "Around *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*" was chosen because Picasso's young ladies share space with two women artists of the 20th century whose work involves a systematic challenging of the canon of Modernism's assumptions from feminist and post-colonialist points of view. The so-called Kremlin of modern art that is the MoMA thus accepts and embraces the impact of the new critical discourses through new expositive discourses.

It is also possible to identify a post-colonialist style proposal in two works from 1985 by Robert Colescott entitled *Demoiselles d'Alabama (Naked)* and *Demoiselles d'Alabama (Clothed)*. This is appropriation understood as the process of taking a painting and giving it a different meaning or use to that originally intended by the artist, contemplating the possibility of even giving it a diametrically opposed meaning. "In some sense, he confesses, I would be stealing the painting -its idea and aspect- for my own use" (Fitzgerald 1997, 14–9). Both versions depict a multi-racial group made up of three black-skinned women, one brown-skinned and a blonde. In the first instance the intention is to focus on the racial differences, perhaps to call attention to the popular stereotypes of black people in sexually explicit circumstances as Beth S. Gersh-Nesic proposes in *The Demoiselles Revisited* catalogue. It could equally be an explicit declaration on the debate of African art in Modernism that we have discussed earlier.

If Ringgold's or Collescott's young ladies are avenging the determining influence of the feminine and the Afro-American in the conception of modern art, in the reinterpretations executed by the Spanish artist Rafael Agredano the result is hyper transexualization of the work with an undertone of queer. One can also find an ironic questioning of Picasso's own sexuality, a sort of jocular visual comment on the psychoanalytic theses on the painter's alleged homosexuality although Agredano belies the seriousness and gravity of these hypotheses with an image overflowing with sarcasm and humour.

In this regard it is interesting to note that there is a curious interpretation of *L.H.O.O.Q.,* Duchamp's famous postcard of the *Gioconda* with a moustache and goatee beard, which we owe to Dalí who once compared museums to broth-

els because they were full of naked women. And in the midst of all these unclothed women, there is the *Gioconda*, dressed in her heavy robes, performing her role of the great asexual mother and refusing to be contaminated by the brothel context. And lastly, as he added that as the only way to sexualize the Mona Lisa would be to convert her into a man, Duchamp did this by painting her with a moustache and goatee beard. Changing the sex of Picasso's young naked women could have the same effect and Agredano achieved this in his 1994 versions of *Les Demoiselles* as *Avignon Guys* (referring both to the "boys" and the gays of Avignon) or *La chambre en noir* (1995-96) as we have also seen in Derek Boshier's work.

In both these works the young women have been converted into "young men" and the experience of a sex change has reinforced their sexual character: in Agredano's case there is also the renewal of the sexual service options offered by these personages as professional sex workers for sale. They have become male prostitutes. The *Avignon Guys* look extraordinarily like the young women of Avignon: they are clearly recognisable, now trapped in their brawny masculine bodies and their well-groomed short hair. Their male genitals are barely hidden by jockstraps—a remarkably efficient source of hilarity—or fabric. The typical resource of hachure or hatching, (that formalist historians have always stressed as a Cubist technique of affirming the painting in itself and that in the original version served as an indication of the female breast) has become a mark with irreverent connotations on the young man in the upper right corner: male chest hair. And for the figure in the lower left corner, Agredano, as did Boshier, resolves once and for all the old debate as to whether the young woman was positioned with her body facing backwards or forwards (in which case the obscene character of her figure and the painting would be doubled because she would be brazenly exhibiting her genitals to the spectator). The body of the young man sprawling is definitely, without a shadow of doubt, facing forwards. Another detail of this reinterpretation is the accentuation of the mask effect on the faces of three of the figures.

La chambre en noir, on the other hand, is not just another male brothel scene because the presence of bondage and black leather serve to establish a more specialised menu of sadomasochist practices. It is impossible not to associate this SM presence with comics or cinema; impossible not to remember the sequences in *Pulp Fiction,* Tarantino's movie that converted the fancies of a couple of perverse sadists into an occasion for macabre humour.

In any event, in both paintings the sex of their personages has been transformed and this transexuality causes a disturbance in the relation between the work and the spectator. It may be that they continue to favour the fact that the spectator will be masculine but they have destabilised his gaze by offering a preferably homosexual, and not heterosexual, bias. There is clearly a humorous and sarcastic element in these which does not exclude the serious inferences that we can use to interpret *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon.* The humour reveals itself as a firm ally of the destabilizing gazes of the hegemonic interpretations and forces us to question ourselves, the nature of our gaze and the conventions about our sexuality.

Here the spectator is no longer a macho predator of female flesh, as apparently Picasso was, but what about female spectator? Perhaps now she is fully recognising her role as an accomplice of the protagonists. Whatever the case, both for him and for her, extra consideration on the nature of the conditions of their gaze is needed so that they can become totally conscious of their condition as spectator and voyeur.

I would not want to conclude the commentaries on "the young men" of Avignon without mentioning, albeit briefly, the load of subversion and irreverence they contain that points directly to discrediting the perhaps excessively entrenched Picasso myth. Above all because there are other artists who are currently working on the critical questioning of this "myth" as we shall see. In fact, parody and demythologization are what can be found in *The Modern Procession* (New York 2002) video by the Belgian artist Francis Alÿs[4] and in the collective workshop *Surviving October,* promoted in 2012 by the artists Rogelio López Cuenca and Elo Vega who have worked for many years on what has come to be known as the "Picassofication" of Malaga, the painter's birthplace that has had its rejoinder in the "Malaganization" of Picasso.

In 2002, when the MoMA of New York moved from its location in Manhattan to its new premises in Queens, for reasons we will see further on, Alÿs proposed to the board of trustees that a performance take place, with the public symbolically processing and carrying some of the masterpieces of the collection on their shoulders. Remembering here the context is important: prompted by the winds of change that were blowing in the critical discourse on Modernism at the close of the 20th century the great avant-garde institutions were reorganising their collections, as we have seen before. Thus, in 2000 the museum temporarily closed the doors of its premises in Manhattan to undertake architectural improvements as part of the process of renovation of its museology and museography. It had urgently to confront the critics who were saying that the influential discourse flowing from the museum had become so obsolete, so canonic, with such a narrowlackluster and authoritarian vision, that it had rightly earned the title of "The Kremlin of Modern Art." To postmodern eyes everything that stemmed from it appeared too much like mainstream: an inadvisable impression for a contemporary art centre with avant-garde vocation.

Alÿs proposed his performance in this context of reorganisation of the accumulated contemporary art collections and the updating of their discourses, basically sharing these critical points of view. Understandably his procession did not use the authentic works but was staged using reproductions of the iconic works in the museum where, naturally, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* occupied the place of honour. They were accompanied by a Giacometti sculpture, Marcel Duchamp's *Bicycle Wheel* and a work by the living artist Kiki Smith. From

[4] Download the video of the procession on http://francisalys.com/the-modern-procession/ (consulted 25.02.2017).

photographs and a video we can watch the young ladies in procession along the avenues, streets, tunnels and bridges of New York. Alÿs's proposal was, among others, a literal reproduction of one of the most famous quotes on *Les Demoiselles* that we owe to André Breton: "*Voilà le tableau qu'on promènerait, comme autrefois la Vierge de Cimabue, à travers les rue de notre capitale*!" (cit. in Dupuis-Labbé 2007, 134). Dated in 1924, it would now be revealed as the fulfillment of a prophecy. Nevertheless, the performance also contained a sarcastic commentary on the whole process of uncritical exaltation of 20th century avant-garde art. If the photographs and videos of the event transmitted to perfection the festive atmosphere, in the sketches and collages made for the project by the artist, an ironic or parodic character can be perceived. The transfer of the MoMA masterpieces emulated the way in which the Catholic Church processes its sacred images through the streets during Easter Week. The artist was inspired by the religious traditions of Latin-America and so, the demoiselles, the bicycle wheel and the other works were escorted by a specie of lay penitents, fanfares, horses and MoMA banners. In one of his collages, next to a drawing of the participants in procession along the route sketched on a map of New York, there is a reproduction of *Les Demoiselles* next to an image of the Virgin of Guadalupe, deeply venerated in Mexico where Alÿs, albeit born in Belgium, has lived and worked since 1986. Two kindred spirits and a warning wink against all uncritical consideration and glorification of modern art.

Something similar could be said of the collective workgroup who worked on the *Surviving October* studio project [Fig. 3], coordinated by Rogelio López Cuenca and Elo Vega (<http://elovega.net/surviving-october>). This project is part of a work in progress that proposes "a series or critical rereadings of the collective identity processes surrounding the figure of Picasso in the city of Malaga" (Vega 2012) in the context of their widespread use for selling the Malaga trademark in the global tourist market. The rampant and mythomaniac cultural activity happening around the figure of the "genius of Malaga," with the process of commercialization of culture and the unconditional surrender of the city to the contemporary tourist logic is identified (and condemned as reprehensible).

Arising from the *Surviving Picasso* initiative developed during 2012, the title of which (borrowed from the biography of Françoise Gilot, one of Picasso's partners) is more than eloquent, the *Surviving October* workshop became critically involved in the "Picassian October." This is an official commemoration of exhibitions and cultural activities centred round the painter that is celebrated yearly in Malaga to mark his October birthday. The collective proposed a kind of exhibition on the website http://www.malagana.com/surviving_picasso/intro.html, comprising the resemblance to an Advent calendar that offered a daily proposal on Picasso's work and his links to the city. Just as artistic proposals of the post-colonialists used *Les Demoiselles* to offer a critical observation on the stereotypes that linked blackness and sexuality, in this workshop Picasso's young prostitutes served as a base for critically considering the true state of prostitution in the modern world by contrasting the artistic image of the prostitute, usually

aseptic and neutralizing, with that of their actual condition and real problems. In this project *Les Demoiselles* occupied a place of honour, not as an object of general admiration but to express criticism on the use and abuse of the figure of the prostitute in the history of painting. This was particularly so in the avant-gardes where the availability of naked female bodies was exploited while systematically eluding the true condition of the women who worked as prostitutes at that time. Once again we observe by emphasising the female body, specifically that of prostitutes, it appears merely generic and allegorical, hiding reality. At the same time it contextualizes the problem of present day prostitution in the 21st century, in a southern European city like Malaga, affected by the economic crisis and appeals for solidarity with this group of workers against the repression they suffer from different municipal rulings. On the 3 October of this curious calendar on the web *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* appear to decry that the invasion of high art by prostitutes as objects of fantasy and admiration can only happen by socially degrading their flesh and blood until they become invisible, excluded and silenced. To do this the web for that day combined texts about modern-day prostitution with news items on the real situation and the actual criminalisation of prostitutes in Malaga, revealed to be linked to the gentrification process of the city, and illustrated with Picasso's erotic drawings. The 4 October presents an appeal to demonstrate indignation in the face of these circumstances by downloading and printing masks of the five young ladies' faces [Fig. 4]. The 9 October offers the possibility of downloading the slogan "We are all Demoiselles d'Avignon" in three languages—English, Spanish and French—to print on T-shirts and thus "show, wear and display dignity and dissent." This slogan is a fitting synthesis of the majority of contemporary artistic proposals: they invite us to experience putting ourselves in the place of the Demoiselles, as the subject and not restrict ourselves to being merely its passive spectators. All art-gazing does, after all, imply accepting the challenge to construct a renewed subjectivity.

We have looked at a very wide range of versions of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* in the repertory of contemporary artistic creation but those we have analysed are by no means all. Confronting them we come to the conclusion that the artists have devoted themselves, fundamentally, to reversing the wave of aggression that the conventional critique of the work has traditionally attributed to the prostitutes represented therein. Consequently, the aggression, according to the most recent versions, does not stem from the naked woman, let alone the painted prostitute. Rather it stems from the oppressive condition to which the real prostitute, and female subjects in general, were exposed. Almost all these versions of the young ladies plead for them to be freed from their condition, pinpointing the origin of their submission as much in Picasso the painter as in modern painting and the canonic critical discourse on Modernism until very recently. In short, it is directly a ferocious questioning of the very presuppositions on which modern art itself is founded.

Fig. 1. Derek Boshier, *Les Messieurs d'Avignon*, 2003. Website Derek Boshier: https://www.derekboshier.com/about-paris-winter-2003. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 2. Damien Elwes, *Picasso's studio at Bateau Lavoir 1908*, 2010, mixed media on canvas. Collection of Antonio Banderas. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 3. Rogelio López Cuenca y Elo Vega, Proyecto Surviving Picasso / Sobrevivir a Picasso October, 2014. Website: https://www.lopezcuenca.com/proyectos/surviving-october/octubre1.html#.

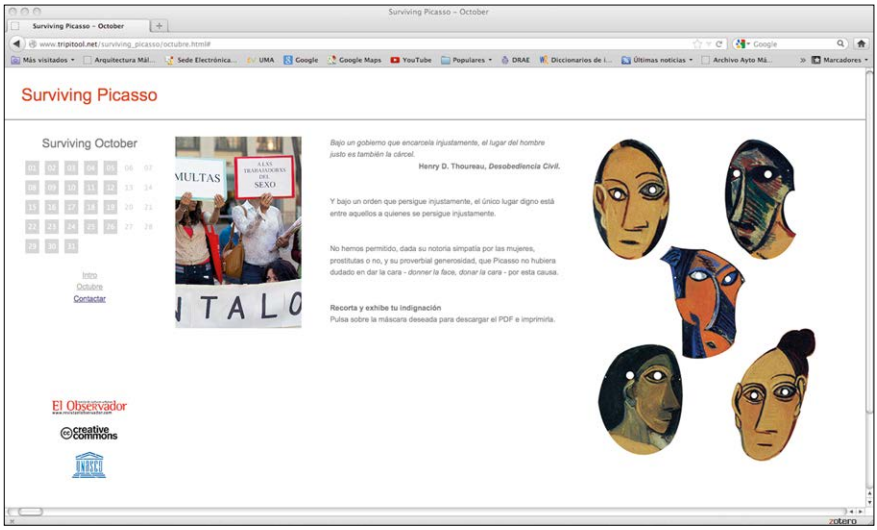

Fig. 4. Rogelio López Cuenca y Elo Vega Proyecto Surviving Picasso / Sobrevivir a Picasso October, 2014. Website: https://www.lopezcuenca.com/proyectos/surviving-october/octubre1.html#.

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Epilogue

As we explained at the beginning, this book mainly follows the evolution of British and American critique with only an occasional appearance of ideas from the European continent or other spheres. The mainstream critical discourse that we wanted to analyse pays little or no attention to authors from other latitudes, as if they were also "others". However I must stress here that the European critique often has meaningful, and on occasion, brilliant propositions to offer.

Walter Benjamin, referring to the hermeneutics of concealment once said: "Art criticism does not have to lift the veil. Rather, it must raise itself up to the true insight of beauty". Perhaps the art historian who has come closest to the true insight of the beauty of our *Demoiselles* is Ángel González who pointed out the scant affinity between Cubism and the nude because "Picasso—he stated—came to painting convinced of the body's infirmity", of a body that is decaying, that is withering, sick and rotting like apples on a plate. "Bodies exposed—he wrote—like the woman crouching in the *Demoiselles d'Avignon,* pierced by a shudder", and continues:

> Bodies made of tow and paraffin... Torches in the night. Bodies miraculously upright, like sand castles; fallen bodies that tumble like the sprockets on a millwheel newly put into action after long disuse; bodies of this world because they are made of its remains; explicit bodies because they have nothing to keep silent. Bodies made of such clarity that some are seen as shadows: dark, obscene. But obscenity cannot be an attribute of the burning circuit of desire (González 2000, 329).

Despite all of which the painting continues to be an enigma.

Maite Méndez Baiges, University of Malaga, Spain, mendez@uma.es, 0000-0002-0762-7004

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Maite Méndez Baiges is full professor of XXth Century Art at the University of Málaga. She's the author of: *Arte escrita. Texto, imagen y género en el arte contemporáneo* (Comares, Granada, 2017); *Camuflaje. Engaño y ocultación en el arte contemporáneo*, (Siruela, Madrid, 2007); and *Modernidad y tradición en la obra de Giorgio de Chirico*, (UNAM, México D.F., 2001).

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