

Barradas' Vibrationism and its Catalan Context¹

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Abstract

Rafael Barradas' Vibrationism is often recognised, together with Planism and Ultraism, as one of the first avant-garde movements to emerge in Spain. However, little attention has been paid to its intellectual roots and its Catalan and European context. This paper will examine the birth of Vibrationism as the Uruguayan painter's response to his contact both with the European avant-garde, in particular Futurism and Simultaneism, and especially with the Catalan context in which it appeared. The brief story of the movement shows us how some of the more consistent answers to the pictorial issues raised by the European avant-garde of the 1910s were to be found in what has traditionally been understood as its periphery.

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Introduction

[1] Vibrationism occupies a particular place in the history of the many avant-garde artistic movements. It was the first *-ism* created by the Uruguayan painter Rafael Barradas (1890-1929) who, as it turned out, was its only practitioner (although Joaquín Torres-García did feel very close to it for a while), and it exerted a great influence on other Spanish artists. From the very beginning, most art critics agreed that Vibrationism was the result of Barradas' own personal understanding of Futurism, Simultaneism and, to a lesser extent, Cubism.² Having adopted a similar view, most art historians have also seen his Vibrationist work as having been influenced by the

¹ This article is a revised and extended version of the paper "Noucentisme and the Avant-Garde: The Case of Barradas, Vibrationism and Torres-García" presented at the international conference *Southern Modernisms: Critical Stances Through Regional Appropriations*, ESAP, Oporto, 19-21 February 2015.

European avant-garde.³ However, the movement originated and developed in Barcelona, in a very specific historical and cultural context, and this article, by reviewing the relationship between Barradas and the Catalonia of 1917-1918, aims to show how the birth of Vibrationism was very closely connected to its Catalan context.

Barradas and Vibrationism

[2] Barradas came to Europe in December 1913 and, until May 1914, he travelled to Paris, Switzerland and Milan where he discovered the works and texts of the European avant-garde, especially in relation to Futurism, Cubism and Simultaneism; and his discoveries were immediately reflected in his painting. At the end of May or the beginning of June 1914 he undertook his first visit to Barcelona, staying till the end of that year when he moved to Zaragoza. In this first Catalan period he published some drawings in the periodical *L'Esquella de la Torratxa*,⁴ but there is no other evidence of any further contact with the Catalan artistic scene. It was not until his second stay in Barcelona, which ran from the end of February or the beginning of March 1916 to August 1918, that the implications of what he had seen and learnt during his European journey would find full expression in his work.

[3] At some point between the end of 1917 and the beginning of 1918 Barradas began to use the concept of Vibrationism to refer to his new artistic proposal; it lasted until 1920. Even though the connection to the aforementioned European avant-garde movements is clear, the fact that

² There are some examples of contemporary criticism of Barradas' work: "He is almost completely at one with Italian futurism: the portrait of the painter J. Torres-García has, above all, a gracile intent." F.V., "Les exposicions," in: *La Revista*, 1 April 1918, 114; "We must look, then, to the epigones of Cubism and the French simultaneists for evocative references in order to characterise a new artist such as Barradas." Guillermo de Torre, "El vibracionismo de Barradas," in: *Perseo* 1 (1919), 216-221, here 221; "Perhaps it would suit Barradas to be labelled a simultaneist; but we do not know if, in effect, he would not assign any other label to himself." Juan de la Encina, "Notas sueltas. Exposición Barradas," in: *España* 255 (1920), 12-13, here 12. - Unless otherwise stated, all translations are mine.

³ Three examples: Raquel Pereda, *Barradas*, Montevideo 1989; Jaime Brihuega, "Saturn al sífo. Barradas i l'avantguarda espanyola," in: *Barradas. Exposició antològica, 1890-1929*, eds. Jaime Brihuega and Concha Lomba, L'Hospitalet del Llobregat 1993, 13-45; and, in the same volume, Eugenio Carmona, "Rafael Barradas i l' 'art nou' a Espanya, 1917-1925," 107-139. The most significant exception to this general view is that of David Jared Morse, *Rafael Barradas and Vibracionismo: Science and Spirituality in Spanish Avant-Garde Art*, M.A. thesis, University of Texas, 2001. The connections he draws between Barradas and the philosophical and scientific trends of the time in Spain, particularly regarding Bergsonism, do not contradict, but rather supplement the arguments in this article.

⁴ Rafael Santos Torroella, "Autoretrat de Barradas. Els dibuixos de Barradas a l'Esquella de la Torratxa," in: *Barradas. Exposició antològica, 1890-1929*, eds. J. Brihuega and C. Lomba, L'Hospitalet del Llobregat 1993, 55-63.

three years had passed between his arrival in Europe and the presentation of his first Vibrationist works makes its seemingly sudden appearance somewhat difficult to explain. Vibrationism did not appear from a void, and it can only be understood by taking its theoretical and aesthetic context into consideration.

[4] It should be noted at this point that the concept of "vibration" was widely recognised and had attained much importance in the avant-garde artistic scene, mainly in Futurist artistic theory, but also in the work of artists such as Delaunay, Kupka or Kandinsky.⁵ It has been widely reported by different authors that at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, the concept of vibration was understood as an intangible and invisible phenomenon that facilitated the connection between elements that were different in nature.⁶ Particularly, the essential vibratory unity between sound and colour that some scientists had "discovered" would seem to have supported the idea that there existed a universal harmony of an essentially vibratory nature. This powerful idea contributed to the broad use of the concept of vibration in the artistic theory of the time, particularly in the Symbolist milieu, and also later in the avant-garde groups, who adamantly argued that the issue of relationships between the different arts was of major importance. Increasingly, the concept of vibration extended its meaning until it came to express a true "monism of sensations",⁷ that is to say, a unity not just between what the different physical senses perceive, but also between the perceiver and what is perceived; it is in this sense especially that the concept of vibration became a key aspect in Futurist literature. In short, the concept of vibration was used by the European avant-garde movements with different meanings, all of which were mutually related: first of all, to refer to the physical phenomenology of light and to the assumed vibration of colours; second, to establish a field of comparison between light and sound which would become the starting point for all kinds

⁵ Maria Lluïsa Faxedas Brujats, "El vibracionismo de Rafael Barradas: genealogía de un concepto," in: *Archivo Español de Arte* 88, n. 350 (2015), 281-298. See also Morse, *Rafael Barradas and Vibracionismo*, and David Jared Morse, "Art-Evolució and Vibracionismo: Torres-García, Barradas, and an Art of Higher Consciousness," in: *Barcelona and Modernity: Picasso, Gaudí, Miró, Dalí*, eds. William H. Robinson, Jordi Falgàs and Carmen Belén Lord, New Haven/London 2006, 333-337.

⁶ Georges Roque, "¿Qué onda? La abstracción en el arte y la ciencia," in: *Arte y ciencia. XXIV Coloquio internacional de Historia del Arte*, ed. Peter Krieger, México 2002, 169-192; Georges Roque, "Ce grand monde des vibrations qui est à la base de l'univers," in: *Aux origines de l'abstraction, 1800-1914*, eds. Serge Lemoine et al., Paris 2003, 51-67; Linda Dalrymple-Henderson, "Vibratory Modernism: Boccioni, Kupka and the Ether of Space," in: *From Energy to Information. Representation in Science and Technology, Art and Literature*, eds. Bruce Clark and Linda Dalrymple-Henderson, Stanford 2002, 126-149.

⁷ Roque, "Ce grand monde des vibrations", 54.

of research into synaesthesia; and finally, to describe a certain connexion or emotional unity between the individual and his or her environment.

[5] In Barradas' Vibrationism we can find echoes of all of these ideas, even if it is almost impossible to know exactly how he came to discover them, besides his already cited contacts with different European avant-garde movements. Although he continued to think about these issues⁸ during his stay in Zaragoza, the work he produced there can be described as both Symbolist and naturalistic.⁹ It would not be until his return to Barcelona in 1916 that he would feel the impulse to create a new artistic proposal of his own. It seems important to ask what factors played a role in this new approach. One of the most significant would surely be his connection with the *Galeríes Dalmau*; this space promoted avant-garde exhibitions by several important European artists who were then refugees in the city, and it was there that Barradas had the opportunity to see, for instance, works by Charchoune, Gleizes and the Delaunays.¹⁰ Undoubtedly, this reconnection with the latest European avant-garde trends would help him recover his own previous avant-garde pictorial practice.

Torres-García, a Vibrationist painter?

[6] 1917 was a crucial year in the artistic development of the Catalan-Uruguayan painter Joaquín Torres-García (1874-1949). Beginning with the important lecture he gave at the *Galeríes Dalmau* on February 22nd, and ending with the cancellation of his commission to paint the frescoes at the *Palau de la Generalitat*, he went through a period in which he increasingly distanced himself from *Noucentisme* as a collective and ideological project.¹¹

⁸ For example, the critic Ángel Abella would write about Barradas in 1915: "He sees colour in everything: in the sounds of words, in the harmony of a sonata, in the rhythm of a dance, in the noise of the tram as it slides over the rails. He is overwhelmed by colour." Ángel Abella, "Pérez Barradas," in: *Paraninfo* 47 (1915), 3-4, here 4.

⁹ Concha Lomba, "Barradas a Aragón," in: *Barradas. Exposició antològica, 1890-1929*, eds. Jaime Brihuega and Concha Lomba, L'Hospitalet del Llobregat 1993, 65-82.

¹⁰ Josep Casamartina, "Serge Charchoune y su arabesco," in: *Serge Charchoune, 1889-1975. Entre Dadá y la abstracción*, Madrid 2004, 51-97; Pascal Rousseau, "La Galería Dalmau. La introducción de la abstracción en Cataluña y la vanguardia durante la primera Guerra Mundial," in: *París - Barcelona, 1888-1937*, Barcelona/Paris 2005, 327-337.

¹¹ Noucentisme was a Catalan cultural movement of the early 20th century (1906-1923), that originated as a reaction against Modernisme and the *fin-de-siècle* Decadentism. The term was coined by Eugeni d'Ors in 1906, playing with both senses of the Catalan word "nou": "nine" (analogous to the Italian *Novecento*) and "new". Noucentisme was in fact a political and artistic project, involving both the Catalan bourgeoisie and the artists and intellectuals that agreed to collaborate on its Regenerationist aims. Besides its anti-Romanticism and anti-individualism, Noucentisme is characterised by a collective idea of the Catalan nation rooted in its

This personal evolution was reflected in many articles he published during that year, and especially in a book of fictional correspondence tellingly entitled *El descubrimiento de sí mismo. Cartas a Julio, que tratan de cosas muy importantes para los artistas* [Self-Discovery. Letters to Julio Dealing With Very Important Things for Artists]. In it, he wrote:

*Forget the past, including your own. Look upon it as a dead thing that must have nothing to do with the present so that none of that past will overcome you, and, thus, the originality that shall sprout from you at all times, as from a fountain, shall have the freshness of living things. (...) In the end, my friend Julio, be a new man in every moment, and don't bother to check whether or not this new man looks like the old man, the dead man, the man from yesterday or the one from an hour ago!*¹²

[7] It was in 1917 that Torres-García and Barradas met for the first time, an encounter that would have a lasting impact on both artists.¹³ This is evidenced by the article on Barradas that Torres-García published in the Uruguayan newspaper *El Siglo*, in which he describes him as a "painter of the present time".¹⁴ Years later he would write about this encounter having left "such an imprint within me, all of it, that for a long time I heard that divine music of Barradas".¹⁵ The impact was powerful in both directions: that same month of August, Torres-García had published an article in the avant-garde journal *Un enemig del poble. Fulla de subversió espiritual* [An Enemy of the People. Gazette of Spiritual Subversion], which consisted of three separate pieces entitled "A Vibration", "A Scream", "An Intelligent Laugh".¹⁶ It began with these words: "A vibration, an instant, an agreement of ideas and of words and sounds, on either side of nothingness." The appearance of the word "vibration" in precisely the same month that Barradas and Torres-

Classicist past and its Mediterranean context; other key concepts of the movement, both in its political and aesthetic sense, are those of Arbitrarism, Civilism and Imperialism. Its theoretical precepts were developed in tandem with the deployment of the Catalan institutions, made possible by the creation of the *Mancomunitat* (1914). Although its aims were never completely fulfilled, it exerted a long-lasting influence on Catalan culture and society and contributed to its renovation. For a broad overview of the movement, see *El Noucentisme: un projecte de modernitat*, exh. cat., Barcelona 1994.

¹² Joaquín Torres-García, *El descubrimiento de sí mismo. Cartas a Julio, que tratan de cosas muy importantes para los artistas*, Girona 1917, 25.

¹³ As recorded by their correspondence; see Pilar Garcia-Sedas, *Joaquim Torres-Garcia i Rafael Barradas. Un diàleg escrit (1918-1928)*, Barcelona 1994.

¹⁴ Joaquín Torres-García, "Los artistas uruguayos en Europa. Rafael Barradas," in: *El siglo* (24 November 1917), 3.

¹⁵ Joaquín Torres-García, *Universalismo constructivo* [Buenos Aires 1944], 2 vols., Madrid 1984, here vol. 2, 475.

¹⁶ Joaquín Torres-García, "Una vibració - un crit - un riure intel·ligent," in: *Un enemig del poble* 5 (1917), 1.

García first met is surprising and significant. In its use by Torres-García¹⁷ we can find echoes of the notion of the simultaneity of sensations and ideas which, as we have seen, some European avant-gardists had associated with the concept of vibration. Undoubtedly, the use of this word by Torres-García would have been a source of inspiration for Barradas that would have helped him choose the concept of Vibrationism to define his work during this period.

[8] Even though it is obvious that Torres-García's painting had already begun to evolve and to move away from classicist iconography in 1916, it is also true that his meeting with Barradas helped to encourage his own research and to get forward on the new path. Torres-García's work from autumn 1917 and the first months of 1918 has sometimes been defined as Vibrationist.¹⁸ It certainly shares with Barradas' oeuvre an interest in the modern city and everyday life: cafés, tramways, wagons, crowded streets, posters, etc. All of these motifs are combined on a flat surface, without using perspective, as a collage. But it is also true that there existed important differences between the two artists, as Torres-García himself summarized years later:

*Something which is ours! Something identical and yet very different at the same time. [...] Something radical separated us deep down: He conceived a dynamic painting, because, as a whole, it was based on a real event, including the plastic aspect, real activity of people or things, qualities, sounds, noises, character, moral expression (drama), etc.; whereas I was drawn to something static, like architecture, to the idea of the thing, to proportion as a foundation, to what is constant, to the law, to what is general; and not so much to the modern aspect, but rather to this centuries-old human tradition.*¹⁹

[9] The difference between them is what separates a dynamic Simultaneism linked to Futurism, on one side, and a Structuralism with Cubist roots, on the other. The similarities and differences are more obvious if we compare two of their most important works from the Vibrationist period, Barradas' *Street of Barcelona* (1918) (Fig. 1) and Torres-García's *Vibrationist Composition* (1918) (Fig. 2). They share iconographic elements linked to the modern city (the clock, the carriage wheels, the presence of letters and numbers, etc.) – a theme that Torres-García had already enthused about in his February

¹⁷ "Vibration" is a word that Torres-García would use very often from this moment on throughout his life; in his autobiography *Historia de mi vida* (Barcelona 1990), for instance, it appears everywhere, and in *Universalismo constructivo*, there's even a chapter entitled "El Arte en la vibración de hoy" ["Art in Today's Vibration"]. Torres-García, *Universalismo constructivo*, vol. I, 174-180.

¹⁸ Juan Manuel Bonet, "Alrededor del reloj: Joaquín Torres-García, Rafael Barradas, Joan Salvat-Papasseit," in: *Joaquín Torres-García, 1874-1949*, ed. Emanuel Guigon, Barcelona 2003, 88-108, here 98.

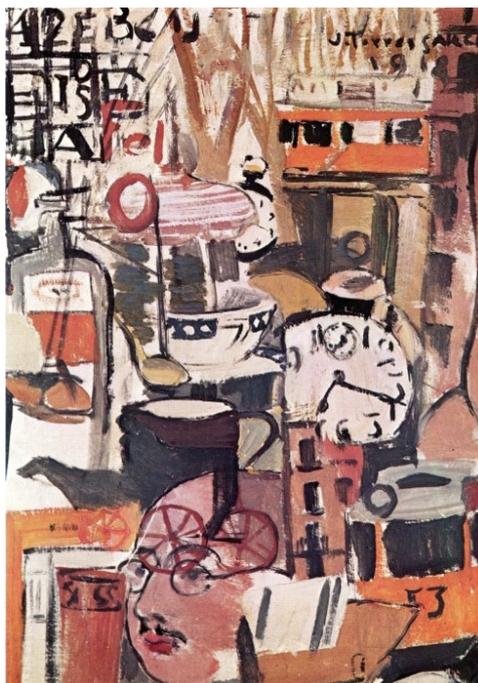
¹⁹ Torres-García, *Universalismo constructivo*, vol. 1, 475.

lecture.²⁰ But this does not hide the important differences in the conception, composition and execution of the two works. In his watercolour, Barradas endeavours to visualize the diversity of the modern urban experience as it is seen in a specific moment via the simultaneous rendering of different, fragmented elements that recall many sensual perceptions, all painted in bright colours. Even the human figures are almost unrecognisable, lost among the multi-faceted reality the artist is trying to convey. Meanwhile, in his oil painting, Torres-García places the elements he has picked up from reality in a solid structure, relying more on juxtaposition than on simultaneity. With a more homogeneous palette of colours, he reinforces the fact that what matters here is the composition. And the objects represented, including a portrait, are individually depicted, not broken into intersecting planes.



1 Rafael Barradas, *Calle de Barcelona*, 1918, oil on canvas, 50.7 x 60.5 cm. Museo Patio Herreriano, Valladolid (© C.A.C. SGL Carbón S.A.)

²⁰ Torres-García, "Conferència a Can Dalmau" [originally published in *La Veu de Catalunya*, Barcelona, 19 March and 9 and 16 April 1917], in: idem, *Escrits sobre art*, ed. Francesc Fontbona, Barcelona 1980, 179-185.



2 Joaquín Torres-García, *Vibrationist Composition*, 1918, oil on canvas, 50 x 35 cm. Private collection (reproduced with permission)

[10] According to Robert Lubar, the essential points of contact between both artists (besides their obvious personal affinity) are not to be found in style or even iconography, but rather in a common ideological substratum which holds that social freedom can be placed on the same level as creative freedom. They are also to be found in their keeping back from the political content of art as it had materialized in the Noucentista mythology, and, instead, in their emphasizing the autonomy of the work of art, as they were both leaning towards certain conceptions of the European avant-garde.²¹ Nevertheless, Torres-García himself would eventually prefer to use the concept of Plasticism to refer to his work of the time rather than that of Vibrationism.²²

[11] Not only was Torres-García not a Vibrationist painter, but his transition from *Noucentisme* to the avant-garde never implied a complete rejection of all of the Noucentistas' artistic principles; concepts such as architecture or construction, for instance, would reappear even in the texts he wrote for the journal *Cercle et carré* in 1930.²³ Nevertheless, his personal influence on

²¹ Robert Lubar, "Art-Evolució: Joaquín Torres-García y la formación social de la vanguardia en Barcelona," in: *Barradas - Torres-García*, exh. cat., ed. Galería Guillermo de Osma, Madrid 1991, 19-32.

²² For instance, in the "Note to the public" by Torres-García that was reproduced in an unattributed article entitled "Les Expositions. Exposició d'En Torres-García i exposició Barradas" in *La Veu de Catalunya* of 3 December 1917, 6, he talks about "biological plasticism" to refer to both his work and Barradas'.

²³ Marie-Aline Prat, *Peinture et avant-garde au seuil des années 30*, Lausanne 1984.

Barradas was strong, and their relationship was crucial in helping the younger painter establish and develop his own artistic ideas.

Barradas and Lagar

[12] Another important issue to consider is Barradas' relationship with the Castilian painter Celso Lagar (1891-1966). Lagar had travelled to Paris as a sculptor in 1911, and he had been in contact there with almost all the avant-garde trends of the moment.²⁴ The outbreak of the First World War forced him to go back to Spain, and he settled in Barcelona at the end of 1914. This same year, he devoted himself to painting rather than to sculpture, and he immediately engaged in significant activity that led to three one-man shows in 1915 (at the *Galeries Dalmau*, *Athenea* and *La Cantonada*) and subsequent shows in the *Galeries Laietanes* in 1916, 1917 and 1918. He also exhibited in Madrid, where he lived from November 1916²⁵ to May or June 1917, and in Bilbao, before he moved back to Paris for good in 1919.

[13] A drawing by Lagar dedicated to Barradas, which has been dated to the year 1916, adds support to the idea that Barradas and Lagar first met at some point between March and November 1916 while Lagar was in Barcelona and the Uruguayan artist, who had just moved back from Zaragoza, was going through a period of very little artistic output (indeed, no works by Barradas have been reliably dated to the year 1916).²⁶

[14] Both painters had much in common: They were almost the same age, they had been in contact with avant-garde art in Paris, and neither of them was Catalan but here they were in Catalonia, struggling for artistic recognition. At the very latest, they had met by the end of spring or the beginning of summer 1917, when Lagar was back in Barcelona. The fact that Torres-García in his memoirs erroneously reports that Lagar took Barradas to visit him in his home in Terrassa for the first time²⁷ suggests that by the end of the summer they all had met each other (De facto it was the poet Salvat-Papasseit who brought Barradas to Torres-García's house, and it probably was Lagar who introduced Barradas to Salvat-Papasseit, whom he may have met at the *Galeries Laietanes*).

[15] When they were first acquainted, Lagar's involvement in exhibitions and the critical attention he had already received placed him in a far better position than Barradas, who was almost completely unknown. Despite this, the relationship they established in their Catalan period, in 1916 or 1917,

²⁴ Isabel García, *Celso Lagar*, Madrid 2010.

²⁵ Isabel García, *Orígenes de las vanguardias artísticas en Madrid* [PhD thesis, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 1998], Madrid 2003, 444.

²⁶ Pereda, *Barradas*, 62.

²⁷ Joaquín Torres-García, *Historia de mi vida*, 136. Lubar would later show that according to Torres-García's diary, it was Salvat-Papasseit who would take Barradas to his house for the first time. Lubar, "Art-evolució," 26.

until they met again in Madrid in 1918, played a key role in the development of their respective careers. In 1917 Barradas resumed his artistic activity, participating in four exhibitions: a cartoonists' exhibition in Madrid; a collective exhibition of *affiches* in Barcelona;²⁸ the exhibition organized by the *Galerias Dalmau* to honour French artists (to which he sent two drawings), and, most importantly, also in the *Galerias Dalmau*, the exhibition that he had in December 1917 together with Torres-García where a still nameless Vibrationism was shown publicly for the first time.

[16] One of the aspects of Lagar's work that would interest Barradas was the fact that he had already developed his own vanguard stance, called Planism. Its birth is attested to by a very brief text that heads the catalogue of his 1915 exhibition in the *Galerias Dalmau*: "Beyond the feeling, the colour and the form contained within planism and volume are the elements of fine art." This is the only theoretical statement about Planism offered by its author and only practitioner. It seems that Planism was born in Paris,²⁹ but no mention of it was made in the titles of the works shown in this first exhibition. However, in the exhibition that Lagar opened in September 1916 in the *Galerias Laietanes*, he exhibited a work entitled *Light Essay for Planism*; and in 1918, he had another show in the same gallery where there was a section specifically called "Planism", with 13 works, one of them being the famous painting *Raid - Guynemer Somme Alsace* (1917), dedicated to the poet and art critic Josep Maria Junoy.³⁰ The brief statement about Planism, along with the works we can clearly associate with it, suggest that it was born from Lagar's own assimilation of the Parisian avant-garde. Even if he was hesitant to embrace Cubism, he assumed some of its principles such as the negation of perspective and three-dimensionality and the emphasis on a constructive composition rooted in Cézanne's work. To this he would add the Futurist dynamism and deconstruction of planes and a richness of colour inspired by Gauguin, references that, together with Fauvism, were often mentioned by his critics.³¹

[17] Lagar's invention of Planism may have exerted a positive influence on Barradas' process of developing his own Vibrationism; and under Lagar's influence it was easier for him to reconnect with his own avant-garde works once he had started to paint again in Barcelona. At the same time, Barradas' first one-man show held in the *Galerias Laietanes* in March 1918, where he

²⁸ According to Pereda, *Barradas*, 66.

²⁹ This is apparent from the fact that Lagar invited other artists living there, such as the Catalan painter Domènec Carles, to join him in the movement; see Santos Torroella, *Revisiones*, 162.

³⁰ Junoy had published his calligram dedicated to the famous French fighter pilot Guynemer on October 6, 1917, in the journal *Iberia*, 9.

³¹ Romà Jori, "Una exposició: Celso Lagar, pintor 'fauve'," in: *Vell i nou* 34 (1916), 212-215; Joan Sacs, "La pintura de Celso Lagar," in: *La Publicidad*, 30 September 1916, 1.

presented a full vision of Vibrationism, may have encouraged Lagar to present the section devoted to Planism in his own exhibition later that year. Planism and Vibrationism show certain affinities in the colour intensity of the images, their modern, urban iconography, and the use of words and numbers written in print letters; in fact, some critics used the concepts of Vibrationism and Planism to refer to either artist's work.³² Lagar's paintings, however, do not express the synaesthetic dimension that is so important in Barradas' work; Planism is also much more structured and constructively organized than Vibrationism.

[18] The consolidation and artistic development of the two friends' careers took place in Barcelona and is closely related to their meeting and the relationship they established within the Catalan context. Lagar's critical reception in Barcelona, however, did not exclusively assign him to avant-garde circles. As happened with other artists, including Picasso, there were attempts to associate his work with Noucentisme. Eugeni d'Ors (under his pseudonym Xènius), for instance, wrote a positive review of Lagar's 1915 exhibition in which, even if he did not adopt him as an outright Noucentista, he pointed out certain values in Lagar's painting that revealed his own interest in Cubism, which d'Ors and others had previously related to Noucentisme.³³ The connection between Cubism and Noucentisme was established precisely through notions such as structure and construction. According to d'Ors, Lagar, though he might have seen himself as a rupturist, bore with him the virtues of the Castilian and Spanish tradition which could at the same time be interpreted from a modern point of view: "And if world literature can show us a great cubist, well, he would be Castilian and his name was Don Francisco de Quevedo." D'Ors discovers in Lagar a "solid and very modern willingness toward construction". The article ends with a warning addressed to Sunyer and other Mediterraneanist artists: They should not get distracted because, as shown by Lagar and Picasso, "Although the light may still come from the North, it may be that the chariot of the light shall reach us pulled by the fiery young colts of Western breeds."³⁴

[19] This positive attention expressed by a person as influential as d'Ors probably encouraged Lagar to make approaches to Noucentisme, as demonstrated by some of his 1916 drawings, or by paintings like *Pastor en el camp* (1915) or *Maternity* (1915), in which Sunyer's influence is evident. There is further evidence of this rapprochement: In Girona, he exhibited his work in *Athenea*, a space consecrated to Noucentisme, and published an

³² For example, Eduard Puig (pseudonym of Joaquim Folguera) mentions Vibrationism in his criticism of Lagar's 1918 exhibition. Eduard Puig, "Celso Lagar," in: *La Revista* 63 (1918), 153; some years later, Planism would be used to talk about Barradas' work, and he himself even entitled one of his drawings *Guignol planista*; see García, *Lagar*, 81.

³³ Mercè Vidal, *1912: l'exposició cubista de les Galeries Dalmau*, Barcelona 1996.

³⁴ Eugeni d'Ors, "Las obras y los días. Celso Lagar," in: *España* 2 (1915), 4.

article in the journal *Cultura*, "El renacimiento del arte después del cubismo,"³⁵ which he dedicated to Xènius. In this article, Lagar attempted to theorize his artistic proposal (albeit without mentioning Planism), relating his work to Cézanne's and, like him, appointing himself the primitive of a new art. Lagar uses concepts such as Cubism, architecture and structure, together with other, more personal ideas, which make the text somewhat confusing. He tries to express the idea that painting, which is flat and two-dimensional, must endeavour to capture volume while at the same time making its flatness clear, anticipating a key idea in later discussions about modern painting.

[20] Lagar's proximity to Noucentisme – as superficial as it may have been for a painter who is usually discussed in the context of avant-gardism – is not at all exceptional, considering the characteristics of the Catalan artistic scene of the time.³⁶ Noucentisme aimed at assimilating almost everything that could be deemed 'modern' or else construed as an attack on the *fin-de-siècle* decadentism, and this could include a wide range of art, from Cézanne to certain aspects of Cubism. The barrier that isolated Noucentisme from the avant-garde was more porous than may have seemed at first glance, especially around 1917; if, on the one hand, we can clearly identify compositional influences from Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J.)* (1907) in such an iconic work as Sunyer's *Cala Forn* (1917),³⁷ we can also, on the other hand, find the poet Salvat-Papasseit dedicating a poem, *Lindòleum* (1919), to Xènius. And in the avant-garde journals that flourished in Barcelona at this time, it was not uncommon to find contributions by prominent figures of Noucentisme.³⁸ The fact that Barradas' work, unlike that of Torres-García and Lagar, could never be approached from a Noucentista point of view, explains to a large extent the poor reception of Vibrationism when it first appeared in Barcelona in 1917.

The intellectual and artistic context: Junoy, Solé de Sojo, Salvat-Papasseit and Miró

[21] Another example of the heterogeneous nature of the artistic and ideological activities of the contemporaries concerns the careers of Josep Maria Junoy (1887-1955) and his friend and collaborator, Vicenç Solé de Sojo (1891-1963). Their work sheds light on another key aspect of the context

³⁵ Celso Lagar, "El renacimiento del arte después del cubismo," in: *Cultura* 6 (1915), 181-182.

³⁶ Joaquim Molas, *La literatura catalana d'avant-guarda: 1916-1938*, Barcelona 1983, 35.

³⁷ Maria Josep Balsach, "L'atzur i les arrels noucentistes de Joan Miró," in: *La imaginació noucentista*, ed. Antoni Marí, Barcelona 2009, 257-267.

³⁸ Eugenio Carmona, "Novecentismo y la vanguardia en las artes plásticas españolas, 1906-1926," in: *La generación del 14. Entre el Novecentismo y la vanguardia*, ed. Fundación Mapfre, Madrid 2002, 13-67.

that allowed the emergence of Vibrationism. Junoy's position as a poet and art critic in the 1910s has been already comprehensively studied,³⁹ and this has helped us to understand that his closeness to Noucentisme implied neither a complete assumption of its ideas nor a total identification with its aesthetic model. Solé de Sojo, a much lesser known poet and art critic, began his poetic career as a Parnassianist, then moved closer to Noucentisme, and eventually, around 1917-1918, stood alongside Junoy as a practitioner and defender of the avant-garde; he wrote a number of visual poems that are important examples of the genre in Catalan literature.⁴⁰

[22] Although limited in extent, their work between the end of 1916 and the first months of 1918 offered a real critical context for the avant-garde artists operating in Barcelona. Both contributed to the newspaper *El poble català*; Solé de Sojo published his art criticism under the penname *Florián* from the beginning of 1917, and on 14 December 1916 he also began an anonymous daily column called "Ecos". In the same newspaper, Junoy published some of his art criticism in a poetic form, which would then be republished in the avant-garde journal he promoted, *Trossos* (originally *Troços*); the name of this journal appears in at least two of Barradas' works of 1917, *Afiche* (Fig. 3) and *Acuarela* (Museo Nacional de Artes Visuales, Montevideo). In this journal, we can find some of Solé de Sojo's avant-garde poems alongside drawings by Lagar and Torres-García, and brief critical reviews of exhibitions by Barradas and Lagar. The concept of vibration appears quite often in the texts of both poets – always with positive connotations,⁴¹ even before Torres-García mentioned it in *Un enemic del poble*⁴² or Barradas himself adopted it.⁴³

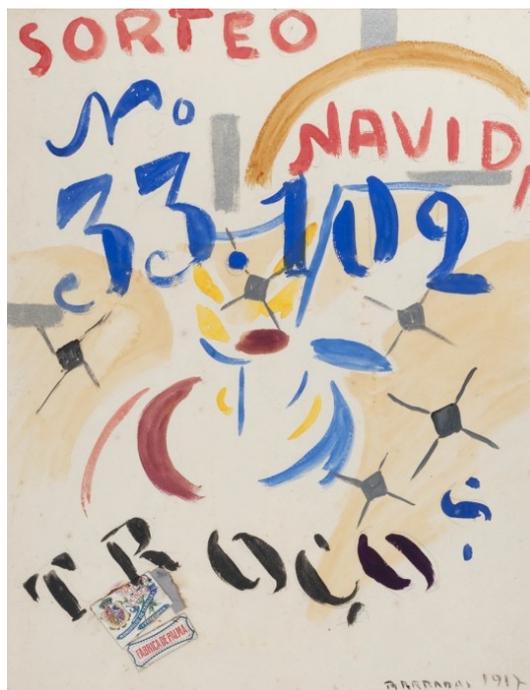
³⁹ Jaume Vallcorba, "Introducció," in: Josep Maria Junoy, *Obra poética*, Barcelona 1984, lxx-lxxiv.

⁴⁰ Molas, *La literatura catalana d'avant-guarda*, 177-184.

⁴¹ In the *Ecos* column of February 28, 1917, 3, Solé de Sojo mentions that a French newspaper had described Barcelona as a "vibrant" great city, and not only did he consider this to be "praise [...] that greatly excites us", but added that the French journalist could search every dictionary he could find and "he would never have found another word as flattering".

⁴² Torres-García, "Una vibració - un crit - un riure intel·ligent," in: *Un enemic del poble* 5 (1917), 1.

⁴³ Faxedas, "El vibracionismo de Rafael Barradas", 284.



3 Rafael Barradas, *Afiche*, 1917, collage on paper, 44 x 34 cm. Museo Nacional de Artes Visuales, Montevideo (reproduced with permission)

[23] These references to vibrations appeared at the same time as other comments that both Junoy and Solé de Sojo made concerning Cubism, Futurism, and whether a confluence between the two movements was appropriate.⁴⁴ Although their ideas on the possible convergence of the two most important trends in the European avant-garde of the time seem to be slightly contradictory,⁴⁵ they definitely contributed to the diffusion of both movements in Catalonia, to the point that Solé de Sojo even compared Sunyer to the "vibrant" Boccioni and Severini, considering him close to Futurism and crediting him with an artistic vision that would seem more typical of Barradas' Vibrationism.⁴⁶ It's also worth remembering that, as an

⁴⁴ Vallcorba, "Introducció", lxxv-lxxiv.

⁴⁵ In the "Ecos" column in *El poble català* of February 1, 1917, 2, Solé de Sojo writes that "a little cubism and futurism is necessary in a country in which three quarters of its [artistic] production is tainted with the sin of Olotism [...]," but in his critical review of Helene Grunhoff's exhibition, published in March 29, 1917, 2, he condemns what he sees as her attempt to fuse both Cubism and Futurism in her work.

⁴⁶ "This is our *Carrer Nou* [new street] *de la Rambla*. To paint it, you need to follow the ways of Futurism [...] you sit at a table in any one of the innumerable terrace bars that populate the *Carrer Nou*. After a while, the planes begin to change and move themselves about and you do not know if the candle is steel or the steel is a candle. The table, round, becomes a well. In the cheeks of a passing woman there is a jeweller's display-case. No one knows where the guitars in their cases come from. The tankard of beer you're drinking grows and grows to an immense size. A tram arrives and pulls into the tankard of beer. The tram guard appears with a candle

art critic, Solé de Sojo wrote positive reviews on exhibitions by Lagar and Barradas as well as by Torres-García, whom he had already supported in 1913.⁴⁷ Junoy also wrote about Barradas,⁴⁸ and his relationship with Lagar is proved by the aforementioned Guynemer painting which Lagar dedicated to the poet.

[24] Another very important relationship for Barradas was his friendship with the poet Joan Salvat-Papasseit (1894-1924), who, together with J. V. Foix, was one of the most important Catalan avant-garde poets. He was the editor of the aforementioned avant-garde journal *Un enemic del poble* (1917-1919), a key publication in our understanding of the artistic context in which the incipient Catalan avant-garde was trying to develop.⁴⁹ Torres-García was a frequent collaborator of this periodical, publishing up to eight theoretical texts (including his important manifesto "Art-Evolució" [Art-Evolution] in November 1917) and a number of illustrations; drawings by Celso Lagar appeared twice, and drawings by Barradas three times.⁵⁰ It is worth remembering that the title of a series of haikus that Salvat would later include in his poetry book *L'irradiador del port i les gavines* [The Irradiator of the Port and the Seagulls] (1921) was, precisely, "Vibrations". Salvat, Torres and Barradas may have been influenced in their use of the concept of vibration by a text by the French author Paul-Louis Couchod, "Les épigrammes lyriques du Japon" (first published in 1906, but republished in 1916), in which he described haikus as being "like a vibration that is not limited by any other and which stretches itself out almost indefinitely".⁵¹ Salvat, Torres-García and Barradas also promoted the journal *Arc voltaic* whose first and only issue (February 1918) carried on its front page, as a motto, their main artistic ideas: "Plasticity of the vertical - Forms in emotion and evolution - Vibrating ideas - Poems in Hertzian waves."⁵² Some years later, Salvat-Papasseit would write an article on Barradas in which, reflecting on Vibrationism, he would state that "in reality it is vibration, that is to say, holder in his hand. [...] This is the vision transmitted by our painter Joaquim Sunyer" (Vicenç Solé de Sojo, "Ecos," in: *El poble català*, 18 February 1917, 2).

⁴⁷ Vicenç Solé de Sojo, "Hablando con Torres-García," in: *El día gráfico*, 24 December 1913, 8.

⁴⁸ Josep Maria Junoy, "Nòtules," in: *La Revista* 61 (1918), 112.

⁴⁹ "When, one day, they want to study the roots of what, in years to come, will be sumptuous and mature work, they'll need to seek out the rare examples of these pages [in reference to *Un enemic del poble*] as though it were something precious." Vicenç Solé de Sojo, "Ecos," in: *El poble català*, 16 December 1917, 1.

⁵⁰ See *Un enemic del poble* 7 and 8 (1917) and 16 (1918).

⁵¹ Quoted in Jordi Mas López, *Josep Maria Junoy i Joan Salvat-Papasseit: dues aproximacions a l'haiku*, Barcelona 2004, 208-209. Mas also suggests an influence of the psychiatrist and writer Diego Ruiz on the theories of all three, Salvat, Torres-García and Barradas.

⁵² Joan Salvat-Papasseit, ed., *Arc Voltaic*, Barcelona 1918.

sensation,"⁵³ an idea that might open a whole new field of contacts with other artistic movements, as for example, with the Sensationism of Fernando Pessoa and Mário de Sá-Carneiro.

[25] This review of the Catalan artistic context of 1917-1918, which made the emergence of Vibrationism possible, would not be complete without a reference to Joan Miró (1893-1983) who in 1917 was an active observer of the lively artistic scene in Barcelona; on 13 September 1917 he wrote in a letter to J. F. Ràfols:

*I believe that tomorrow there'll be no more schools ending in "ism" and we'll see a canvas of a speeding train painted in a way that is completely different from a landscape done at midday. Within a free spirit, every aspect of life will produce a different sensibility, and all we'll want to see via the canvas is the vibration of a spirit, a fully heterogeneous vibration.*⁵⁴

[26] Miró would also refer to the concept of vibration in other letters of the same period. 1918 was the year of his artistic emergence: Some of the principal events involving Miró that year⁵⁵ include his first one-man show at the *Galeries Dalmau* and the publication of one of his drawings in the front page of *Arc Voltaic*; his being claimed as "one of us" in *Trossos* by J. V. Foix (March); the creation of the *Agrupació Courbet* and its participation in the *Saló dels evolucionistes*, which also included Barradas and Torres-García (April), and his participation in the official *Exposició d'art* at *Palau de Belles Arts* (May - June). It may be worth remembering that, as some authors have consistently argued, Miró's artistic roots lie also in Noucentisme,⁵⁶ and that he himself emphasized the classicism of his work.⁵⁷ In any case, his painting can be placed in the same avant-garde context shared by Torres-García, Lagar and Barradas; it may not be a coincidence that paintings by Barradas and Miró were reproduced on the same page of an article reviewing the *Exposició d'art*,⁵⁸ nor was it strange that all these artists shared certain iconographic motifs such as the carriage wheel. The numerous interconnections between these artists would itself be worthy of a study.

[27] As we have seen in this section, vibration was not only a key concept in discussions of the European avant-garde of the time, but it was also heavily used by the Catalan artists and writers who represented the core of the

⁵³ Quoted from Lidia Roig, "Joan Salvat-Papasseit: textos desconeguts," in: *Els Marges* 46 (1992), 77-86, here 84.

⁵⁴ Joan Miró, *Epistolari català*, Barcelona 2009, 68.

⁵⁵ Joan Maria Minguet, *Joan Miró: l'artista i el seu entorn cultural (1918-1983)*, Barcelona 2000, 51-52.

⁵⁶ Balsach, "L'atzur i les arrels noucentistes de Joan Miró."

⁵⁷ Minguet, *Joan Miró*, 54.

⁵⁸ O. F., "Les tendències artístiques en l'actual exposició de l'art," in: *D'ací, d'allà*, 10 June 1918, 503-511, here 508.

Barcelona avant-garde;⁵⁹ I believe, therefore, that the fact that his colleagues made use of the term vibration in their articles and texts was an important factor in Barradas' decision to name his new artistic proposal Vibrationism. At the same time, and even though Barradas was, in 1917-1918, a fairly marginal figure in the Catalan cultural context, I believe that his own understanding of the concept of vibration may also have influenced other Catalan artists, as we will see in the next section.

Possible influence on other artists

[28] Barradas' Vibrationism is the most widely known use of "vibration" in the Catalan context, but the concept was also important in the work of other, younger artists, whose main influences were probably similar to those Barradas had experienced, but who were, I believe, further influenced by Barradas himself. Between October 1918 and May 1920 (that is, when Barradas no longer lived in Barcelona), ten issues of the journal *La columna de foc: fulla de subversió espiritual* [The Column of Fire: Gazette of Spiritual Subversion], whose main promoter was Salvador Torrell, were published in Reus.⁶⁰ Contributors to this publication included Jaume Aiguader, Gabriel Alomar, Josep Maria de Sucre, Àngel Samblancat, Eugeni d'Ors and, last but not least, Joan Salvat-Papasseit. It has been pointed out that there are links with Salvat's work, discernible in the title of this marginal journal, inspired by Salvat's visual poem "Columna vertebral: sageta de foc" [The Vertebral Column: Arrow of Fire] (1917),⁶¹ as well as in its list of contributors, many of them having participated also in *Un enemic del poble*. Furthermore, there were texts by Salvat in issues 5, 7, and 9; the ninth issue (January 1920) featured his article "Nature and Art", an incomplete version of which had been published in *Un enemic del poble* in October 1918. In this article, he makes an interesting reference to Delaunay: "There is something in Delaunay's [work], one would say, that is wrought by prisms, and nevertheless it has extraordinary merit - and perhaps that is precisely why."⁶²

[29] Whether through Salvat-Papasseit's work or through the publications he had promoted (particularly, *Un enemic del poble* and *Arc voltaic*), the concepts of vibrations and Vibrationism - sharing and reflecting Barradas' own use of the terms - are very present and active in the journal. Particularly, they are used by the poet Bonaventura Vallespinosa i Salvat, who published a visual poem in the fourth issue of the journal (January

⁵⁹ Jaume Vidal, "Episodis de l'art abstracte a Barcelona," in: *Revista de Catalunya* 91 (1994), 53-78, here 72.

⁶⁰ *La columna de foc: fulla de subversió espiritual* [1-10 (1918-1920)], Facsimile, Barcelona 1988.

⁶¹ Which, in turn, was inspired by Gabriel Alomar's book *La columna de foc* [The Column of Fire] (1911).

⁶² Joan Salvat-Papasseit, "Natura i art," in: *La columna de foc*, January 1920, 3.

1919, double issue) in the centre of which we can read about "Vibrationism of ideas", a direct quote from the *Arc voltaic's* front page which is usually considered to be a contribution by Barradas. The same word "vibration" appears repeatedly in the text "Time", published by the same author next to this poem, the central metaphoric figure of which is, in fact, a clock.⁶³ In the issue of February 1919, more texts by Vallespinosa were published that make continuous references to vibrations; and in the seventh issue (June and July 1919) we find a poem by him that refers to "vibrant plasticity". There is also a reference to the concept of vibration in the first issue of the journal, in an unattributed article entitled "Polyphony" and devoted to the question of the relationships between the arts; it describes "an authentic torrent of harmony [...] it vibrates within our very soul".

[30] It should also be pointed out that another of the contributors to the journal was Pere March, pseudonym of the painter Ernest Enguiu (1892-1919), who was the author of an interesting review of Barradas' 1917 exhibition (together with Torres-García) in the *Galeríes Dalmau* that had appeared in another publication.⁶⁴ Enguiu, founder of the artists' group *Els Evolucionistes*, whose name comes directly from Torres-García's manifesto, published under his pseudonym a section entitled "D'Art" that appeared in the second and sixth issues of *La columna de foc*. The proximity of the journal members to Barradas' circle is reinforced by the fact that, in the seventh issue, we can find a drawing by the sculptor Hortense Begué (partner of Celso Lagar), whose work is quite unknown to us. Barradas himself appears only once in the journal, in its sixth issue (March, April and May 1919), which commemorates the untimely death of the poet and critic Joaquim Folguera. The front page reproduces an issue of *Un enemic del poble* dedicated to Folguera, which included a portrait of him drawn by Barradas.

[31] In July 1921, in the Catalan town of Sabadell, the one and only issue of another avant-garde journal called *Vibracions* [Vibrations], promoted by Armand Obiols and Esteve Serra, saw its publication. This journal, like *La columna de foc*, is also thought to have been influenced by Salvat-Papasseit, mainly because of its long subtitle: *Primera fulla de gimnàstica espiritual. Fulla de subversió espiritual* [First Gazette of Spiritual Gymnastics. Gazette of Spiritual Subversion]; the obvious connections with Salvat, however, should not conceal the fact that the use of the concept of vibrations is also closely related to Barradas' work.

⁶³ A quote from this text: "Time, concept, evolution time, vibrant spirit time, manifest vibration; Hertzian waves; sound running through the vacuum." On the importance of the clock as an iconographic motive in Barradas' and Torres-García's work, see Bonet, "Alrededor del reloj".

⁶⁴ This text is reproduced in Pereda, *Barradas*, 75-77. However, the author does not give any information about its original publication, nor is it included in the bibliography of the book.

[32] As mentioned before, the influence of Barradas' work and personality on the artistic groups in Madrid from the moment he established himself there in August 1918, particularly regarding Ultraism, and by extension his impact on the flourishing Iberian avant-garde at large, has already been well assessed and recognised.⁶⁵ However, the use of the concept of vibration in these Catalan journals, promoted by people who were closely related to his own circle of acquaintances, would suggest that in fact his vibrationist activity during his Barcelona period (1917-1918) also had a certain impact, at least on this small group of Catalan artists.

Conclusions

[33] This review of the artistic avant-garde scene in Barcelona around 1917-1918 reveals that Barradas' work in this period is interwoven in a much richer tapestry of relationships than may have seemed at first glance. Barradas' Vibrationism, therefore, was not an artistic eccentricity or a spontaneous creation; quite the contrary: its birth and its evolution during its Catalan period are closely connected to a very specific artistic environment where the artistic ideas that Barradas had discovered in Europe found a context where they could mature and develop.

[34] His relationship with painters such as Torres-García and Lagar helped him to define his own artistic style, and his connections with writers such as Junoy, Solé de Sojo or Salvat-Papasseit may have helped him develop his theoretical statements. The fact that the artistic scene he immersed himself in was embedded in Noucentisme, and that both his work and his sense of himself as an artist were and remained completely alien to the contemporary Catalan artistic traditions – and to Noucentisme itself, was no obstacle to his establishing productive relationships. It may, however, have been a powerful factor in his decision to relocate to Madrid in 1918. In any case, one thing is sure: Barradas was an innovative artist who made a strong contribution to the emergence of avant-garde, modernist poetics in Catalonia and the whole of Spain.

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⁶⁵ Juan Manuel Bonet, "Barradas y el ultraísmo," in: *Barradas – Torres-García*, Madrid 1991, 11-18; Juan Manuel Bonet, *El ultraísmo y las artes plásticas*, exh. cat., Valencia 1996; Juan Manuel Bonet, "Rafael Barradas, ultraísta," in: *Barradas*, exh. cat., Montevideo 2013, 18-25; Morse, *Rafael Barradas and Vibracionismo*. Beyond the ultraists, we can cite Dalí, García Maroto and Alberto as artists most influenced by Vibrationism.

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