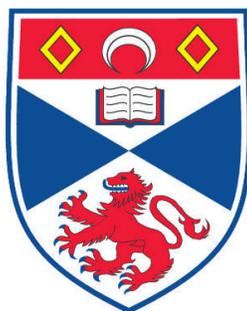


**LES YEUX DE LA MÉMOIRE:
THE PAINTINGS OF MARIA HELENA VIEIRA DA SILVA,
1930-1946**

Maria Halkias

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St. Andrews**



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“Les Yeux de la Mémoire:
The Paintings of Maria Helena Vieira da Silva
1930-1946”

By Maria Halkias

A thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
September 2008
University of St Andrews

I, Maria Halkias, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 70,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the figurative work of Portuguese-born artist Maria Helena Vieira da Silva (1908-1992) completed between 1930 and 1946, in the cities of Paris, Lisbon and Rio de Janeiro.

This thesis divests Vieira's work of the persistent formalist framework from within which her artistic production has thus far been examined. Unlike any previous study, it explores the artist's paintings through specific themes, subjects and forms of expression. By uncovering these narrative premises, we are able to re-assess the overall significance and contribution of Vieira's pre-war work to her post-war oeuvre. Moreover, the interpretative framework that develops from this account re-draws Vieira's position within the modernist canon; contrary to prevalently held views, her work ceases to be autonomous from its cultural field. The historical awareness embedded in the artist's choice of subjects and themes captures the significance of the moment in history in which these paintings were completed. Yet, a contextual examination of Vieira's work in relation to the major streams of thought of the twentieth century reflects its elusive aesthetic nature.

Each chapter examines specific themes and subjects. The first three chapters explore Vieira's use of memory and the imagination through the expression of the child-like and the naïve, as ways to escape the mimesis of traditional painting. The introduction of these images alters the third person narrative quality of her work by bringing the artist's perceptions to the forefront of her artistic production. The following three chapters explore Vieira's subjective spatial quality, either through the use of linear formations of space, memory as projected on to urban landscapes, or simply by using her own image, in its numerous forms, as a spatial signifier.

Moreover, in identifying Vieira's choice of themes and forms of expression, this study observes the cross-roads of creativity that modernism inspired, disclosing the richness and plurality of sources involved in the production of painting, including literature, print-making and film.

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Finally, special thanks to my parents and siblings for their endless support and belief in this project. It is to them that I dedicate this thesis.

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Introduction

In 1974, Portuguese-born artist Maria Helena Vieira da Silva (1908-1992) was asked the following question by interviewer André Parinaud: “Qu’est–ce que vous fait peindre aujourd’hui Vieira da Silva?” Vieira answered: “Il y a un plaisir à peindre, à mêler un regard extérieur à un regard intérieur, mais c’est long de trouver le chemin”.¹ It is important to note that Vieira’s answer neglects the exact time-frame implied by the question – that of today – instead, she answered the question in terms of what her artistic focus had been and will continue to be in the future.² Vieira thus, transformed Parinaud’s sporadic term “aujourd’hui” into a persistent narrative of struggle and continuation that she designated as an endless path, or “chemin”. In describing her intentions as an artist, Vieira also addressed the underlying force behind her artistic production: one concerned with the expression of a complete vision which embraces both an external as well as internal model of sight. These two central issues, succinctly stated by Vieira, concerning the notion of continuity alongside an internal/external divided model of vision, catalyse the critical questions of this thesis. These issues will be addressed through the examination of Vieira’s figurative œuvre between 1930 and 1946.

The phrase that forms the title of this thesis, “*Les Yeux de la Mémoire*”, has been taken from a letter Vieira wrote to a colleague, the artist Julian Trevelyan in 1939. At this time Vieira was suffering from an eye infection which did not permit her to read or paint, yet, as she remarked: “Je n'emploie pas mes vrais yeux, j'emploie souvent les yeux de la mémoire ...”³ In this short note Vieira addressed in a few words concerns similar to those she described to Parinaud more than three decades later. In this earlier statement, Vieira nonetheless made specific reference to what the internal and the external models consisted of, as she conjoined the notion of “regard intérieur” with that of memory work, whilst the external model, “mes vraie yeux”, represented reflections of the external world.

¹André Parinaud, “Vieira da Silva: peindre c'est marier le regard intérieur au regard extérieur”, *Galerie-Jardin des Arts*, April, 1974, 32.

²From now on Vieira da Silva’s surname will be abbreviated to Vieira.

³Unpublished letter from Vieira and Arpad Szenes (the artist’s husband) to Julian Trevelyan, circa 1939, Julian Otto Trevelyan Archive, Wren Library, Trinity College, Cambridge.

Vieira became aware of this visual dialectic early, after her arrival in Paris in 1928, when she discovered Paul Cézanne's painting *Les Joueurs de Cartes* (1890-92), at the Louvre. She described her perceptions of this image as follows: "Ceux deux petite bonshommes qui n'arrêtent pas de battre les cartes, de jouer ... C'était la clef pour passer derrière le mur apparemment sans issue".⁴ Within the scholarly literature on the artist, it has been the historian Gisella Rosenthal who points out the relevance of these "adjacent spatial zones" within Vieira's own œuvre specifically, regarding the notion of continuity and her engagement with the anachronistic pictorial device of linear perspective throughout the 1930s.⁵ By contrast, this thesis alternatively aligns this spatial analogy to a metaphor of vision, a reconciliation project which lies at the heart of Vieira's artistic production. In Cézanne's painting the wall represents a screen whose only opening – a window – permits us to extend the narrative of vision into two distinct yet simultaneous zones of activity, from the observed - the men in the foreground playing cards - to the unobserved background activity illustrated by the presence of two shadowy figures absorbed in conversation by the window.⁶ It is the latter group's activity, that which remains behind scenes, that most intrigued Vieira throughout her artistic career. As late as 1988 the artist continued to make similar metaphorical claims regarding this inaccessible vision to the following scenarios: "Il y a un mystère derrière la coulisse du théâtre. Il y a plus de mystère que au cinema ... Il y a de l'espace. Il y a une vie sur scene et il y a une autre vie derrière ... où on est obligé à imaginer ..."⁷ Vieira's struggle therefore concerns the concrete attempt to breach the barrier between these two distinct realms, the real, as the objective and observed world and the imaginary, the subjective and the intangible. I will thereby examine Vieira's figurative paintings executed between 1930 and 1946 in terms of the oppositions that develop in her thinking between the objective and subjective realms: representation and perception.

⁴Pierre Schneider, *Les Dialogues du Louvre*, Paris 1972, 247.

⁵Gisela Rosenthal, *Quest for Unknown Space*, Cologne 1998, 21.

⁶The notion of the *screen* as a metaphor of sight has been borrowed from Haim Finkelstein's book, *The Screen in Surrealist Art and Thought*, Aldershot 2007.

⁷Daniel Le Comte, *Visite Privée*, Centre Georges Pompidou, 26', Paris (1988) 1993.

Although the literature on Vieira is extensive (there have been a total of twenty-three monographic examinations since 1949 alone), there has been a general tendency amongst scholars to focus the most critical and analytical segment of their studies upon her more renowned post-war work. In view of this limited focus, there has been a predisposition to examine Vieira's artistic career within a particular artistic panorama, specifically her contribution to the Second or Nouvelle School of Paris between 1949 and 1965. Very few studies have attempted to engage specifically with her figurative work completed between 1928, the year of her arrival in Paris from Lisbon, and 1947, when Vieira finally returned to Paris after seven years in exile in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. By centering this study solely up on her figurative œuvre, this thesis reverses the usual analytical and contextual focus on Vieira's work to the inter-war period in Paris. I will examine the evolution and artistic environment within which these works were completed.

Within the existing literature, only *La Peinture de Vieira da Silva: Chemins d'Approche* (1971) by historian Dora Vallier shares the same period of study as this thesis. Unlike the subsequent literature on Vieira, such as Nestor Aguilar's PhD dissertation, Diane Daval Béran's contribution to the artist's catalogue raisonné or Gisella Rosenthal's monograph, Vallier's book avoids becoming a characteristic descriptive survey of Vieira's œuvre. Instead, on the basis of a close examination of a small group of paintings, she raises fundamental questions regarding style, expression and spatial structure. A similar model to Vallier's is expounded here. However, the similarities with this thesis are limited to chronology and layout. Vallier's formalist framework can be observed early on in the introduction: "cette interaction ligne-couleur-espace ... d'une certaine façon ... réside tout la signification du tableau".⁸ This statement marks the foundations of her examination of Vieira's work. Furthermore, Vallier's formalism developed on the basis of her observations regarding Vieira's attempts to, "se détacher du visible et à s'installer dans son propre langage. C'est sur ce langage qu'insistera le Cubisme ... Comme il touche à la construction,

⁸Dora Vallier, *La Peinture de Vieira da Silva: Chemins d'Approche*, Paris 1971, 16.

l'espace pictural est du même coup mis en question".⁹ In many ways, this thesis complements Vallier's formalist analysis by deciphering Vieira's choice of visual language and narrative. Contrary to Vallier's approach to the study of the creation of pictorial space, this thesis investigates the subject, the theme and the underlining narrative that threads through Vieira's imagery; *form* is studied within space, *theme* is observed in terms of structure and *symbolism* in dialogue with the color. In this manner, an entirely new dialogic interface develops between the artwork and its author, the artist and the context from which these works developed and lastly, the artist and the viewer.

The explorative gateways in this thesis proceed from a common set of primary sources: the artist's own remarks and statements pronounced over seventy different occasions in the form of radio and television broadcasts or published in journals and newspapers between 1944 and 1992. Within the literature, the most in-depth research to date that uses these primary sources to illustrate Vieira's life and works, has been historian Diane Daval Béran's contribution to the artist's catalogue raisonné in her texts "Analyse d'Œuvre " and "Biographie".¹⁰ This strict schism in Daval Béran's work inspired me to follow an equally detailed examination of the artist's interviews. I soon discovered that only on rare occasions did Vieira refer to her actual paintings. One time she justified her silence on the subject of her paintings as follows: "La chose la plus urgente à dire sur la peinture est peut-être qu'on ne peut pas vraiment en parler. Rien n'est plus difficile, en tout cas, pour un peintre, que de communiquer sa propre expérience par des mots".¹¹ The question thus arises as to what was then said in these interviews? On occasion she reported on her ambitions as an artist and the state of the Arts in general. However, a point most frequently brought up by the artist was the relevance of her childhood experience in her choice of profession and the encouragement she received from her family. She also commented on her early exposure to the arts, mentioning her grandfather's position as the owner of Lisbon's largest circulating daily newspaper entitled

⁹Ibid., 9.

¹⁰Diane Daval Béran, in Weelen, Guy; Jaeger, Jean François and Daval Béran, Diane (eds), *Vieira da Silva-Catalogue Raisonné et Monographie*, Vol.2, Geneva 1994.

¹¹Bernard Ringaud, "Parler avec les Peintres", *L'Arc*, Spring, 1960, 50.

O Século and his immense library, alongside her solitary life as an only child in a house inhabited by a widowed mother and a divorcée grandmother. In her interviews, Vieira launched a clear narrative dialogue between her personal history and her artistic persona: “Pour moi la peinture c’est une chose très sérieuse, très difficile. Et je pense toute ma vie ... c’est toute ma vie et toutes les yeux de ma vie”.¹² In this statement we observe a consistency in her articulation of inspirational sources, as her claim “toutes les yeux de ma vie” imply the aforementioned analogy of “les yeux de la mémoire” and “mes vrais yeux”. Furthermore, this analogy is further validated once we observe that a span of four decades divides both expressions, one declared in the privacy of one’s personal correspondence (1939) whilst the other was publicly made through a radio broadcast (1988). In either case, Vieira fundamentally mythicises her engagement with painting, creating what historian Margit Rowell described in relation to the Catalan artist Joan Miró as a “mythopoeic enterprise”, where the artist consciously refers to the past as a continuous present.¹³ It is not the aim of this thesis to create a psychobiographical account of Vieira’s figurative work, characteristic of many inter-war female artists’ work. But rather use these personal details relating to the artist’s impressions and recollections of the times to establish her self-awareness and historical consciousness. Furthermore, observe how these attitudes conformed or responded to the aesthetic canons of the time. In this manner, Daval Béran’s distinct analytical frameworks of visual analysis and biographical events can be reconciled and examined in continuous dialogue with one another.

During my research I came across what to date can be referred to as Vieira’s first ever published interview in a daily newspaper in Brazil in 1944. In this interview Vieira explained her *need* to follow an alternate route from the one which would otherwise have naturally followed had she pursued her classical education in the arts in Paris from Lisbon. Accordingly, two years after her arrival in Paris in 1928, Vieira made the following decision:

¹²Michel Butor, *La Nuit sur un Plateau*, France Culture, Radio France, 3/10/1988.

¹³Margit Rowell, *Joan Miró: selected interviews and writings*, London 1987. See Chapter I, Introduction.

Nessa altura, eu devia ter caído ao fauvismo de Roualt, o maior dentro todos eles, era a continuação natural da linha que eu seguira até então. Os meus estudos durante dois anos foram nesse sentido. Mas não era suficiente pois nesses mestres havia mistérios que todo o amor e toda boa vontade e todo trabalho não podiam desvendar. Era preciso seguir outros caminhos – tudo e uma questão de época.¹⁴

Vieira declares the presence of “misterios” [mysteries] to be a catalyst of unsatisfactory fulfillment that led her to pursue alternative aesthetic routes from that of her fauvist masters at the arts academies in Lisbon and Paris. However, Vieira never explains the essence of the “misterios” nor the alternative paths she embarked upon. In order to decipher the exact meaning of this statement, I turned to empirical evidence and used Vieira’s catalogue raisonné. I traced this mystifying rapture exactly to 1930, as stated, when she altogether abandoned her 1926-1929 academic paintings for her use of fantasy in the expression of the child-like and the naïve – the “other route”. This form of expression lasted for over four years, engendering not only a return to her more primitive pictorial efforts but also engendered a narrative regression regarding her personal experiences.¹⁵ In identifying this joined pictorial and narrative venture I was able to begin identifying the sources for Vieira’s concept of the “misterios” and for her existential awareness that represent the foundations to the analytical backdrop to Chapter I. It is thereby, with regard to these conditions of constant validation between word and image that Vieira’s interviews become a key source in developing new explorative and interpretative grounds for the further examination of her work.

The interpretative framework that develops from incorporating Vieira’s biographical accounts into the visual analysis of her oeuvre re-draws Vieira’s position within the modernist canon as her work ceases to be considered autonomous from its cultural field. One of the challenges presented by Vieira’s inter-war paintings, particularly

¹⁴“At that time I should have followed Roualt’s fauvism ... it was the natural linear course given my previous artistic education. My studies during my first two years were in that direction. However they were not fulfilling, the mysteries could not be reconciled despite all love and good intentions from these masters. It was necessary to follow other routes - it was all a question of an epoch” in Anon., “Caminhos da Arte de Maria Helena Vieira da Silva”, *A Manhã*, Rio de Janeiro 10/12/1944. Translation my own.

¹⁵A general tendency in the literature on Vieira tends to overlook the artist’s earliest paintings completed in Paris at the various art academies between 1928 and 1930, treating her 1930-1934 as the earliest examples of her mature work.

her 1930-1934 works, is of establishing not only their intrinsic value within her overall œuvre but identifying their association and position within the larger artistic panorama of *l'art moderne*, considering her position as a woman, an émigré, a loner and an explorer. The following question therefore remains to be answered, in this process of pictorial retrieval how does this analysis of Vieira help us better to understand the role of young artists within the art historical narrative canon? In Chapter I, this thesis explores Vieira's notion of *l'art moderne*, the closest reading of this literal expression is that which historian Christopher Green refers to as *l'art vivant* [living art], embracing the canonised narratives of modernist and avant-garde art.¹⁶ However, as this thesis continues to explore through numerous chapters, Vieira's position within this artistic panorama becomes elusive and marginal as she pursues an independent career with regard to aesthetic movements and rejecting any kind of label. This results in the overall absence of her figurative work from being included in the general literature of French and European art. In this manner, Vieira's early paintings represent a case study of the many young artists whose work in the inter-war period fell into the non-denominational cracks spreading through the walls of the art historical narrative canon. In Chapter VI, a typical example emerges, in view of curator Stephanie Barron's argument on the issues central to exile art regarding memory and art, politics and art for the exhibition, *Exiles + Emigrés: The Flight of European Artists from Hitler*.¹⁷ Barron acknowledges in the introduction that a myriad number of "lesser known artists" whose work was also affected by exile could have been included in the exhibition, yet they were not. The exhibition only exhibited the works of well renowned artists whose career was well established before exile. Barron's work is exemplary of the number of occasions that young artists' work is excluded from exhibitions and their corresponding literature, resulting in their early works only being examined within the monographic treatment of their œuvre. However, as this thesis expounds in Chapter VI,

¹⁶See Christopher Green's Introduction in his book *Cubism and its Enemies: Modern Movements and Reaction in French Art, 1916-1928*, London 1987.

¹⁷Stephanie Barron, "European Artists in Exile: A Reading Between the Lines", exh. cat., *Exiles + Emigrés: The Flight of European Artists from Hitler*, Los Angeles 1997, 11.

Vieira's Brazilian cityscapes responded in an exemplary fashion to the same issues central to exile, such as memory, reconstruction and loss.

When Vieira left Lisbon for Paris her intentions were clearly to absorb and incorporate *l'art vivant* into her work: "Paris - c'était le lieux au monde où j'aurai retrouver la peinture vivant".¹⁸ In Chapter I and Chapter II, Vieira's energetic participation in numerous ateliers and workshops, particularly in view of her early and extended collaboration with Stanley William Hayter at the *Atelier 17* during her early years in Paris, reveals the keen enthusiasm with which she embraced contemporary works. However, she was careful not to conform to any particular aesthetic labels, or an *ism*, of the time. The conviction with which Vieira asserted the independent nature of her artwork has invariably influenced the analytical trajectory of the treatment of her œuvre and particularly that of her early paintings. These works have rarely been examined outside the context of her artistic production, and there has been a failure to attribute any special relevance to the environment, affiliations or collaborative work that influenced the completion of her artworks. An example of this is Daval Béran's claim concerning Vieira's, and her husband Arpad Szenes', presence within *Atelier 17*: "Ils [Vieira and Arpad] y font la connaissance de peintres surréalistes, sans toutefois établir de liens particulières avec eux".¹⁹ Although early in her career Vieira had shown a preference for painting over print-making, it was her husband, Arpad Szenes who was twelve years her senior, who became closely acquainted with this group of artists after 1931 and exhibited alongside them in 1936. Although it is not necessarily the intention of this thesis to contradict the artist's assertions regarding the independent nature of her artistic development, the infiltration of surrounding aesthetic practices into her own visual œuvre is inevitable, as these groups, to a certain extent, determined the course of her artistic career.

This thesis traces hitherto undiscussed thematic appropriations that appear in Vieira's early paintings inspired from other artistic modes such as print-making and cinematographic productions, such as William Hayter's *L'Apocalypse* series of 1931 and René Clair's film *A Nous la Liberté*, of the same year. In Chapter II I discuss the manner in

¹⁸Butor, *La Nuit*.

¹⁹Daval Béran, "Biographie", 387.

which these two sources served Vieira during her work on the series of paintings entitled *A Nous la Liberté* executed between 1933 and 1934, relating her choice of iconography to Hayter's prints and the underpinning narrative parallel to Clair's storyline. In view of the highly politicised message in Clair's work, this discovery engenders a new series of interpretations bringing to light the significance of her early associations with intellectual left wing groups, such as Henri Barbusse's *Les Amis du Monde*, in 1931, a moderate group of artists concerned with the role of art within society. The significance of this connection is not only to prove that Vieira's work was responsive to the environment in which it was completed, but also that it legitimately responded to a specific narrative framework, one which required Vieira to evaluate her position as an artist and the role of art within society.

This position of self-awareness and historical consciousness can be linked to a certain extent to the Surrealist effort. The writer Michel Butor eloquently described Vieira's association with Surrealism in a radio commentary in 1988: "A première vue la peinture de Vieira da Silva ne semble pas à la peinture surréaliste. Mais je pense que si la peinture surréaliste n'existait pas, eh bien, la relation à la réalité de Vieira da Silva ne serait pas la même".²⁰ On various occasions there are hints in the literature on Vieira, regarding possible Surrealist influences on the quality of her work, such as Daval Béran's description of Vieira's paintings *La Scala* (1937) and *Le Jeu de Cartes* (1937): "L'alliance ce contrariée de la construction et du chromatisme fait découvrir à l'artiste une nouvelle relation de la forme et du fonde ... qui leur confère une extrangète prêche des atmospheres du surréalisme - auquel l'artiste s'interessa sans jamais s'adherer".²¹ Daval Béran is one of the few that identifies Surrealist qualities in Vieira's imagery, but the length of the quotation represents the extent of Daval's commitment to examining the movement's inferences. Conversely, on the basis of empirical evidence, this thesis questions and examines, the nature of this "extrangète prêche", exploring the different Surrealist tenets which may have served Vieira as means of breaking away from the mimesis of her academic training in Lisbon and in Paris at the *Académie de la Grande*

²⁰Butor, *La Nuit*.

²¹Daval Béran, "Analyse", 152.

Chaumière. In Chapter I, I examine Vieira's use of awkward and child-like expression as a tool used to free herself from the traditional values of painting that she acquired during 1926 and 1928-1929. A succession of Fauvist teachers in the Paris art academies before 1933, such as Dufresne, Waroquier and Friesz, proved crucial in stylistic terms, teaching Vieira methods of paint application, technique and expression, and encouraging her to use the free motor of the hand to render forms. However, Vieira's complete expressionistic breakthrough came about when she abandoned traditional genres such as still lifes, portraits and landscapes altogether for an entirely new imagery which was highly fantastical in narrative content and embedded in personal memory. Although psychobiography plays a significant role in this thesis, particularly in the discussion of Vieira's early paintings in Chapter I, the discovery of persistent ties between Vieira and the image generates original discourses regarding her work and the environment within which she completed them, both artistically and historically. It is in view of this effect that this thesis considers Surrealism a key theoretical movement as it legitimised the use of fantasy and the marvelous as aesthetic alternatives to mimesis and traditional representation (Chapter III). Historian Malcolm Gee refers to the Surrealist achievement in painting as follows: "It was figurative but against nature, intelligent but anti-rational, liberated but uninterested in 'plastic values'".²² As a young artist working on the fringes of the Surrealist movement, Vieira was able to receive, explore and interpret these theoretical tenets as she pleased, re-evaluating their worth according to her own artistic whims and desires.

This thesis identifies the 1930-1934 period rather than 1937 as the most directly influenced by Surrealism as the imagery and expression relate to Breton's remark: "a hunger for the marvelous, as we could still revive it in childhood memories".²³ In Chapters I and II, once a thematic thread has been identified winding through the fabric of these marvelous visions, I examine the function of fantasy as a narrative mode in Chapter III. In

²²Malcolm Gee, *Dealers, critics, and collectors of modern painting: aspects of the Parisian art market between 1910 and 1930*, New York 1981, 147.

²³André Breton, *Conversations: The Autobiography of Surrealism*, (transl.) Mark Polizzotti, New York 1993, 63. Although this claim is made in retrospective by Breton in his sixth featured broadcast with André Parinaud, Breton's comment is made in direct reference to the events surrounding the end of Dada and the publication of the *First Manifesto*, 59-68.

this chapter, I incorporate as a theoretical framework Rosemary Jackson's theory of the "literary fantastic" with regard to Vieira's illustrated children's storybook entitled *Kô et Kô* (1933). Jackson designates the fantasy mode in narrative to be representative of a form of protest and escapism from the "real world".²⁴ In the 1930s the Surrealists advanced a critical eye and denunciation of the status quo, presenting Vieira with a contemporaneous aesthetic gateway to the application of fantasy. Although originally intended as a children's book, *Kô et Kô* was rejected by an editor of a large publishing house on the grounds that "il le trouvait trop apocalyptique".²⁵ The inherent pessimism in *Kô et Kô's* narrative is analogous to the negativity underpinning Vieira's contemporaneous child-like paintings discussed in Chapters I and II, as they all address a similar subject of ascension and escape.

Vieira once made the claim: "La peinture peut parler de la réalité? Non, elle peut s'approcher de la réalité".²⁶ As this thesis argues, Vieira's use of fantasy becomes her visual response to reality, where she approaches the issues concerning reality without necessarily representing it as such. That is, these fantastical projections correspond to an internal modelling of the psyche through which Vieira relates rather than represents her experience of the world. To this effect Vieira's paintings do not present a mimetic response to the world, but rather illustrate internal concerns, projections which correspond to external effects. Thus, it is through the act of self-observation and introspection that the disarray prevalent in the external world is manifested in Vieira's paintings. We can observe the artist's pursuit of an introspectively devised model to be an extension of Breton's Romantic conception of an "internal model". In Chapter IV, I identify and examine Vieira's visual trajectory from an external model of sight to a purely internal one on the basis of her *Autoportrait* series of 1930-1932. Each painting conveys a different circumstance, as Vieira examines herself as object, subject and author of the painting. In 1932 she reconciled these three qualities when she resorted to a purely internal model of sight, of a young girl climbing a ladder, despite entitling the painting *Autoportrait*. This

²⁴Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: the literature of Subversion*, New York 1981, 3.

²⁵Anne Philip, *L'Eclats de la lumière: entretiens Marie-Hélène Vieira da Silva*, Paris 1978, 28.

²⁶Daniel Le Comte, *Visite Privée*, Centre Georges Pompidou, 26', Paris (1988) 1993.

chapter incorporates a facet of Vieira's paintings, specifically her need to anchor her images in self-representations, into the theoretical discourse underpinning the literature of inter-war female artists, expressly those engaged in the Surrealist movement. In 1936, Vieira re-engaged with self-imaging through the use of alternate identities, in the form of mermaids and harlequins. By utilising these foreign entities as symbolic forms, Vieira's imagery continued to engender an internally devised vision of the self.

In response to Vieira's continual re-engagement with the subject of the self through self-imaging and self-representation, this chapter determines the artist's female gender as the determining cultural variable behind her choice in imagery. The time that critics most often make specific reference to Vieira's gender is with regard to her Brazilian newspaper reviews published in Rio de Janeiro between 1940 and 1947. These writings tend to assign the personal quality of her art and subject to the fact that she is a woman artist.²⁷ The earliest example of this is a 1942 review of her one-woman exhibition at the Museu Nacional de Belas Artes: "A arte de Maria Helena sente-se e um corolario de sua propria vida e por isso que seu traço tem vigor, seu colorido vibraçao e suas figuras um traço humano de profunda expressão ... vale la pena ..." ²⁸ However, one critic's approval proved to be another's disapproval. After this review, two years later Geraldo Ferraz referred to these same qualities in Vieira's paintings as 'temperamento', condemning her oeuvre as a means of moderating personal expressions, attitudes and interpretations.²⁹ Despite their contrary opinions both critics base their remarks on the highly personal expression of Vieira's narrative, which prioritised content over form. Moreover, both critics see Vieira's choice of expression as subservient to narrative. On two other separate occasions these traits caused critics to designate Vieira's work as the work of a woman -

²⁷ Brazilian art critics were well informed and acquainted with female artists. In 1922, a pivotal year in the exposure and development of modern art in Brazil, two of the five artists involved in the cutting edge movement in Brazil at the time were women, Tarsila do Amaral (1886-1873) and Anita Malfatti (1889-1964).

²⁸ "The art of Maria Helena [Vieira] is a 'proposition' of her own life and for this her design has vigour, her colouring vibration and her figures have a mark of profound expression ... it is worth it ..." in *A Manhã*, Rio de Janeiro, 9/7/1942. My own translation.

²⁹ Geraldo Ferraz, "Maria Helena na Galeria Askanazy", *O Jornal*, Rio de Janeiro, 14/12/1944. Although these reviews respond to Vieira's figurative art completed in Brazil between 1940 and 1944, they are significant as they are the only critical reviews ever written about her figurative work. My own translation.

'arte feminino'. A 1944 advertisement for Vieira's one woman show at the Azkanazy Gallery in Rio de Janeiro describes her work as consisting of: "essas telas atestando uma sensibilidade femenina e até mesmo requintada ..."³⁰ On another occasion, a short advertisement read: "Maria Helena - de quadros e pinturas femeninas".³¹ Upon her return to Paris, the œuvre's attribute of 'temperament' was recognized as a positive trait by the art critic Michel Seuphor, due to its ability to manifest an intense inner reflection.³² Although Seuphor made no particular mention of Vieira's gender, that same year the art critic Pierre Descargues published a short study on Vieira's most recent work, making the following claim: "Peu d'œuvres féminines sont au contraire aussi concertés à la fois dans l'ensemble et dans le détail".³³ In Vieira's first published monograph in 1957, René de Solier remarked in the opening lines: "La peinture de Vieira surprend. Œuvre de femme, elle ne manifeste aucune fémininité, peut être dans des couleurs blanches".³⁴ Solier's hesitant designation of the artist's gender on the basis of her use of colour hints at two corresponding elements concerning Vieira's most recent critical work. Firstly, the fact that her work is hardly recognisable as 'feminine' is treated as a form of praise rather than criticism. Secondly, the manner in which Solier suggests the artist's femininity to be based on her choice of colour predicates the highly formalist examination of her œuvre by the subsequent literature as it is rarely to be re-visited as 'feminine' in quality.

Although the literature has rarely considered the artist's gender as a significant factor with regard to her artistic development, her use of space on the other hand, particularly her use of linear perspective has caught the attention of many historians. A common response has been to designate Vieira's use of perspective as *classical*, responding to the Renaissance mathematical formulation. However, after careful empirical observation I have come to realise that Vieira's interior rooms, awkward and

³⁰"those canvases proving a feminine sensitivity ..." in *A Manha*, Rio de Janeiro, 16/12/1944. My own translation.

³¹..."canvases and feminine paintings", *O Jornal*, Rio de Janeiro, 9/12/1944. Brazilian newspapers and magazines often referred to Vieira by her first name, Maria Helena. My own translation.

³²Michel Seuphor, "Maria Helena Vieira da Silva", *Cahiers d'Art*, No.24, 1949, 335.

³³Pierre Descargues, *Vieira da Silva*, Paris 1949.

³⁴René de Solier, *Vieira da Silva*, Paris 1957, 7.

skewed in perspective, correspond to the work of her late medieval predecessors where the experience of space rather than mathematical formulation dictated spatial structures.³⁵ This discovery led to new interpretative grounds: Vieira's formalist language, in view of her use of perspective, responded to the experiential backdrop that dictated the narrative subject of her work. In this manner, her use of linear perspective visually expounds on Erwin Panofsky's theory of "reversals" as constructive pictorial devices.³⁶ In view of this effect, Vieira's pictorial re-formulations are examined in context to possible contemporaneous examples, including Paul Klee's theoretical writings and late Cubist Picasso. On a subject-based interpretation, Vieira's use of slanted perspectives is then examined with regard to Max Ernst's use of perspective in his Dada collages of the 1920s where perspective implied an *introspective* projection, rather than the external projections of space, as dictated by her predecessors. In this manner, perspectival space serves Vieira to continue expounding on the highly personal narrative of her work.

Expanding on the notion of the representation of memory through specific pictorial strategies of depicting space, in the concluding chapter to this thesis, I examine a series of cityscapes that Vieira completed during her seven years in exile in Brazil during 1940-1947. The bulk of these works depict her native city of Lisbon and the Brazilian city of Salvador de Bahia. A characteristic common to all three cities is Vieira's physical distance from her source, filtering her images either through memory work or her imagination. Although on three occasions Vieira paints the city of Lisbon, each individual image is linked to Vieira's experience as an émigré artist, a stateless artist and lastly as an artist in exile. The aim of this concluding chapter is to explore the manner in which Vieira's newly adopted subject of cityscapes becomes a form of metaphorical screen that visually projects the artist's statutory transformation.

It is in this view that throughout this thesis one observes a gradual distancing of the artist from the canvas surface. In Chapters I through IV we observe the presence of Vieira's form on the canvas. By Chapters V and VI, there is a deliberate abandonment of

³⁵Cubist commentators such as Maurice Raynal in the 1920's had already established this connection between Cubism and its medieval predecessors.

³⁶Erwin Panofsky, *Perspectivism as Symbolic Form*, London (1925) 1991.

this self-referential pictorial narrative, yet a highly personal discourse persists through her work. This manifestation of the “I” in fact never abandons her work, even when her pictorial language is couched in abstraction. It is therefore to this effect that Vieira expressed painting as one continuous struggle, where although themes and expression may change, one voice, her voice alone, remains to express that which for her remains concrete: “Je peins un spectacle qui se deroule en moi-même”.³⁷

³⁷Bernard Pingaud, “Parler avec les Peintres”, *L’Arc*, Spring, 1960, 51.

Chapter I

1929-1932: a retrogressive narrative

Introduction

Vieira made the following remark during an interview in 1974 with regard to her intentions as an art student in Paris:

Non, je n'étais pas une élève très douée ... j'étais maladroite ... je salissais tout. Je ne faisais pas un dessin adroit, habil, joli, non! Il y avait quelque chose qui me poussait à faire cela. Je me préparais pour faire quelque chose d'autre/*Quel a été ce quelque chose d'autre?*/ C'était *l'art moderne* que je pressentais.¹

Vieira declared that the awkward execution of her paintings was a conscious decision: a preparatory stage in the production of *l'art moderne*. To solidify her position Vieira established a set of aesthetic values – “adroit, habil, joli” – contrary to that which she applied to her own work: “maladroite”. This chapter shows how this aesthetic tension characterised Vieira’s œuvre from 1929 to 1930, when she abandoned the teachings of the classical tradition for a more liberated style of naïve and child-like expression. Vieira claimed this deliberate primitiveness in her execution to be the result of two retrogressive impulses.² The first arose from a purely internal, subjective force: “Il y avait quelque chose qui me poussait à faire cela”. The second was a consequence of the art historical preoccupations of inter-war Paris: “C’était *l'art moderne* que je pressentais”. In view of the oppositional nature of these two forces, a recurrent rather than progressive narrative history surfaces in Vieira’s early paintings as she worked to reconcile a personal past with the demands of the present artistic environment of *l'art moderne*. In her first published interview in Paris with Georges Charbonnier Vieira made the following claim in view of her

¹André Parinaud, “Vieira da Silva: `Peindre c’est marier le regard intérieur au regard extérieur””, *La Galerie*, June, Paris 1974, 31. Italics correspond to the interviewer’s questions.

²Please note that the word retrogressive in this particular context is used in view of its significance of a contrary motion – a change in direction, rather than a return to a previous, worsened state.

awareness of the significance of *l'art moderne*: “Ce n’était pas: peindre la vie. Mais un spectacle qui est autour de moi”.³ In this instance, we encounter a dual retrogressive measure in Vieira’s attempt at the creation of *l'art moderne*, where the pictorial activity embedded in the artist’s awkward and child-like gesture also implied a transference in receptive measures as she abandoned the classical generic viewpoint inherent in “la vie”, for the introduction of a more personalised reception as she finds herself at the centre of her own creative production “autour de moi”.

This chapter argues that Vieira in her deliberate abandonment of more traditional representational methods and choice of subject development during the 1930-1932, particularly her fantastical compositions of *Le violoncelliste* (1930), *Les Balançoires* (1932) and *Autoportrait* (1932), represent her earliest attempts at rendering visible her awareness of life as its subject. This latter tendency, leads to her third and final retrogressive activity regarding the narrative content of her work. The child-like quality of Vieira’s art inevitably leads to the question of its source – childhood – to which Vieira referred to as a reliable fountain of inspiration: “L’enfance est comme une commode avec une multitude de tiroirs. Il suffit d’en ouvrir un.”⁴ In the re-creation of childhood emotions and experiences, Vieira oscillated between recollection, memory and the work of art, resulting in the creation of a “mythopoeic enterprise”; re-ordering of the time-space structure of her narratives, making past and present experiences interchangeable.⁵

The literature available on Vieira tends to entirely ignore the academic paintings of the period 1926-1929. The child-like and naïve paintings of 1930-1934 also tend to be largely overlooked due to their perceived alien expression from her overall figurative work. In 1994 Daval Béran remarked: “Les premières œuvres de Vieira da Silva ne sont pas les plus représentatives de son originalité - elles pourraient même sembler étrangères au reste de l’œuvre”.⁶ The first historian to accord significant importance to these early paintings was Dora Vallier, who described their expression as a deliberate clumsiness

³ Georges Charbonnier, *Le Monologue du Peintre - Vieira da Silva*, Paris (1957) 2002, 173.

⁴ Alphonse Layaz, “Maria Helena Vieira da Silva”, *Voir: le magazine des arts*, No. 59, May, 1989, 39.

⁵ See Introduction.

⁶ Diane Beran Daval, “Analyse d’Œuvre”, in Weelen, Guy; Jaeger, Jean-François, Daval Béran, Diane (eds), *Vieira da Silva: Monographie*, Geneva 1994, 141.

("maladresse voulue"), ascribing to them the epithet of child-like, ("à la manière des dessins des enfants")⁷, in reference to Vieira's manner of minimising figurative elements through awkward delineation and her use of child-like figures and forms. Furthermore, Vallier argued that Vieira's intentional use of this stylistic language is an early attempt by the artist to distance herself from any specific "modèle esthétique" [aesthetic movement]; an isolationist position, Vallier argues, that Vieira maintained throughout her entire professional career.⁸ Vallier's claim however, regarding Vieira's independent intentions from any specific aesthetic label prefigures the characteristic formalist framework through which her paintings are explored as her intentions are isolated from the surrounding aesthetic field.

In the light of Vallier's analysis, this chapter examines Vieira's stylistic expression as environmentally and contextually significant, as well as on account of an intuitive force. This subjective impulse becomes apparent in her paintings once these pictorial transformations are observed alongside narrative ones. Her choice in narrative elements becomes more abstract and thus elusive in nature as the location of her compositions becomes unidentifiable whilst the main character is one and the same, that of a young girl. It is in view of the presence of this child figure in her work, particularly in her painting entitled *Autoportrait*, alongside the deliberate transference of a naïve expression within her oeuvre that this chapter employs Freud's psychoanalytic framework. Specifically, the phantasing process in the lasting impression of infancy, in order to develop new interpretative grounds through which to decipher Vieira's otherwise unexplored early fantastical works.

This chapter explores Vieira's paintings in chronological order to clearly determine the point in time when Vieira's oeuvre underwent a stylistic transformation from the purely academic to an almost naïve, child-like expression. The first section focuses on her early academic paintings completed in 1926, 1928 and 1929.⁹ The second and third sections carry the bulk of the visual analysis, exploring Vieira's abandonment of the

⁷Dora Vallier, *La peinture de Vieira da Silva: Chemins d'Approche*, Paris 1971, 24.

⁸Ibid.

⁹These dates directly correspond to the surviving works to date.

“adroit, habil, joli” style for a clearly more awkward and naïve brushstroke, with 1930 proving to be a key year. Section two examines Vieira’s abandonment of traditional stylistic values in painting through works she completed during her travels in Rumania and Hungary with her husband Arpad Szenes such as *Portrait de Famille* (1930), *Roumanie* (1930) and *Transylvanie* (1930). Section three explores Vieira’s first fantastical narratives which originate with the *Le Violoncelliste* series, *Les Balançoires* (1931) and followed by *Autoportrait* (1932) where Freud’s theory on the constructive element of memory work is applied.

1.1 Lisbon 1926, Paris 1928-1929

Vallier’s insistence on isolating Vieira’s work from any specific *modèle esthétique* may be based upon the artist’s vehement rejection of any attempt to assimilate her work to that of any of her contemporaries: “Mais, si j’ai utilisé ces petits carreaux, cette perspective ... c’est parce que je ne voyais pas l’intérêt de suivre Mondrian ou un autre”.¹⁰ Nonetheless, the artist’s tone changed significantly when asked to determine the sources of inspiration for her work, as her answers confirmed that her painting was subject to various influences, many of which she considered “contradictory”:

C’est un ensemble de différents sources qui m’a fabriquée ... c’est pourquoi ... je réponds que mes influences ont été plus nombreuses et contradictoires qu’on pourrait le croire. En arrivant à Paris, je n’avais aucune idée de ce que j’allais faire.¹¹

The lack of a specific aesthetic agenda in 1928 opened the door for Vieira to experiment, which she did by attending numerous classes at the various independent art academies, workshops and artists’ ateliers. Like many young foreign artists of the time, Vieira enrolled at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière. A number of her nude life drawings survive to this day, providing evidence of her formal studies. In *La Grande Chaumière* (1929) [Pl.1], Vieira worked hard to render the figure’s bodily mass by carefully smudging the carbon pencil to represent the surface of the skin, illustrating the areas where the skin rests over

¹⁰See Introduction.

¹¹Vezin, “Entretien Vieira da Silva”, 39.

the figure's musculature. This same meticulous anatomical observation can be observed in her oil painting *Académie* of 1929, where once again Vieira dutifully renders in detail the muscular structure of the body [Pl.2]. This fascination with the human form followed Vieira back to Lisbon where she studied the structure of the human body in depth, complementing her studies at the city's School of Fine Arts with anatomy courses at the School of Medicine. Although only three works from this period survive today, they exhibit a clear tendency towards the small-scale ink representation of human bones, rendered with intimate detail and precision of form, such as *Dessin Anatomique* (1926) [Pl.3, Pl.4]. Vieira ascribes this fascination with detail to her naturalist-realist tendencies at the time:

*Pourquoi suiviez-vous ces cours?/Pour la peinture. Je le voulais. Cela avait du reste eu une fâcheuse influence sur moi, car j'étais préoccupée d'une façon excessive par chaque muscle, chaque os. Je voulais tout montrer, tout dire. J'avais une obsession presque naturaliste.*¹²

As accounted for in her aforementioned nude drawings and paintings of 1929, Vieira did not immediately abandon this "obsession presque naturaliste" in Paris. As she did during her final years in Lisbon, she began to complement her drawing and painting practice with sculpture. In 1929 she joined Antoine Bourdelle's sculpture atelier:

*La peinture que j'y [Lisbon] fait ne me satisfait plus... J'étais mise à la sculpture, ce qui m'a été très utile parce que ça m'a donné un contact avec le réel. Je reproduisais ce que je voyais: j'étais capable de sculpter une tête.*¹³

Sculpture became a default practice for Vieira that represented an inevitable extension of her naturalist practice. Therefore, in 1930 when Vieira adopted a more synthetic expression of anatomical forms with a single draw of the line, awkward and clumsily delineated, as exhibited by works such as *Gitane* and *La modèle assis*, she had already abandoned sculpture in 1929 [Pl.5, Pl.6]. On this matter, Vieira remarked: "Jamais je n'y pensé devenir sculpteur".¹⁴ The reason for Vieira's rejection of sculpture may be located in her desire to abandon naturalistic realism altogether. This change was not

¹²Anne Philipe, *Eclats de la Lumière: entretiens avec Maria Helena Vieira da Silva*, Paris, 1978, 65.

¹³Ibid., 68. To date no reproductions survive of Vieira's Portuguese or French sculptural works.

¹⁴Vallier, *Chemins d'Approche*, 23. No reference is made as to the origin or the provenance of this quote.

immediate, as Vieira's drawings and paintings of 1928 and 1929 testify. Her first step towards the abandonment of naturalistic realism was leaving Lisbon in 1928. However, once Bourdelle died in 1929, Vieira relinquished sculpture altogether, unchaining herself from her last ties with naturalism.

Despite Vieira's abandonment of sculpture early in her career, painting did not receive her undivided attention, as she continued to experiment with various art forms and styles. Vieira attended the Académie Scandinave, working under former Fauves such as Charles Dufresne, Henri de Waroquier and Othon Friesz. She also joined the Académie Colarossi to attend some courses on applied art instructed by Fernand Léger, where she completed a number of abstract designs for tapestries [Pl.7]. That same year Vieira joined Stanley William Hayter's print-making *Atelier 17*, which proved to be the longest standing workshop that she attended.¹⁵ This rather pluralistic approach conformed with her belief that non-institutional instruction was necessary for the production of modern art: "Au XIX siècle, il était nécessaire de faire des études, mais plus aujourd'hui. C'est qu'il faut, c'est beaucoup voir, regarder".¹⁶ Furthermore, the limited time that she spent at each academy or enrolled in specific classes permitted her to observe aspects of art forms and mechanisms of production without necessarily committing herself to any of them, either ideologically or visually, yet continued to feed her knowledge of them through direct exposure.

Vieira's attitude toward the need for a self-regulated, institution-free approach to painting in Paris finds a precedent in her early childhood experience: she was taught by her mother that observation required active participation and reception on the behalf of the observer:

On me disait: "Une petite fille intelligente ne s'ennuie pas. Regarde. Regarde. Regarde les livres. Regarde ..." Alors ce petite fille qui s'ennuyait a commencé à regarder, à regarder, à écouter, à écouter, à regarder, à regarder. A ne vivre que ça. Quand elle s'ennuyait ... Elle

¹⁵For a more detailed examination of Vieira's involvement with *Atelier 17* see Chapter II, section 2.1.

¹⁶Please note that if otherwise indicated all quotes borrowed from Diane Daval Béran, "Biographie", in *Vieira da Silva: Monographie*, Geneva 1994, do not state provenance. On some occasions the author does indicate that quotes were taken from personal interviews she held with the artist for the completion of the *catalogue raisonné*.

pouvait dessiner ... c'était un monde complètement silencieux.¹⁷

From an early age, Vieira's sensibilities were placed at the centre of her creative universe where the power of sight ("Regarde") was encouraged over that of speech producing a lasting impression.

Within a schema of art education methodologies, the method proposed by Vieira's mother coincides with a schooling method implemented in certain educational systems at the turn of the twentieth century as a radical alternative to more traditional methods of art education.¹⁸ Art education historian Kenneth Lansing categorised the two distinct methods within the art education schema as the "child-centred" approach and the "subject-centred" approach.¹⁹ It fundamentally concentrated on the child's individual character, giving the student the freedom to express their view of the world through the freedom of expression engendered in dancing, theatre, drawing and painting.²⁰ In this manner, the experiences of the child, its perceptions of the world and life become key constituents in its personal and educational formation; through the ability to experience freely and express, "what they really thought, what they honestly felt".²¹ Vieira's mother's home-school instruction features strong similarities to the ascribed "child-centred" approach, in that she continually encouraged the young Vieira to exercise her mind through observation of the world and reading without restriction and, for that matter, without instruction: "elle vivait seule; complètement ... Je bouquinais partout, sans aucune restriction ... je pouvais toucher à tous les livres ... Je vivais comme ça, presque isolée".²² The sum of these qualities, in addition to the solitude of such a life, was the main force that led Vieira to engage in music and painting from a young age. These art

¹⁷Charbonnier, *Monologue du Peintre*, 172-3.

¹⁸The *Advanced Montessori Method* (London, 1918) was a method of art education where children were allowed to explore their own feelings through the free expression of their hand, leaving them to the mysterious and divine labour of producing things according to their own feelings. By 1931 numerous studies on children's art and art education had been published in Europe. For a complete listing please refer to Herbert Read, "The Art of Children", *Education through Art*, London, 1941, 108-170.

¹⁹Kenneth M. Lansing, "Art and the Child: Are they Compatible?", *Studies in Art Education: a Journal of Issues and Research*, 28 (I), 1986, 11,

²⁰Lansing, "Art and the Child", 12.

²¹Ibid., 12.

²²Charbonnier, *Monologue du Peintre*, 173.

forms became the channels through which Vieira was able to release all the tensions built up in her as a lonely only child: “Je crois que je suis venu à la peinture comme ça, enfant ... J’étais enfant unique”.²³

In his article Lansing examines the alternative mode to this kind of instruction, the “subject-centred” approach, where education was imparted through lectures, blackboard illustrations, written assignments and finally, drawing and painting. Lansing declares that the repercussions of this instructional mechanism includes the loss of “individuality, spontaneity, and originality” in the child’s upbringing.²⁴ Furthermore, he argues, the suppression of the element of spontaneity in a child’s expression leads to the withholding of curiosity and their “natural” urge toward self-expression and spontaneity.²⁵ The latter methodology in children’s art education conforms in many ways with Vieira’s academic artistic schooling after 1924 at the School of Fine Arts in Lisbon, which resulted in what Vieira described in the opening quote to this chapter as, “une dessin adroit, habil, joli”. Her move to Paris is indicative of her will to disengage from such formal schooling. Once in Paris, Vieira denied any correspondence with a particular *modèle esthétique*, as Vallier asserts, and through a more precarious expression and execution, Vieira retrieved previous forms of expression which aligned in form and execution to her work produced during her “child-centred” formation period. In this manner, Vieira’s artistic experience thus far may be chronologically divided as follows, in relation to Lansing’s art educational framework: 1908-1924 “child-centred”; 1924-1929 “subject-centred”; 1930-1934 “child-centred”.

1.2 1930

Vieira describes the year 1930 as the starting point of a more personal visual trajectory: “C’est vers 21 ans [1930] que j’ai cherché sérieusement ma voie, très entêtement”.²⁶ This observation coincided with the initial examples of her more awkward lines and brush strokes. Moreover, this intimation towards the personal in her use of the possessive, “ma

²³Ibid., 172.

²⁴Lansing, “Art and Child”, 11.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Parinaud, “Vieira da Silva”, 31.

voie” reflects Vieira’s overall view of her understanding of the mechanisms at work in the production of *l’art moderne*. She described this briefly as: “J’ai commencé par faire des natures mortes, ou des paysages où je cherchais l’essentiel de ce qui m’intéressait dans la nature”.²⁷ Vieira’s reference to “ma voie” therefore does not only refer to particular stylistic expressions but also to a second regressive measure: the process of interiorising her perceptions in the recording of objects. On another occasion she offered a more detailed description of this receptive process:

J’ai compris que je ne voyais pas la nature telle qu’elle était : j’y ajoutais quelque chose qui ne residait qu’en moi seule, un enchantement, un émerveillement continuel. C’était cela qu’il fallait peindre, et je n’étais pas capable. Plus tard à Paris, j’ai continué patiemment à dessiner et à faire des études.²⁸

Vieira begins by stating the impossible enterprise of rendering an unbiased image when the process of observation itself creates a unique image which is subject to the artist’s consciousness. Vieira transcribed these images as “un enchantement, émerveillement continuel”. In light of our earlier examination of Vieira’s views on *l’art moderne*, there is immediate correspondence between these events: the emergence of the concept of self-awareness, as the artist becomes the centre of this phenomenological study, “qu’en moi seule”. Vieira claims to have had this vision in 1923 at the age of fifteen however, it was not until she was able to disengage herself completely from the repressive, academic “subject-centred” approach that she began experimenting with delineating these visions on paper.

In 1930 a clear stylistic move away from the detailed rendering of the nude paintings toward a more spontaneous and independent movement of the hand occurred simultaneously in both her drawings and paintings. Vieira transposed the spontaneous sketch-like single line quality of her nude drawings such as *Gitane*, to her paintings of that same year, such as *Portrait de Famille* (1930) [Pl.8]. In this painting we observe Vieira’s figure at the forefront of an interior setting, staring directly out at the viewer, with Arpad painting in the background. As in *Gitane* Vieira presents herself in an over-expressive pose

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Bernard Pingaud, “Parler avec les Peintres”, *L’Arc*, Spring, Aix en Provence 1960, 51.

with her arms on her waist, separating the upper part of her body from the lower through this unnatural stance. This deliberate carelessness in the rendering of her figure's form is detectable throughout the rest of the composition where the absence of pencil under-drawing further suggests the immediacy of execution. The door-frame in the background, as well as the application of colour, suggests an unmediated, unstudied form for which the lines were quickly drawn and the movement of each brushstroke rapidly rendered. Even the basic laws of perspective are overlooked: although Arpad's figure is placed in the background, the size of his head is equal to that of Vieira's in the foreground. *Portrait de Famille* thus becomes one of the earliest examples where Vieira actively engaged in a psychological and technical struggle to free herself from the legacy of her traditional upbringing by deliberately refusing to conform to classical pictorial devices, by dedicating herself to what seems to be a less controlled and studied motor activity of the hand, in order to achieve freer expression.

That same year Vieira with her husband Arpad travelled to Rumania and Hungary, working for a few months alongside the artistic group and school Nagybanya during their stay in Transylvania, completing a series of paintings, amongst them Vieira's oil painting entitled *Transylvanie* [Pl.9]. In this painting we can observe a curving staircase leading to a landing with two doors, one directly opposite the staircase and another adjacent on the left. On the landing, resting against the right-hand banister, a figure is leaning over, staring out the viewer. Initially, one might refer to this work as a continuation of Vieira's academic nude paintings of 1929, with a return to the same subdued hues of brown and light blue, and the meticulous attention to detail. However, an awkward effect in the curvaceous lines of the banister, the melting staircase and oblique passageway bring to mind her contemporaneous interior gouaches entitled *Roumanie* [Pl.10] and *Les Deux Portes* [Pl.11].

The title *Roumanie* is indicative of the fact that all three paintings were completed whilst the artist couple's sojourn abroad. Furthermore, these two latter paintings render similar interior settings to Vieira's *Portrait de Famille* with door frames rendered in dark hues of green and walls in cobalt vivid blues. Although these paintings represent Vieira's

earliest experiments in formal spatial construction and the illusion of three dimensional space, they are all subject to the same method of paint application where colour is directly applied to the surface, eliminating all explanatory detail through the integration of line into a synthesis of colour and form.²⁹ This almost spontaneous operation is bound to result in an awkward rendering of forms. This is most apparent in *Roumanie* where the background door-frame is severely contorted in relation to the one in the foreground, creating an asymmetrical sense of spatial continuity.

That same year Vieira completed *Transylvanie*, for which the clumsiness and awkward spatial structure of *Roumanie* may have served as a prototype, leading towards this example of freer pictorial expression. However in *Transylvanie* one observes a more constrained hand at work as Vieira struggled to master the material base of her painting: oil on canvas. In this painting there is clear evidence to suggest a premeditated and carefully rendered awkwardness of forms, as no object features a straight line, throughout the entire composition. Furthermore, Vieira's attention to minute detail in her oil paintings of 1929 is translated into this later work as she captures the two colours in the staircase carpet, outlines the rooftop beams and delineates the door carvings and handle. Her continued attention to detail, alongside the consciously uncoordinated and ungainly rendering of forms in *Transylvanie*, demonstrates Vieira's pictorial battle to escape from the worn out conventions of tradition.

The aesthetic methodology indicated by Vieira's return to an artistic style representative of her pre-formal training is not unique, but was practiced by many modern artists. Children and their art had been viewed with interest in literary France since the mid-1850s when Baudelaire defined genius as, "l'enfance retrouvée", admiring this fresh vision as an uncorrupted expression of human creativity: "L'enfant voit tout en nouveauté, il est toujours ivre".³⁰ This considered abandonment of naturalism in Vieira's paintings and her movement towards a more awkward definition of form that manifests a

²⁹An extensive and detailed analysis of space and spatial construction in Vieira's paintings is featured in Chapter V.

³⁰Charles Baudelaire, "Le peintre de la Vie Moderne" in *Œuvres*, (Paris 1938), as cited in translation in Ellen Charlotte Oppler, *Fauvism re-examined*, PhD dissertation, Columbia University, New York 1960, 152.

deep mimetic instability, enables Vieira's 1930 paintings, particularly her gouache works, to render visually a parallel vision to Baudelaire's concept of a child's state of *drunkenness* with the acquisition of new knowledge. Vieira seems to glory in her visual clumsiness, as she submitted to the uncontrolled motor of the hand, her brushstrokes seeming spontaneous and independent in their movement, thus liberating her artistic inhibitions and leaving much to chance. Within the artistic recent past, Vieira's awkward forms, clumsy execution and use of bright colour recalls early Fauvist works. Moreover, one could appropriate Allistair Wright's description of Matisse's work to describe Vieira's 1930 visual vocabulary as "a ruined mimesis" where observation is juxtaposed simultaneously with an "exuberant and unmediated response to nature".³¹

In this case, Vieira's return to a child-like expression in order to experiment with *l'art moderne* was not a phenomenon particular to her work alone. This stylistically retroactive activity as Vieira moves away from traditional pictorial elements toward a more naïve style, was borrowed from the French modern movements, her Fauvist precursors and Surrealist contemporaries.³² By the time Vieira arrived in Paris, Surrealism had legitimised the idea of regression as part of artistic execution, moving away from the academism of the arts to a more personalized expression of the self within the sphere of *l'art moderne*, which in the cases of Joan Miró and Paul Klee, resembled the "unspoiled" view of a child's perception. Moreover, by 1931, when Vieira's paintings and drawings had veered toward a more liberated hand stroke, a comprehensive list of exhibition reviews and articles had been already written on the subject and were widely available. As noted by historian Christopher Green the application of the epithet "child-like" to the works of Joan Miró and Paul Klee was very popular amongst the art critics of the time.³³ The periodical *Documents* edited by Georges Bataille, contained the largest number of articles on the subject of child art published during this period, alongside the paintings of Miró and Klee. In addition,

³¹Alastair Wright, *Matisse and the subject of Modernism*, Princeton 2004, 61. In her use of bright greens and cobalt blue Vieira's interior paintings recall Matisse's *La Danse*, as these two colours determine the otherwise simplistic backdrop.

³²A more concise examination of Vieira's Surrealist tendencies are examined in Chapters III and IV.

³³Christopher Green, "The Infant in the Adult: Joan Miró and the Infantile Image", in Jonathan Fineberg's (ed) *Discovering Child Art: Essays on Childhood, primitivism and Modernism*, Princeton 1998, 211.

Cahiers d'Art, another periodical less readily associated with Surrealism yet more widely distributed, had also published two articles dedicated to Miró by 1931, one with specific reference to the 'child' quality in his art.³⁴ According to Vieira's biographer, Guy Weelen, Vieira paid monthly visits to a kiosk on Boulevard Montparnasse to read the new editions of *Cahiers d'Art*. By 1937 there is evidence that issues of these periodical were present in the artist couple's studio from a portrait photograph dated around 1937 [Pl.12]. It is therefore through the expression of the child-like and the naïve that Vieira chose to cross the threshold from painting "la vie" to the spectacle of life as she experienced it, "autour de moi".

1.2.1 *Le Violoncelliste, 1930 and Les Balançoires, 1931*

It is not until the series on *Le Violoncelliste* that one is able to observe the various stylistic and compositional stages of Vieira's "unmediated response to nature" explored through a single theme, where the otherwise commonplace image of a viola player acquires a new, unearthly meaning. In the earliest image, *Le Violoncelliste I*, the basic composition of the series is rendered: a viola player standing upon a pedestal [Pl.13]. It is the surrounding composition that Vieira subjects to alteration through either the inclusion of a surrounding crowd, as in numbers II, V, VI and VII, or instead by incorporating two female forms swinging on each side of the viola player into the narrative, as exemplified by number IV [Pl.14]. By alternating the composition Vieira also experiments stylistically, which makes each of the paintings unique. Unlike her aforementioned Rumanian paintings only one painting – number II – is completed in gouache. Vieira however, applies a new technique as she renders her objects in charcoal and only fills up the unmarked areas in

³⁴The two published articles specifically on Miró were *Joan Miró ou l'Enfance de l'art* by Georges Hugnet and *Le Papier Collé ou le Proverbe en Peinture* by Eugene Teriade both in 1931. Various other illustrations of Miró's work may also be found in Teriade's series *Documentaire sur la Jeune peinture II*. The quality of the periodicals illustrations is what made the periodical such a success and prestigious one. Amongst the illustrations published to accompany Hugnet's articles were Miro's *Nature Mort* (1928), *Hollandaise* (1928) and *Paysage* (1926), while Teriade's "Documentaire" featured an illustration of *Dog Barking at the Moon* (1926).

gouache [Pl.15]. The resulting image corresponds to a highly compartmentalised geometric vision as its figures breakdown in cohesion. For instance, the viola player is hardly readable as such, and the central object to the composition, the viola, merely becomes a crucified rhomboid as the charcoal line of the bow runs across the instrument's strings. Vieira applies this same technique of mixing charcoal and gouache to the painting entitled *Maternité* (1930) [Pl.16], which presents an image of a mother sitting on the floor against a bare interior wall with a child in her arms. Once more Vieira draws her figures with charcoal and overruns the delineating lines with colour. Nelson Aguilar is alone in having carefully observed this painting, describing its overall impact as that of "une apparition. L'un des attributs des Madones, soit dans la mosaïque byzantine, soit dans les vitraux gothiques".³⁵ The charcoal lines set the figure of the child against the arms of the mother surrounded by a yellowish halo, "qui rayonne autour du visage du fils en temoigne".³⁶

Aguilar's unworldly reading of *Maternité* can be extended to numbers IV and V of *Le Violoncelliste* series as the mother's figure is substituted by the performer and the child by the cello itself (Pl.17). In number IV Vieira's incorporation of the two swinging figures on each side of the viola player creates what Aguilar calls "une triangulation", once more identifying a spiritual undertone to Vieira's vision.³⁷ This compositional layout and narrative element is further supported by the dematerialised presence of the figures' forms as they swerve and dissolve before the viewer's eyes, recalling Aguilar's words in reference to *Maternité* – "une apparition". This quality is further enhanced in number V by the cello player's elevated form within its pedestal's niche, recalling the holy presence of saints in Byzantine icons, where their celestial existence is represented through the suspension of their forms in an undetermined space. In Vieira's painting the only one to achieve this supernatural position is the cello player as the crowd witnesses this event

³⁵Nelson Aguilar, *Figuration et spatialisation dans la peinture moderne brésilienne: le séjour de Vieira da Silva au Brésil, 1940-47*, PhD Thesis, Université Jean Moulin, Lyon 1984, 71.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Aguilar, *Figuration*, 73. Although Aguilar ascribes this vision to Vieira's 1931 painting entitled *Les Balançoires*, painting number IV of the *Le Violoncelliste* series as indicated by Rosenthal proves to provide the basic composition for the later painting.

from their otherwise unaltered position. In numbers VI and VII Vieira returns once again to a more copious interpretation of her original image, *Le Violoncelliste I*, by returning the cello player to his original position upon the pedestal surrounded by an observant crowd [Pl.18]. By ending where she began, the vision of a viola player against a pedestal niche becomes testimony of Vieira's early intimations at deviating from realistic imagery. In her Rumanian paintings the "unmediated response to nature" occurred from a pictorial standpoint by way of awkward and clumsy lines whilst maintaining her image rooted in classical genres, interior rooms. Instead in the *Violoncelliste* series Vieira engenders transformation through a narrative qualitative change away from the realism inherent in plate I towards the unearthly, the marvellous. In effect, it is this latter which proves to be Vieira's continued source towards the subject of the fantastic as the subject and composition of the *Le Violoncelliste* series, served Vieira to complete her first fantastical image entitled *Les Balançoires* (1931) [Pl.19].

In this painting, Vieira expands upon the narrative she began to develop in *Le Violoncelliste IV*, that is, on a larger, vertically formatted canvas. The orientation of the canvas is suggestive of the descriptive flow of the painting, as Vieira extends the cello player's pedestal niche in a vertical direction, recalling the shape and swing of a pendulum.³⁸ The two hanging figures on each side of the cello-playing figure swing from two ropes that originate at the top of the rhythmic device. In this painting, Vieira abandons all horizon lines in favour of a blue monochromatic backdrop, akin to the plain backdrops used by Byzantine artists. In *Balançoires* the use of a blue background generates a parallel celestial conception to her predecessor's use of gold, as this colour has long been associated with the spiritual world.³⁹ Furthermore, in also eliminating the surrounding and observant crowd, Vieira metaphorically abandons all horizontal and earthly narratives and dedicates herself to developing her narrative in only one direction - upwards, complementing the vertical format of the canvas. One last trait from her *Le Violoncelliste* series observed in this latter painting is from image number II, where Vieira

³⁸The first historian to refer to this otherwise unrecognizable form was Mario Cézaryny in *Vieira da Silva-Arpad Szenes ou o Castelo Surrealista*, Lisbon 1984, 32.

³⁹Robin Cormack, *Byzantine Art*, Oxford 2000, 11.

rather than outline her figures with a charcoal pencil outlined the of the pendulum and the two swinging figures, by way of a delineating bright red brush stroke. The effect is similar to the one observed by Aguilar in *Maternité* of “une apparition” where the immediate bright delineation evokes a halo-like aura around her figures.

Despite the apparent qualitative transformation taking effect within Vieira’s narrative, the existing literature adheres to a strictly formalist approach in the examination of *Les Balançoires*. Daval Béran dismisses the figurative element altogether in *Les Balançoires* as she proclaims: “La figuration se perd presque complètement dans la construction”.⁴⁰ Vallier declares: “L’espace clé voute de la composition. Reportée aux autres tableaux des mêmes années, cette évidence degage l’identité: l’espace y joue le même rôle primordial”.⁴¹ In both instances, the literature relates *Balançoires* to the rest of her 1931 works, particularly the Marseille series, such as the aerial port view of *Le Quai de Marseille*, the single construction of a port storage depot in *Marseille entrepôt* and the suspended linear train bridge of *Le Pont Transbordeur* [Pl.20].⁴² The linear, almost abstract quality to all these modern structures, according to Vallier, is their “frontalité absolut”, arguing that depth, or any possible interpretation of a three dimensional spatial construction has been completely obliterated.⁴³ In both instances, for historian Gisella Rosenthal as well as Vallier, the spatial structure of the composition overrides all other aspects of the painting, creating an unalterable framework of analysis based on a purely formalist approach. However, in observing the year-long thematic trajectory prior to the completion of *Les Balançoires* is testimony to the presence of a more complex set of underlining pictorial and thematic values in comparison to the artist’s contemporaneous Marseille paintings. Moreover, the fact that *Les Balançoires* represents Vieira’s largest painting to date shows the importance bestowed upon this vision, both in terms of structure and narrative content.

⁴⁰Beran Daval, “Analyse d’Œuvre”, 137.

⁴¹Vallier, *Chemins d’Approche*, 26.

⁴²Vieira completed this paintings after she payed a small visit to the city of Marseille with her husband Arpad in 1931. These paintings prove to be a rare occasion of Vieira’s fascination in the early 1930’s with modern life and architecture. Their abstracted linear compositions recall Germaine Krull and Moholy Nagy’s industrial architecture compositions published in Paris circa 1928.

⁴³Ibid.

In view of these observations a whole new dialectic develops. Vieira herself, on the only occasion she ever made direct reference to these early paintings, she hinted at a conscious parallel development between the visual and the narrative element as follows:

Je ne voulais pas de l'évidence mais je voulais qu'il y ait beaucoup de choses sur mon tableau et pourtant je voulais faire très simple: *Les Balançoires* ... Je me souviens, un jour, un peintre m'a dit: Vous ne pouvez pas continuer à faire des choses épurées.⁴⁴

Vieira suggests the existence of a more complex network of values underlining the otherwise simple pictorial format through her declaration that her intended visual language is to be "très simple". Her intentions in this capacity do not only relate to the schematic quality of her forms, for instance the wire-like inverted pendulum, but also to the deliberate reduction of her narrative figures from any visible detailed element and structural forms. This resulted in her contemporaries' classification of these paintings as "épurée" [purged]. Furthermore, Vieira declared this effect to be conscious and deliberate, but also incomplete to the extent that these forms possessed more value than was declared by their simple expression, serving to disguise a set of more complex readings latent in the narrative, described as "beaucoup des choses". Although no explanation is given as to what these qualities are or refer to, the mere fact that Vieira implied their presence opens up this "très simple" image for re-interpretation, particularly in terms of the collaboration between the manifest and latent qualities in this vision: the child element and expression vis-à-vis content and symbolism.

There are two recognizable figures in *Les Balançoires* bringing to mind Vieira's aforementioned composition IV of *le Violoncelliste*, such as the viola player and the figure of a young girl in a blue dress swinging over the left shoulder of the musician, hanging from one of the two strings.⁴⁵ The presence of a child figure within the narrative generates a significant link with Vieira's choice in a naïve and simplistic language. Furthermore, it is in *Balançoires* that the child figure emerges within Vieira's oeuvre. According to historian

⁴⁴Guy Weelen, "Vieira au Fil des Jours-Eclats multiples pour une esquisse de portrait", in Weelen, Guy; Jaeger, Jean-François; Beran Daval, Diane, (eds), *Vieira da Silva: Monographie*, Geneva 1994, 33.

⁴⁵The identity of the figure lying over his right shoulder remains unidentified to date.

Denise Golomb, modern painters, such as Klee and Miró, used the child-like in their expression as a point of entry “into the emotional life of the younger self”.⁴⁶ If Vieira’s painting were to be examined from within this framework of analysis, the retrogressive stylistic activity is also suggestive of the narrative origin embedded in primordial experiences as they are “remembered”, thereby “imagined”, “desired” and eventually “reconstructed”.⁴⁷ This process of recollection based on the juxtaposition of memory and the imagination, does not necessarily guarantee a cohesive or legible narrative of the past. Instead it involves the encoding of a combination of visual and semantic aspects of past events, holding simply to the meaning, sense, and emotions provided by these experiences. It is to this effect, that a similar encoding effect was put into place to further interpret the imagery of *Les Balançoires*, combining words of recollection and image. In her interview with André Parinaud, Vieira made the following claim regarding her childhood memory: “Il y avait autour de moi quand j’avais 4 ans, un peu l’ambiance exacerbée de Schönberg. C’était avant la guerre de 1914. Alors a commencé une époque moins hereuse pour moi”.⁴⁸ In this instance we can observe that Vieira refers to her childhood memories in Lisbon prior to the war in view of an analogous description of a state of mind, “l’ambiance exacerbée de Schoenberg”, rather than in reference to specific events.

Arnold Schönberg published his book on *Theory of Harmony* in 1911 that theorised the new “atonal” style of music that he composed, which he claimed “evolutionary” in terms of style and execution.⁴⁹ He described his music’s acoustics as an “overwhelming multitude of dissonances”⁵⁰, and proposed that “new sounds ... a new kind of melody appeared, a new approach to expression of moods and characters was discovered ... many people called it a revolution.”⁵¹ This musical description in many ways mirrored the

⁴⁶Claire Golomb, *Child Art in Context*, Washington DC 2002, 128.

⁴⁷Ibid., 120

⁴⁸Parinaud, “Vieira da Silva”, 30.

⁴⁹Arnold Schönberg, “How one becomes Lonely” in Leonard Stein (ed.), *Style and Idea: selected writings of Arnold Schönberg*, London 1975, 50.

⁵⁰Arnold Schönberg, “My evolution” in Leonard Stein (ed.), *Style and Idea: selected writings of Arnold Schönberg*, London 1975, 87.

⁵¹Schönberg, “How one becomes Lonely”, 50.

“atonal” social panorama of Portugal at the time, characterised by political and economic unrest after the fall of the monarchy in 1911. In music, Vieira was able to find an analogous revolution that created a common descriptive ground: “une ambiance exacerbée”. In view of this examination, one could argue that the painting *Les Balançoires*, juxtaposes the two key elements that contributed to the artist’s pre-1914 experience: childhood and music. Furthermore, a parallel symbiotic relationship is recreated between the artist and music, as both the child in the blue dress and the cello player sway and play to the rhythmic swing of the pendulum. Once the pendulum ceases to swing, the child’s game ends and the cello player’s music stops; to this event Vieira gives an end date: the war of 1914.

For Vieira, memories did not necessarily confine themselves to being mere recollections but, as she claims: “La mémoire chez moi, c’est n’est pas me souvenir, mais me construire”.⁵² Her recognition of the constructive quality in memories recalls Freud’s writings on the function of memory work in *History of an Infantile Neurosis* (1914): “So far as my experience hitherto goes, these scenes from infancy are not reproduced during treatment as recollections, they are products of construction”.⁵³ That is not to say that the artist herself suffered from neurosis, but rather observed her experience of memory work to function within a similar re-constructive and encoding framework. In *Les Balançoires*, Vieira does not necessarily re-draw a specific event, but rather reconstructs the impressions of the past as they are perceived in the present through visual analogies. In this manner, memory functions as a retroactive medium through which Vieira can project her mnemonic fantasies, Schönberg’s music and her childhood experience, as a direct function of psychobiography. As Freud explained, scenes from early infancy are not necessarily real occurrences, but rather products of the imagination which find their instigation in mature life.⁵⁴ In 1899 Freud published an article that described this phenomenon as a “screen memory”, where the childhood memory is rendered entirely

⁵²Jean-Marie Tasset, “Vieira da Silva: Le Labyrinthe apprivoisé”, *Le Figaro*, Paris 27/9/1988.

⁵³Sigmund Freud, “The History of an Infantile Neurosis”, in *9 Case Histories, The Rat man, the Wolf Man, a case of female homosexuality*, James Strachey (transl.), Harmondsworth 1979, 284. As Vieira had read Breton’s Surrealist Manifesto, Freud’s works may have come to her attention.

⁵⁴Freud, *Infantile Neurosis*, 282.

fantastical or seemingly insignificant in content, but acts as a cover for analogous or repressed memories. A parallel transcription of a “screening” effect may be made in reference to Vieira’s deliberate use of a simple pictorial language in *Les Balançoires*, resulting in the description of the painting by her contemporaries as “epurée”. Yet there is a repressed element in this vision that extends beyond its simplistic visual language; a deliberate concealment of suppressed, latent narrative content which avoids being immediately unveiled. Music for Vieira functions on a similar pattern of concealment:

Une œuvre belle - je pense précisément à la musique de Haydn, ou de Mozart ... laisse entendre, la lâteur, le drame qui font partie de la vie, il en fait sentir le poids et la présence mais sans les mettre volontairement en avant.⁵⁵

This simultaneous trajectory of parallel qualities of concealment and disclosure form the theoretical basis to Vieira’s subsequent fantastical painting completed a year later. Although once more Vieira’s composition could be easily incorporated into the same formalist framework as her 1931 paintings of “frontalité absolu”, there is a clear indication by the artist of a more complex thematic underpinning her work through the symbolism of her narrative. The element of tragedy and disillusion becomes more easily readable with her subsequent fantastical painting of a young girl in a red dress climbing a ladder, entitled *Autoportrait* [Pl.21].

1.3 The Child in Vieira

In her first Paris interview in 1957 Vieira made the following claim: “Je crois que je suis venue à la peinture, comme ça, enfant ... J’étais enfant unique. Je dois raconter un peu ma vie pour expliquer ça.”⁵⁶ In pronouncing these words Vieira immediately reveals her need to narrate a story; her particular story, “ma vie”. As she begins her account, she refers to her child-self in the third person: “Dans une maison très grande où je me perdais ... Quelque fois il n’y avait personne ... Alors ce petite fille qui s’ennuyait a commencé a

⁵⁵Philip, *Eclats de la Lumière*, 39.

⁵⁶Charbonnier, “Entretien Vieira da Silva”, 172.

regarder ... Elle vivait seule; complètement”.⁵⁷ In many ways, the nature of this oral expression determines the visual development of her work, where her reference to “ce petite fille” is made manifest in the form of a young girl in *Les Balançoires* of 1931 and again a year later in *Autoportrait*.⁵⁸ Vieira’s recurrent appearance in these two paintings identifies her as the principal author and participant in these visual adventures in much the same fashion as her verbal narratives. Nonetheless, there are times of emotional tension in her storytelling that oblige Vieira to return to a first person narrative: “Au fond je passais mon temps à imaginer ... avec ce que je connaissais de la vie ... et j’ai essayer de les dessiner”.⁵⁹ It is in view of this double narrative voice in operation, as Vieira describes herself in the process of expressing these sentiments that a second narrative rubric overhauls her imagery, the first person narrative of “I”. However, the first person remains latent in her visual narrative as it is less easily recognizable, embedded in the personal symbolism of her pictorial language. To this end we may recall Vieira’s words: “Je ne voulait pas de l’évidence mais je voulais qu’il y ait beaucoup de choses sur mon tableau”. In this fashion, the notion of “beaucoup de choses” is not necessarily rendered in the imagery but rather suggestive of the emotional charge underlining the vision.

1.3.1 *Autoportrait*, 1932

This painting depicts a child in a red dress climbing a wire-like ladder against a nebulous blue backdrop. Unlike the more evasive imagery in *Balançoires*, by entitling her work *Autoportrait* Vieira immediately discloses the identity of the figure to be herself.⁶⁰ Despite the subject of the painting being embedded in the first person, Vieira’s condensed imagery and ethereal expression offers no further clues, yet similarly to *Balançoires*, Vieira re-engages the viewer through style and expression with a child-based mnemonic narrative. In view of this serial-like development from *Les Balançoires*, I will again juxtapose the artist’s oral testimony with visual references. A detailed examination of

⁵⁷Ibid. Italics my own.

⁵⁸For the purpose of identification, in Chapter IV this painting is referred to as *Autoportrait* (V).

⁵⁹Charbonnier, “Entretien Vieira da Silva”, 173.

⁶⁰A more detailed examination of Vieira’s treatment of this sub-genre is undertaken in Chapter IV.

Autoportrait soon reveals that despite apparent similarities, fundamental qualitative differences illustrate the year long gap that divides one painting from the other.

To begin with, the title of the painting, *Autoportrait*, invites the viewer to read the work as a contemporary reflection of the artist's persona. However, both the content and expression allude to Vieira's past self in the form of the aforementioned *petite fille*. The very nature of this dual temporal function creates an independent perception of the self through time, as Vieira intimately connects her present persona to her historical self. The undeniable present-past dialectic in which Vieira submerges her self-portrait testifies that her child-like visions are immersed within the autobiographical; specifically the first person narrative. Nonetheless, these images, in their fantastical form, disclose their origin as having been entirely borrowed from the imagination rather than based on actual events. As in *Les Balançoires*, the image does not necessarily relate to a single or real incident but rather represents a re-construction and synthesis of autobiographical material. Hence, the pictorial language of the few condensed forms is deeply embedded with personal symbolism.

Before proceeding in this analysis, it is necessary to examine what has already been said regarding Vieira's 1932 *Autoportrait*. Despite the incongruent relation of the title to the imagery, this has not been commented upon, except by Nelson Aguilar and Gisela Rosenthal. Aguilar was the first to pinpoint the symbolic nature of this imagery, in 1984, quoting Carl Gustav Jung: "une petite échelle accompagnait les offrandes funéraires égyptiennes pour l'ascension du Ka des morts".⁶¹ However, in his attempt to assess the spatial properties of the ladder, Aguilar overlooks the undeniable correspondence that Jung established between the action of ascension and death. Fourteen years later, Gisela Rosenthal picked up on the allegorical symbolism of the ladder and, in view of Vieira's life experiences, suggests a possible psycho-biographical reading. Rosenthal entitled the first chapter of her book "The Unsupportable Loss, Lisbon 1908-1927", where she claims that Vieira's father's death in 1911 brought about her early "confrontation with human mortality", which she then argues became the "experiential backdrop with which she

⁶¹As quoted in Aguilar, *Figuration*, 79.

grew up with and her work matured”.⁶² *Autoportrait* is the first painting Rosenthal examines and identifies the artist’s representation of this personal loss: “*Autoportrait* evokes one of her infantile images, in which Vieira attempts to dominate the loss of her father and the insupportable sentiment of separation between Him and the World”.⁶³ This, however, is the extent of Rosenthal’s analysis. My analysis encompasses both historians’ theories; Aguilar’s reference to psychoanalysis and Rosenthal’s idea of the significance of death, by carefully evaluating Vieira’s relationship with death and its significance within a psychoanalytical framework.

Interviewed in Lisbon in 1981, Vieira declared her fearless fascination with death when asked “Pensa na morte?” Vieira answered that she had thought of it, “Muito ... muito. Desde criança. Mas nunca me impressionou a minha morte ...”⁶⁴ This remark establishes an undeniable correspondence between her childhood experience and death. Moreover, she showed a desire for death, as only by dying would she be able to comprehend the meaning of life on earth. In this interview, Vieira hinted at all three elements already identified in *Autoportrait*: childhood, death and life, aspects which are included in Rosenthal’s analysis. Nonetheless, justification of these ideas solely on the basis of a single event overlooks Vieira’s life experiences in the aftermath of 1911:

Moi je vis une époque. Nous sommes tous les enfants d’une époque qui est tellement troublante ... Dès mon enfance ... j’ai senti tous les événements, après la guerre de 14, la révolution russe ...⁶⁵

On this occasion Vieira does not present herself merely as a product of personal history, but rather, exposes her sensitivity from a very young age to the tragedies that befall mankind, based on her own experience since her birth in 1908. Vieira’s solemn outlook on life, although founded on an early personal tragedy, was continuously nourished by historical events which made her conscious of the transient condition of human existence

⁶²Rosenthal, *Unknown Space*, 7.

⁶³Ibid., 11.

⁶⁴“Do you think of death? A lot ... a lot since childhood. But I never feared my own death ... I wanted to die to be told why we were on these lands” in Anon., “Vieira da Silva: a pintura e a vida”, *Jornal Expresso*, Lisbon 25/7/1981, 24. My own translation.

⁶⁵Charbonnier, *Monologue du Peintre*, 175-6.

from a young age. In order to further comprehend the extent of Vieira's awareness of the evils of mankind she addressed the notion of violence in a 1977 interview with Bernard Noël: "le mal, la laideur viennent de la bêtise, et contre la bêtise il n'y a rien à faire parce que la violence existe".⁶⁶ It is on the basis of this extreme sensitivity to the unalterable condition of mankind, and her desire to escape from it, that Vieira's vision in her 1932 *Autoportrait* becomes more legible.

In *Autoportrait* the presence of the ladder creates a clear connection between the two levels of human existence: the 'earthly' lower area fenced off and seemingly uninviting, while the higher, 'celestial' one is indecipherable and unknown. This imagery recurs in the work of many artists within *l'art moderne*, often with the same symbolic reference to an upward movement, which maintains the sense of transcendence in the image. Miro's *Dog Barking at the Moon* (1926) and Klee's *The Limits of Understanding* (1927) are two examples by modern artists whose works have long been accorded the epithet of "child-like" [Pl.22, Pl.23]. The historian Jack Spector brought these two works together through a close psychoanalytic reading of Freud's daydream/phantasising process in an article entitled, "On the Limits of Understanding in Modern Art: Klee, Miró, Freud".⁶⁷ On the basis of Spector's readings of the two paintings, where he juxtaposes Klee's tension between boundless inner subjectivity and the restraints imposed by the physical world alongside Miro's imagery of a dog barking at the moon signifying, "a destination which desire aims", we may extend this framework of analysis into a cohesive reading of Vieira's vision as expressed by *Autoportrait*. The ladder, according to Spector, represents the line between the terrestrial and celestial terrain, and the distance from which the fulfilment of a desire lies, fulfilling "a subjective function" which resembles "desire in dream and childhood as analysed by Freud".⁶⁸ In Vieira's painting we have determined that the use of the child-like pictorial language accompanied by the presence of a young self represents the origin of these fantastical visions. Moreover, the storytelling

⁶⁶Bernard Noël, *Rencontre*, Paris 1994.

⁶⁷Jack K. Spector, "On the Limits of Understanding in Modern Art: Klee, Miró, Freud", *American Imago* vol.58, part 1, Spring 2001.

⁶⁸Spector, "Understanding in Modern Art", 488.

image in this case is linked by symbols and detached fragments of thought processes that align with Freud's daydreaming/phantasising activity.⁶⁹ Their origin, Freud claims, derives "from things that have been heard but understood [only] subsequently ... arise from an unconscious combination. The goal of phantasies is defensive of things experienced and heard".⁷⁰ Two crucial elements may be determined from this early definition of the phantasising process. Firstly, that phantasies derive from a retrogressive process between present apprehensions and past experiences heard but understood [only] subsequently. Secondly, that the goal of phantasising is embedded in the psychology of self-defence. In relation to Freud's first concept, one could possibly assume that Vieira's image in *Autoportrait* derives from an infantile impression indicated by the presence of the child, yet its visual articulation into a fantastical imagery only finds its instigation in mature life. In Freud's article "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis" we understand the defensive capacity of the phantasy process in that it "substitutes for unperformed actions".⁷¹ In Vieira's case, the desire to die in order to further understand life becomes a frustrated ambition for which her fantastical imagery in *Autoportrait* could possibly be regarded as the artist's overcoming of this unrealistic wish. Hence we arrive at the second level of ladder symbolism in *Autoportrait*, where the ladder is intended to overcome the distance between life and death, bridging the separation it "signifies and measures".⁷²

Freud's emphasis on the enduring significance of childhood years for later development can be extended into Margit Rowell's contemporary designation of the notion of the "mythopoeic enterprise".⁷³ In Vieira's case, the act of remembering actively creates the meaning of the past which can never be fully recovered, since "memories are records of how we have experienced events, not replicas of the experience themselves."⁷⁴ It is therefore in this attempt to re-create the experience of the past that the myth-

⁶⁹The spelling refers directly to Freud's psychoanalytic terminology.

⁷⁰A letter from Freud to Fliess in 1897 as quoted in Cornelius Castoriades in "Logic, Imagination and Reflection" in (eds) Anthony Elliott and Stephen Frosh *Psychoanalysis in Contexts: paths between Theory and Modern Culture*, London 1995, 16.

⁷¹Freud, *Case Histories II*, 287.

⁷²Spector, "Understanding in Modern Art", 488.

⁷³See section 1.

⁷⁴Daniel Schacter, *Searching memory: the Brain, the Mind and the Past*, New York 1996, 6.

creating element in Vieira's narrative becomes a live agent, "a constructive mental activity" where her images have to be interpreted – constructed gradually and laboriously from an aggregate of indicators.⁷⁵ Eventually, the interchangeability between past and present becomes indecipherable for Vieira, once she invokes memory to function as: "un présent qui reste présent".⁷⁶

Conclusion

This chapter argued that Vieira in her search for creative authenticity used the naïve and child-like art expression as a pictorial gateway for her artistic explorations. Her use of a naïve expression freed her from the traditions and worn out conventions of the art academies. For Vieira, this form of retrogressive pictorial expression permitted her to begin exploring the foundations of *l'art moderne*. However, Vieira alongside this pictorial primitive form accorded a second retrogressive activity, that of personal histories and narratives. Vieira in her own defence regarded her "maladroite" painting as subjective in force: "quelque chose qui me poussait à faire cela". Through this newly acquired expression she sought to achieve not only the representation of life, but rather the incorporation of life and its experiences into her paintings. In which instance the deliberate use of the child-like and the naïve in her stylistic expression can be regarded as a means rather than an end, a port of entry through which she could begin visually rendering her own personal experiences through her early memories.

The painting *Autoportrait* initially established a clear autobiographical link to Vieira's early fantastical imagery by way of the presence of a "petite fille" present in her images as well as her own childhood accounts. In attempting to provide a possible symbolic interpretation to these otherwise elusive visions a common fundamental quality was attributed to both images in *Les Balançoires* and *Autoportrait*. That is, these paintings fail to represent a concrete physical event, but rather through their symbolic language they envision in all probability the experience of memory work itself, through sensorial, semantic and phenomenological coding. In this instance,

⁷⁵Golomb, *Child in Art*, 4

⁷⁶Philippe, *Eclats de la Lumière*, 50.

Vieira's child-like and naïve paintings of the period 1930 to 1932 represent initial stages in Vieira's conscious intentions at reversing or rather interiorising the narrative content of her work, as these visions can be interpreted as projections conveying the experiences of life as a state of mind, a state of being.

Chapter II

A Nous la Liberté and L'Apocalypse

Introduction

In Chapter I, I examined in detail Vieira's 1932 painting *Autoportrait*. By utilising a psychoanalytic framework, I concluded that the work's imagery is suggestive of wish fulfilment and a desire to escape life through death, relating to Vieira's early recognition of the transient nature of human existence. In view of this escapist interpretation, this chapter explores Vieira's disenchantment with life in relation to the negative theology of apocalyptic literature. Biographical accounts relate that from an early age Vieira was encouraged to interpret world events through theological texts. She was read passages from the Book of Revelations every night during the First World War by her widowed mother, who believed that the war was a sign of the End of Time. Theologian Harry Boer described man's last day on earth as follows:

there are catastrophic events in nature and total dismay governs mankind. The earth quakes, the sun, the moon, stars and sky are profoundly affected ... Men see these things and tremble ... Their fear is not of death or physical harm. Indeed, *they seek death ... and consider death as their only hiding place from the wrath of God.*¹

Vieira completed *Autoportrait* after experiencing as a child the most devastating war in terms of loss of life by new military technology, and as a result called for a re-interpretation of the New Testament text. Moving *from the wrath of God* to a more human-centric interpretation Vieira's words denounce mankind's unalterable and violent nature: "Neste planeta, os homens não fazem sanção matar-se uns ao outros".² Consequently, *Autoportrait*, an elusive figurative narrative of a young girl climbing a

¹Harry Boer, *The Book of Revelations*, Michigan 1979, 50-51. My own italics.

²"On this earth, men do nothing else but kill one another" in Anonymous, "Vieira da Silva", *Jornal Expresso*, Lisbon, 17/03/1979, 20. Translation my own.

ladder, comes to represent Vieira's first intimation of an apocalyptic vision through its eschatological reading and a yearning to transcend beyond material experience. Vieira's internal yearnings are further revealed as her art reaches its visual apotheosis with the series of paintings entitled *A Nous la Liberté II* [Pl.24]. These ideas are also explored in the literary children's book entitled *Kô et Kô*. Both examples refer to this apocalyptic vision as a journey, a form of flight from mankind's doom. In *Kô et Kô* the discernment of this eschatological vision is aided by the book's accompanying narrative text, whilst in *A Nous la Liberté*, to which this entire chapter is dedicated, its apocalyptic theme is revealed through a comparative iconographic study with Vieira's friend and colleague William Hayter's 1932 print *L'Apocalypse V* [Pl.25].³

In *A Nous la Liberté* the pictorialised narrative extends over a vertically formatted canvas, as in her previous autobiographical works. Furthermore the unrecognizable wire-like structures characteristic of Vieira's earlier paintings, serving as narrative props, are re-adjusted to create a helicoidal form which runs along the length of the canvas. Thematic coherence is also established in line with her previous autobiographical paintings such as *Autoportrait*, as human-like figures are caught up in an ascending whirlwind-like flow. Moreover, the impulse to read these paintings as a continuous unfolding autobiographical narrative develops from the re-emergence of the *petite fille* figure in the third painting of the series, recalling Vieira's swinging form in a light blue dress in *Les Balançoires* (1931).⁴ In this manner, Vieira's *A Nous la Liberté* series is representative of her continued interest in pictorial investigations of the naïve and the child-like, juxtaposed simultaneously with a synthesis of themes and variations corresponding to her contemporaneous fantastical images of 1932 such as *Arbre en Prison* and *L'Évadée*.

In the same way that Vieira was able to absorb Hayter's apocalyptic iconography into a highly personal and symbolic narrative, the series' title engenders a historical sensitivity if examined in view of René Clair's 1931 film identically entitled *A Nous la Liberté!* [Pl.26] The film alludes to the socio-political afflictions in the age of mechanisation

³See Chapter III for an extensive examination of *Kô et Kô*.

⁴See Chapter I, section 1.3.

in inter-war France. It is on the basis of the film's contextual value that I decided to carefully explore the underlining message to Clair's highly politicised film, specifically, the concept of "spiritual freedom". The aim is to observe possible narrative and contextual inferences which may arise in juxtaposition to Vieira's thematic explorations in her 1932-1934 fantastical oeuvre, which conclude with the series, *A Nous la Liberté*.⁵

Unlike Hayter's imagery of the Apocalypse which allows us to re-visit past art historical iconographic references, such as El Greco's *The Apocalypse of Saint John*, Clair's work becomes a reflection of the afflictions ailing the age of industrial mechanisation, providing a historical benchmark to its title of *A Nous la Liberté!* It is in this manner that these two contemporaneous external sources work in accord and take on different roles within Vieira's vision: Hayter's eschatological imagery provides an internal spiritual projection of the social afflictions affecting contemporary society in France as addressed by Clair.

This chapter examines Vieira's *A Nous la Liberté* series in terms of its visual, narrative and contextual value within the artist's child-like oeuvre. There are four sections: the first examines the *A Nous la Liberté* series of paintings from a purely internal pictorial and narrative development standpoint, in direct communication with the rest of Vieira's contemporaneous fantastical imagery. The second section examines alternative manifestations of apocalyptic readings within the imagery and concludes with a comparative study between William Hayter's rendition of the Apocalypse in his *Atelier 17* prints and Vieira's appropriation of this iconography. The third section examines René Clair's film, *A Nous la Liberté* in detail from within the context of the events challenging Europe at the time. Finally, section four examines how Vieira's work can be re-interpreted in view of these two sources.

2.1 A synthesis of forms and narratives

⁵In Vieira's 1934 catalogue the first image of this series was entitled *Pim!Pam!Poum!* It is not until 1984 that the title of *A Nous la Liberté* is attributed to these works. However, despite the possibility of a retrospective title, I examine Clair's film in view of its contextual import and value to further understand Vieira's pictorial trajectory between 1932 and 1934.

In an interview with Georges Charbonnier in 1957 Vieira declared: “Pour beaucoup de peintres, le monde visuel ne compte pas. Pour moi, il compte beaucoup: c'est le vocabulaire”.⁶ In Chapter I, I examined Vieira's attempt to realise the fantastic in her painting *Les Balançoires*, as the result of an imaginative trajectory away from an original sketch entitled *Le Violoncelliste*.⁷ For her *A Nous la Liberté* series, Vieira followed a parallel pictorial path. The starting point for her investigations of the supernatural was based on a real, recognizable object designed for a child's amusement *Le Manège* [Pl.27]. The theme of the merry-go-round can be traced back to an identically titled 1930 pencil sketch [Pl.28]. In this earlier version, Vieira depicted the central, circular structure of a large carousel with figure forms hanging onto their respective poles, swinging in circles around the main structure. According to Rosenthal, this otherwise small and unfinished sketch inspired Vieira to complete the flying forms in *Les Balançoires*.⁸ However, in *Le Manège* all references to flight are abandoned and the figures are anchored to the ground, maintaining their circular formation, whilst holding on to their respective wire-like strings like puppets. These linear extensions emanate from the central nucleus at the top of the centre of the canvas. They are the only remaining proof of a spectre carousel, as no central structure remains in view. The theme of a child's entertainment is extended nonetheless, as the figures are in costumes and take the form of a carnivalesque parade. It is significant to note that amidst many un-identifiable costumes, the most easily discernable one is that of the devil, with his long pointed tail. This satanic presence, alongside the aforementioned radiating linear extensions, prefigures an aura of the supernatural in Vieira's imagery. This identification is confirmed with Vieira's subsequent painting, entitled *A Nous la Liberté* (1933) [Pl.29], titled *Pim!Pam!Poum!*⁹ In this painting, the seemingly playful wire-like extensions discerned in *Le Manège* re-configure and re-structure into a helicoidal wire-like framework, which Vieira's figures are to be enclosed within and subsequently elevated from the ground into the air.

⁶Georges Charbonnier, *Monologue du Peintre*, Paris, 1957 and 2002, 173.

⁷See Chapter I, section 1.2.1.

⁸Rosenthal, *Unknown Space*, 23.

⁹Please refer to Mario Cezariny, *O Castelo Surrealista*, Lisbon 1984 for a copy of Vieira's 1934 exhibition catalogue.

The onomatopoeic nature of its original title may refer to the sudden transformation of Vieira's visual narrative, moving away from the seemingly innocent child's playground theme to the immediate disclosure of its latent thematic content of entrapment and enclosure, as exemplified in works such as *L'Arbre en Prison* and *L'Evadé*. These two paintings allow us to preview the thematic outcome of her visions in the subsequent series of *A Nous la Liberté*. In these three paintings Vieira engages various dialectical metaphors, which move from a physical notion of involuntary enclosure to an entirely spiritual, mental notion of entrapment. Most straightforward in terms of its narrative is *L'Arbre en Prison* [Pl.30]. Although the key figure is designated to be read as a tree, as per the title, its shadowed presence is almost human-like. Standing on its feet as its arms/branches stretch upwards, this human tree is encaged atop an elevated column set against a limitless horizon line. Conversely, in her painting *L'Evadé* Vieira presents a different outcome for similar events, freedom [Pl.31]. In this image a rectangular container with a ball inside is set against a monochromatic backdrop. Three sides of this form are solid, two are transparent and colourless, while one is a net-like surface against which a figure stands in a contorted position on all fours on the outside surface. The title hints at the ability of the figure to avoid enclosure. However, it is in this painting that Vieira offers a potential overlap for these two opposing themes, a child's game represented by the ball and entrapment. Lastly, within an alternate concept of entrapment that turns away from the physical to the purely psychological, Vieira completed *Autoportrait*. In this latter vision, the notion of entrapment is conceived from a psychological standpoint, as all references to enclosed areas, such as cages, fences and nets are abandoned for the presence of a single ladder. The notion of entrapment is thereby represented by way of its symbolism where the area in between the known territories of the earth to the unknown of the heavens represents life, as that stage caught between birth and death.¹⁰

It is important to note the extent to which *A Nous la Liberté* represents a synthesis of pictorial and thematic attributes from all three aforementioned contemporaneous

¹⁰See Chapter I, section 1.4.1.

paintings, signalling its conclusive position within Vieira's early œuvre and significance accorded it by the artist as she fully explored this imagery during the following year, completing a total of three paintings, relating to these themes. In *L'Arbre en Prison* Vieira extended the theatricality of the tree's outstretched arms against the wire-like netting. This attitude is indicative of a form of protest, a cry against its imprisoned state. All three paintings in *A Nous la Liberté* series present figures with their arms stretched over their heads in a V-like formation, suggesting the same notion of involuntary state of imprisonment; of crying out in protest or fear. It is only in *A Nous la Liberté* III that Vieira accompanied this body language with a discernable facial expression, as the composition's most elevated figure has its eyes and mouth wide open in horror [Pl.32]. In the painting *L'Évadé*, Vieira draws the initial line that marks the dialectical narrative transformation that occurs between *Le Manège* and *A Nous la Liberté*, bringing to an end the prevalent child-like pictorial language and concluding the extended childhood narrative as well. To a certain extent, this abrupt rupture in the narrative of her paintings produced a parallel effect through Vieira's own traumatic accounts regarding the impetuous end of her own childhood experience with the advent of World War I.¹¹ It is therefore between the encounter of two opposing themes of innocence and self-awareness that Vieira visually captures in the narrative transformation between *Le Manège*, a child's playground theme and *A Nous la Liberté*, a game of horror, fear and death.

2.2 *L'Apocalypse in A Nous la Liberté*

Themes of imprisonment, fear and death within Vieira's 1932 vision of *A Nous la Liberté* gain further narrative cohesion in regard to the supernatural when examined against the artistic environment these paintings were completed. While in William Hayter's printing workshop where she worked since 1929, Vieira may have come across a series of six prints by Hayter entitled *L'Apocalypse*, made to accompany Georges Hugnet's poems.¹² Plate V

¹¹See Chapter I, section 1.3.1

¹²It was to be Vieira's life-long dealer and friend, Jeanne Bucher, who published these prints in 1932 alongside Georges Hugnet's poems. Moreover, it was through her atelier colleagues Julian Trevelyan and

[Pl.25], the print which most closely echoes Vieira's imagery is set against a dark background created by repeatedly incised parallel lines, while wire-like human forms extend their arms in a V-like formation as if they are drawn upwards by an unrecognisable force toward the top of the surface plane. This sinister vision of the coming destruction of the world does not fall short of Vieira's own sombre narrative in the *A Nous la Liberté* series. These figures draw on a parallel iconography through the use of outstretched arms, linear incisions running through the length of the surface area and the dark backgrounds. The following section examines possible underlying biographical accounts that may have induced Vieira to re-engage with this visionary imagery, and considers how the surrounding artistic environment may have led her to re-engage with this pictorial narrative.

The rendering of eschatological visions via child-like, naïve expression finds its source in Vieira's childhood encounters with apocalyptic literature. In a house inhabited solely by adults, Vieira's childhood experience was brought to a sudden end with her early understanding of the tragedies of war: “[m]es premières lectures furent les nouvelles du front. On vivait toujours à la pointe des dernières nouvelles”.¹³ These ideas conjured up by having read the news on the front were further exacerbated for the young Vieira by her mother's insistence upon a strict religious upbringing which involved being read a different passage from *The Book of the Apocalypse* every night.¹⁴ Consequently, from an early age the artist was provided with the tools for the predication of the Apocalypse, where mankind's unalterable destiny of war and death was expressed to her as a radical problem inherent in mankind. This further validates Vieira's fascination with death expressed through the symbolism of the ladder in 1932, as it provided her with the only

Mario Campigli that Vieira was first introduced to Jeanne in 1932. See Anne Philip, *L'éclats de la lumière: entretiens Marie-Hélène Vieira da Silva*, Paris 1978, 27.

¹³André Parinaud, “Vieira da Silva: peindre c’est marier le regard intérieur au regard extérieur”, *Galerie-Jardin des Arts*, April, 1974, 30.

¹⁴Diane Daval Béran, “Biographie” in Weelen, Guy; Jaeger, Jean-François and Daval Béran, Diane (eds), *Monographie: Vieira da Silva*, Geneva 1994, 375.

outcome regarding mankind's mission on earth - an epiphany she declared to have experienced since childhood.¹⁵

By re-visiting these childhood visions a recurrent narrative enterprise extends into the *A Nous la Liberté* series of paintings, not only by way of a means of expression [the child] but through the thematic choice of the Apocalypse.¹⁶ The revival of the past into the present in her fear of the future recall Walter Benjamin's negative theology in his interpretation of Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus* (1920) as he proclaims the Apocalypse ("the storm from Paradise") to be caught in the Angel's wings as he is pushed into the future "while the pile of debris before him grows".¹⁷ Benjamin's reference to an ongoing destruction corresponds not only with the past (the pile of debris) but a "constant presence" (its growth).¹⁸ In this instance, Vieira assumes the same role of apocalyptic visionary to Klee's *Angelus Novus*, as she anticipates in the image of *A Nous la Liberté III* through the presence of the *petite fille*, the same destiny with that of the rest of humanity, as she is pushed into the future.

The Portuguese literary figure Agustina Bessa-Luis is the commentator who has placed most importance on Vieira's childhood, claiming it as the initial grounding for the artist's overall "theatrical unhappiness".¹⁹ The notion of theatricality in *A Nous la Liberté* develops from the exaggerated gestures of her figures and their body language which reads as though they are being unwillingly elevated into the air with their arms stretched up in a V formation. An iconographic visual parallel is evoked by El Greco's painting *The Vision of St John* (1608-14) [Pl.33]. In this painting Saint John is depicted with his arms outstretched toward the turbulent skies announcing the forthcoming destruction of the world. In the background, are seven male and female nudes, levitating in the air in a dream-like trance, as if they "were part of an other, unreal world ... they too seemed

¹⁵Anon., "Vieira da Silva: a pintura e a vida", *Jornal Expresso*, Lisbon 25/7/1981, 24. For quote see Chapter I, section 1.3.1.

¹⁶This term is introduced and further examined in Chapter I. Also see Introduction.

¹⁷Walter Benjamin, "Theses of the Philosophy of History", in Hannah Arendt (ed.), *Illuminations*, 257-58.

¹⁸The notion of Benjamin's negative theology in this examination has been taken from Frances Carey's examination of the Apocalypse in "The Apocalyptic Imagination", Frances Carey (ed.), *The Apocalypse and the shape of things to come*, London 1999, 292.

¹⁹Agustina Bessa-Luis, *Longos Dias Tem Cen Anos*, Lisbon 1982, 22.

moved by an unnatural power”.²⁰ This notion of an invisible force in El Greco's work is indicated through the theatricality of its figures and the agitated sky rendered in strong pulsating brush strokes. A similar effect to El Greco's sky can be observed in Vieira's *A Nous la Liberté III* as the notion of an unfamiliar force is hindered as she thins out the backdrop gouache and suggests movement through the variable pulsations of the “méli-mélo” colour. Despite these visual insinuations of movement Vieira gives shape to this unknown force by means of a wire-like helicoidal structure. At which stage, her use of an overtly expressive backdrop alongside the presence of wire-like framework resists the iconographic melodrama of El Greco's work and attests to its status as a product of Vieira's exposure to *l'art moderne*.

Vieira's choice of working with monochromatic backgrounds throughout this period recalls Joan Miró's paintings of the 1920's, which were exhibited and reproduced in numerous art journals and galleries throughout Paris. It is of particular interest to this analysis to examine Miró's views on certain colours, particularly that which the writer and ethnographer Michel Leiris defined as “méli-mélo”. In a recent essay entitled “Notes sur les Fonds Colorés de Miró (1925-1927)” the historian Isabelle Monod-Fontaine brings to light the readings and symbolism behind Miró's coloured backdrops entitling one of her sections: “La couleur “méli-mélo”: ombres et limbes (1925)”.²¹ The term “méli-mélo” originates in Leiris' work on Miró's chromatic backdrops such as in *La Naissance du Monde* (1925), where he describes “un ton indécis, olivâtre ou violacé ... terreuse”, indicating the expression of a “chaotic” beginning, and of a gestation period: “à merveille ce chaos qu'est la première stade de la vie” [Pl.24].²² In her evaluation, Monod-Fontaine described Miró's “méli-mélo” as, “un gris ocre brun, une “non-couleur” indéfinissable, une terre salie d'ombres et limbes...”²³ In both instances, both historians associate the presence of colour

²⁰Theodore Rousseau Jr., “El Greco's Vision of Saint John”, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, New Series, Vol.17, No.10, June, New York, 1959, 241.

²¹Isabelle Monod-Fontaine, “Notes sur les Fonds Colorés de Miró (1925-1927)” in Agnès de la Beaumelle (ed), exh. cat., *Joan Miró 1917-1934: La Naissance du Monde*, Georges Pompidou Centre, Paris 2004, 72-3.

²²Michel Leiris, *L'Âge d'homme*, (Paris 1939), 32 as quoted in Monod-Fontaine, “Notes sur les Fonds Colorés”, 72-3.

²³*Ibid.*, 70.

to function in collaboration with the subject of the painting. A similar effect can be bestowed on Vieira's violently rendered “non-couleur” backdrop, particularly in *A Nous la Liberté III*, where the undefined colour resembling Miró's “méli-mélo” assists in engendering a penumbra of shadows (of the past), yet equally possible, representing the gestation period of things to come (in the future). In this manner, despite the simple and minimal use of figurative props Vieira catalyses the development of an otherwise complex narrative – the coming of the End of Time. Thus, once again Vieira relates her simplistic images to the same underlining forces behind the *Les Balançoires* imaginary: “Je ne voulais pas de l'évidence mais je voulais qu'il y ait beaucoup de choses sur mon tableau et pourtant je voulais faire très simple”.²⁴

2.2.1 The *Atelier 17*

Although an abstract, expressionist background may be ascribed to Joan Miró's paintings, Vieira's overall vision and composition seems to have been appropriated from Hayter's print *L'Apocalypse (V)*. In an attempt to escape from the conservatism of the academies, Vieira sought out alternative methods of teaching, joining Hayter's print-making *Atelier* early on. Although Vieira did not become an ardent engraver, she maintained close contact with the group as her husband, Arpad, joined the *Atelier* in 1931, becoming a prolific printmaker and exhibiting alongside his colleagues in 1936. The layout of the workshop, where young artists were able to work side by side with more experienced artists instituted an open and free environment for the interpolation of print-making techniques and aesthetic ideologies. Many renowned artists, amongst them Surrealists such as Alberto Giacometti, Yves Tanguy, Joan Miró, Max Ernst and Jean Arp joined the group early on, between 1930 and 1932. Amongst the non-figurative artists was Jean Hélion who historian Carla Espósito describes as, “de l'autre côté de la barrière”.²⁵ Rather than create a united front, this overlap instigated an aesthetic “fusion benefiting each of

²⁴See Chapter I, section 1.2.1 for full quote.

²⁵Carla Espósito, “Stanley William Hayter et l'Atelier 17”, *Nouvelles de l'Estampe*, No.127, March, Paris, 1993, 9.

the artists” separately.²⁶ The artistic freedom and open mindedness of Hayter’s organisation of the *Atelier* corresponded with Vieira’s own views regarding artistic methodologies of apprenticeship and the need for exposure to *l’art moderne*, rather than instruction.²⁷ The *Atelier* might be expected to have had an immediate effect on Vieira’s artistic career and particularly to have had an impact on her early prints. This unfortunately can not be verified, as there are only two surviving prints of her pre-1934 period completed in 1929, *Vale de Grâce* and *La Visiteuse*, which very much like her earliest Paris works, rely substantially upon natural realism [Pl.35].²⁸ The absence of these early prints has in many ways reduced the *Atelier*’s significance in regard to Vieira’s early formation. For example, Diane Daval Béran denies that there were any influences from the *Atelier* while Gisela Rosenthal and Dora Vallier ignore its presence altogether.²⁹ Despite this neglect, a pictorial transference did occur, which regardless of the lack of prints, may be traced in Vieira’s painted works. This pictorial trajectory, for she completed her paintings within an entirely different studio and environment, signifies and measures the extent of the impact of the *Atelier* on Vieira’s early works. Most notably, one can identify the abstract and independent quality of the print line in these paintings, particularly with regards to her larger format autobiographical works.

It is in retrospect that we can examine Vieira’s work in view of Hayter’s engraving theory, as it is only in 1949 that he published his first book, describing the art of print-making as “the art of the line”.³⁰ In *A Nous la Liberté*, Vieira uses an assembly of lines to construct a wire-like helicoidal structure to contain her floating forms. Aguilar ascribes the function of *tableau-contenant* to this geometrical form, explaining the process as follows: “il s’agit de produire l’espace sans allusion, sans s’en remettre à l’artifice de la perspective

²⁶Scarlett Reliquet Bonduelle, “The Poetics of the Line. Atelier 17 Engravings (1927-1940)”, exh. cat., *A Poetica do Traço: Gravuras do Atelier 17 1927-1940*, Fundação Arpad Szenes-Vieira da Silva, Lisbon 2006, 122.

²⁷See Chapter I, section 2.

²⁸See Chapter I, section 2.

²⁹For Daval Béran’s remark see Introduction.

³⁰Stanley William Hayter, *Ways of Gravure*, Oxford (1959) 1966, xxi.

linéaire”.³¹ A similar structural effect within a two dimensional framework appears in Vieira's early paintings, such as the inverted pendulum in *Les Balançoires* and the ladder in *Autoportrait*. In both works these structures assist in deciphering the underlying narrative of an otherwise fantastical and highly enigmatic imagery, given the paintings' inherent symbolism of music and transcendence respectively. In *A Nous la Liberté* the symbolism of the helicoidal form lies in the very nature of its abstract quality as it is not designated to delineate an object, but rather describe the quality of abstraction in the force of an action. It is in view of this qualitative transformation in Vieira's use of the line from that we begin to identify its independent function as accorded by Hayter. He declared: “The most outstanding advantage of the engraved line is probably its function either alone or in a web-like system of lines, of demonstrating an order of space having inherent curvature, its time function ... existence of tension and pressure ... direction of flow”.³² A clear example of this directional and temporal use of the line in Hayter's work can be observed in his print, *Apocalypse (III)* [Pl.36]. Standing against a darkened backdrop, stands a light toned transparent human figure with a minutely rendered heart. Superimposed against this living organism, Hayter renders a parallel, transparent and colourless wire-like form which seems to be removing itself from the confines of the lighter coloured body. In this work Hayter captures the moment of exodus of the souls from their material bodies, thus representing man's last moments on earth. The lines in the background bifurcate into elevated vertical columns, with a zigzagged line running through them. The manner in which Hayter connects the action of the soul's exodus and eventual ascension is through the incision of a line running deep into the background area of the picture plane, indicating the narrative flow of the illustration, from the foreground to background. This image prefigures the vision in *Apocalypse (V)* as these wire structures run from the bottom to the top, elevating the forms into unknown territories.

Similar linear functions apply to Vieira's helicoidal structure in her *A Nous la Liberté* series, particularly its ability to assist narrative through its capacity to delineate space,

³¹Nelson Aguilar, *Figuration et Spatialisation dans la peinture moderne brésilienne: le séjour de Vieira da Silva au Brésil (1940-1947)*, PhD dissertation, Université Jean Moulin, Lyon 1984, 81.

³²Hayter, *Ways of Gravure*, 266.

indicate time and establish directional flow. Against a non-descriptive backdrop, the line becomes the only narrative device within the painting, as its presence symbolises the entrapment and subjection of her figure forms as they find themselves being elevated into unknown territories. A parallel vision arises in Hayter's *Apocalypse (V)*. A sense of forced vertical movement is imbued not only through the figures' extended arms but through a clear zigzagged set of lines cutting through the surface of the image, indicative of the ascending movement of the forms, "establishing a narrative sense of displacement in time".³³ This is how the storytelling occurs in both images, either by drawing a line through each of them, as in Hayter's case, or encircling them within its three dimensional space, in Vieira's. In both instances the artists do not only use the line in its descriptive capacity but extend its function so as to express "transparency and evoke three dimensions by means of a continuous linear movement".³⁴ Historian Peter Black's suggests that Hayter's use of the line in its most intellectual form was the result of his close association with sculptor Alexander Calder. It is in view of Calder's expression of the line as the visual rendition of "motion, force and space" that Hayter's print work developed.³⁵

Associating Vieira's work with that of her colleague Hayter generates new interpretative grounds through which to examine the artist's choice of theme and pictorial development. By identifying the underlying theme of the *Apocalypse* in her work, a clearer, more definitive role can be assigned to the line as a form of pictorial device, as it relates to a multiplicity of functions, both descriptive of an action yet abstract in quality.

2.3 A Contemporary reading of René Clair's *A Nous la Liberté*

The title of the painting *A Nous la Liberté*, prefigures a series of questions regarding the nature of its outcry - *Freedom to us!* Although on a visual level these depictions may be

³³ Stanley William Hayter, *Ways of Gravure*, Oxford, 1966, 238.

³⁴ See Peter Black's, "Differing Modes of Representation: The Originality of Hayter's Imagery", in (eds) Desirée Moorhead and Peter Black, *The Prints of Stanley William Hayter: A Complete Catalogue*, London 1992, 36.

³⁵ Ibid.

aligned with Hayter's *Apocalypse* images, another source inspired Vieira's title - René Clair's 1931 film *A Nous la Liberté*. This association leads to a new interpretation in relation to the socio-political context within which the series of paintings were completed, as Clair's film is highly politicised in content. The following section features a close examination of Clair's work and its socio-political implications, which are then compared in the following section with Vieira's apocalyptic imagery in *A Nous la Liberté*, examining possible narrative and contextual inferences produced by their juxtaposition.

Clair's story is the comic tale of two prison convicts, Louis (Raymond Cordy) and Emile (Henri Marchand), who plot an escape together. Louis is the only who escapes successfully to freedom. He sets himself up as a sidewalk phonograph salesman and in short time rises to the directorship of a successful phonograph manufacturing company. Louis' new identity keeps him out of prison and allows him to join the upper levels of society. Eventually Emile gains employment at Louis' plant, where he recognizes his former cellmate and friend. When Emile reveals himself to Louis, the latter tries to bribe Emile into leaving and remaining silent from his secret past. But their friendship triumphs over everything else. Eventually the local mob blackmails Louis with photographic evidence of his former identity and his life falls apart. The story concludes with Louis and Emile both escaping from the time-driven and regimented factory life and settle on the road to vagrancy with no other destination in mind than *Liberté!*

The underlying political tone of the film is left-wing, expressed through its concern for the socio-economic implications which arose with the age of mechanisation and in particular, the loss of personal freedom. Clair explored this particular issue by designating both prisoners and factory workers with the Marxist term the "masses", which robs them of their individuality and personal identity. The "masses" are all dressed the same, in uniforms, performing the same menial tasks whether in a prison workshop or a factory conveyor belt [PI.37, PI.38]. Clair extends these parallels from their work to their daily routine as he alternates shots in a series of dissolves:

A shot of the prisoners standing at attention in response to a horn slowly dissolves to a shot of their marching feet. This shot dissolves to a shot of workers eating at long tables

identical to their assembly-line work tables. Finally this shot dissolves to one of the prisoner's legs marching back to the cells.³⁶

Clair's message seems to be straightforward: the life of a factory worker, an alleged free man, is no different from that of a prisoner, an institutionalised convict. It was film historian R.C. Dale who first observed these parallel narratives, remarking: "both groups are spiritually imprisoned to the same degree by the regimentation of their work".³⁷ In an interview with Clair in 1952, Georges Charensol asked him what he had in mind when he was completing *A Nous la Liberté*. Clair answered: "it was the time when I was closest to the extreme left, and I wanted to combat the machine when it becomes an enslaver of man rather than contribute, as it should, to his happiness".³⁸ In his film, mankind seems entirely enslaved by chronological time, an external temporal force which sets the pace by which human beings need to operate. In the most famous shot of the film, Clair assumes a high angle and shoots down as two precisely ordered lines of workers march past each other "in a perfectly parallel set of frame-transecting lines" [Pl.39].³⁹ Clair draws a visual insinuation with the horizontal linear quality of his frames as the transecting worker's lines parallel the horizontal planks that frame the building in the background. This horizontality directs the rhythmic outplay of Clair's factory shots as the factory workers march in time to the ticking second dial of the factory clock. Historian Nancy Watanabe accords this concept of temporal linearity as an emblem of the enslavement of man to chronological time: "it set its schedule of thought and action according to the persistent tick of the time machine, which plods unremittingly forward marking the path from past to present to future".⁴⁰ Clair's underlying message however, can be applied to a larger contextual reading, relating to mankind's existence as dictated by the canon of modernity.

³⁶Nancy Watanabe, "René Clair's Freedom: an Extratemporal Moment", *The French Review*, Vol.XLII, No.3, February, 1969, 434.

³⁷R.C. Dale, "A Clash of Intelligences: Sound and Image in René Clair's *A Nous la Liberté*", *The French Review*, Vol.38, No. 5, April, 1965, 641.

³⁸As cited in R.C.Dale, *The Films of René Clair: Volume I - exposition and analysis*, London, 1986, 186.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 191.

⁴⁰Watanabe, "René Clair's Freedom", 428.

The sense of irony in Clair's criticism of this unalterable condition of self-imprisonment is readily available within the opening scene of the film as he draws a clear juxtaposition between "sound and image".⁴¹ While the prisoners are forced to labour in a prison workshop constructing wooden children's toys they sing a song concerning freedom:

La liberté, c'est toute l'existence, /Mais les humains ont créé les prisons, Les règlements,
les lois, les convenances /Et les travaux, les bureaux, les maisons. Ai-je raison? /Alors
disons: Mon vieux copain, la vie est belle, /Quand on connaît la liberté, /N'attendons plus,
partons vers elle, L'air pur est bon pour la santé. /Partout, si l'on en croit l'histoire,
/Partout on peut rire et chanter, Partout on peut aimer et boire, /A nous, à nous la liberté!

Clair seems to be suggesting that freedom is given to us, "c'est toute l'existence", and yet we choose this state of imprisonment, "Mais les humains ont créé les prisons, les règlements, les lois, les convenances". The prisoners' forced voices, almost unintelligible, singing through gritted teeth, makes apparent their own understanding of this unalterable condition. However, beyond the first line of the song, incarceration is not the sole usurper of liberty; it is accompanied by the institution of labour as well: "Et les travaux, les bureaux". This song prefigures a parallel shot later in the film, of Louis' factory workers singing *A Nous la Liberté* behind a highly mechanised assembly line. This second juxtaposition of factory workers and prisoners enables the viewer to understand that Clair's concept of imprisonment lies beyond the bars of a prison cell to a general state of existence regarding "spiritual imprisonment". To further enhance the notion of the non-physical aspect of this form institutionalisation, Clair includes a scene of very young boys in a classroom setting being instructed to repeat the following claim: "Work is compulsory/Because work/is freedom". Via this statement Clair draws clearly upon the paradox inherent in the capitalist credo: work is freedom, yet work is compulsory. Clair visually draws on this contradictory offer of freedom as he inter-cuts the school scene with Emile's second incarceration, his crime being leisurely lying on the grass hours after his discharge from prison.

⁴¹Dale, "Clash of Intelligences", 642.

The following question therefore remains to be answered: does wealth signify freedom? Thus far, left-wing outcry has been made in favour of “masses”, the factory workers and prisoners. However, Clair draws upon these same values further up the social scale in relation to Louis' own particular circumstance of *imprisonment*. Although Louis escaped from prison, in his new role as a successful company director he has become a prisoner of time, for time only signifies money in his new adopted world.⁴² This is clearly expressed in the film as Louis is continuously looking at his pocket watch while forced to attend one meeting after another. This concept of chronological imprisonment in Louis' life is starkly contrasted with Emile's life as a worker in his factory, as he is unable to comply with the orderly procedure of schedule and routine, resulting in him continuously disrupting order. The cause is his pursuit of love, an innate quality of human nature and personal freedom. It is in this view that Watanabe designates Emile as the only character in the film to be “suspended from time”, that is, the only free spirit present in the film.⁴³ However, this internal freedom is that which afforded Emile with his second jail term. As for Louis, he is forced to abandon all his possessions once his identity is disclosed to the police. Abandoning all his material possessions, Louis joins Emile as a free spirit, as they opt for the road to vagrancy, signifying freedom from time, money and responsibility.

2.4 Vieira, Hayter and Clair – an examination

In the following section I examine the manner in which Vieira's use of the theme of Apocalypse can be interpreted as an internal projection to Clair's examination of humanity's psychical entrapment. Vieira completed *A Nous la Liberté* using recognisable visual references to prior intimations of apocalyptic images, such as the use of El Greco's iconography from *Vision of Saint John* and more contemporaneously, Hayter's composition from *L'Apocalypse* (V). The significance of the 400 year time lag between these two visual sources underlines the fundamental non-temporal quality inherent in apocalyptic literature as it is representative of a prophecy describing human fate,

⁴²Watanabe, “René Clair's Freedom”, 434.

⁴³Ibid.

regardless of time and space. Theologian D.T. Niles describes the apocalypse as a literature that unveils the meaning of the present in light of the End of Time: “it illuminates the meaning of any time, and affords guidance for every living age”.⁴⁴ Vieira was first made aware of this script as an expression of mankind’s unalterable self-destructiveness with her mother’s religious readings between 1914 and 1918. Therefore, in 1933 when Vieira resorted to the theme of the Apocalypse in her painting she relied on it as an internal projection, as an expression of a similar internal turmoil of dread and pessimism instigated in her as a child during the war. However, unlike 1914-1918, no grand scale historical event triggered this self-introspective vision, but rather a series of accounts leading to 1933 may have led Vieira to the belief of the possibility of a similar outcome, such as the Wall Street crash in 1929 or the rise of fascism in Europe, particularly Germany and the Arms Race. Whereupon, identifying a possible source to her series title in a film like Clair's raises issues central to the socio-economic implications of inter-war Europe in the new industrial age. In this manner, contrary to her initial exposure to apocalyptic visions defined by a single historical circumstance, this second narrative is associated to a normative script, concerning mankind's doomed fate in his chosen path.

Clair’s film was not alone in its expression regarding the spiritual crisis of mankind afflicting society at the time. Its contextual value regarding spiritual consciousness gains further validity in this analysis when examined alongside an article published by the art journal *Formes* in 1931 in Paris entitled, “The World Crisis and the Crisis of Man”. In his text historian Daniel Rops accounts for the confusion of the modern world to lie within man rather than outside as he declares:

They [contemporaries] take a given phenomenon – such as over-production, international rivalry, the movements of old, the aftermath of war – and make it responsible for all. I am not denying that such phenomena as these have had a marked influence on the disorder of our times; but each of them is, itself, but the consequence of an essential, and wider cause. If we examine the various domains in which the spirit of unrest prevails, we find that the external and visible disorganisation is always the reflection of an inward and spiritual chaos, which explains it.⁴⁵

⁴⁴D.T. Niles, *As Seeing the Invisible: a study of the book of Revelations*, London 1961, 27.

⁴⁵ Daniel Rops, “The World Crisis and the Crisis of Man”, in *Formes*, No.18, October, 1931, 118.

Akin to Rops in 1914-1918 Vieira's mother used the theme of the Apocalypse to present to young Vieira with the inner turmoil which corrupts mankind toward self-destruction, such as the Great War. In 1933, there is a different quality to this self-destructive mode as it ceases to represent a physical notion and aligns with the state of affairs regarding human existence in general – a *modus operandis* of the human psyche. In Clair's work *Dale* refers to this effect as "spiritual imprisonment", where mankind betrays something within him – the spirit. Vieira's pessimism can be detected in this rather bleak outlook on life that accompanies her autobiographical work, initially with *Autoportrait* in 1932 and eventually with *A Nous la Liberté*. It is not however until this last series of paintings that Vieira visually expresses the horror and fears of that which remains to come. Hope in these paintings lies beyond the recordings of History, past, present or future as Vieira's figures journey from the known territories of History to the unknown future. In ascribing this function to Vieira's apocalyptic visions the words of sociologist Catherine Keller Beacon come to mind: "We are the Apocalypse: we are in it as a script ... and we are in it as recipients of the history of social and environmental effects of that script ... apocalypse is both a state of mind and an interpretation of it".⁴⁶

In describing the forces behind the making of his film Clair declared: it stood against the machine and "[a]bove all against the *sanctity of work* when it is uninteresting and non-individual".⁴⁷ It is important to note Clair's vocabulary when he addresses the issue of capitalist work ethic as he suggests an element of inviolability with the use of the word *sanctity*. On another occasion he remarked: "There would be fewer employed today if the moralists had not established a *religion of work* in the past. We must work in order to live, but it is absurd to live in order to work".⁴⁸ In this instance, Clair addresses the

⁴⁶Catherine Keller Beacon, *Apocalypse Now and Then: a feminist guide to the End of the World*, Boston 1996, 12-13.

⁴⁷Georges Charensol, "To Fight the Machine" in Jacques, Richard and Hayden, Nicola (eds), *A Nous la Liberté and Entr'Acte films by René Clair*, London 1970, 9. *Italics my own*.

⁴⁸René Clair, "Picabia, Satie and the First Night of Entr'acte", *Figaro Littéraire*, June, 1967. As cited and translated in Jacques, *films by René Clair*, 9.

capitalist ideal as a doctrine of devotion, as if mankind has lost itself, and its spirit to the capitalist canon, reflecting the Marxian notion of self-sacrifice:

the external character of labour for the labourer is demonstrated that it belongs not to him but to another, and that in it he belongs not to himself but to another... just like in religion the spontaneous response of the individual to the imagination detaches itself as a god or a devil ... It belongs to another, it is a loss of himself.⁴⁹

On this occasion Marx described the condition of man in industrial society by using the Hegelian term “alienation”. Man is alienated in two senses: firstly, having lost control of the products of his own activity, which now controls him as an inhuman power and secondly, man is restricted to performing uninteresting and degrading jobs. In Clair's film, the regimented and rigorous schedule of a highly unskilled job immediately discloses this sense of “alienation” between man and work engendering Dale’s description of *spiritual imprisonment*.⁵⁰ Dale's designation does not concern the dualism between nature and super-nature, man and God, earth and heaven, but rather the notion of man against man where History rather than divine intervention becomes the principle author.⁵¹ This same secularist emancipation from an otherwise religious reading overpowers Vieira's apocalyptic vision, where the notion of elevation comes to represent self-awareness, a consciousness of human mortality where man is set against his own: “On this earth, men do nothing else but kill one another”.⁵²

In Vieira's use of apocalyptic imagery, rather than state the relevance of religion in this prediction she proclaims its absence, “Je n'ai pas de religion”.⁵³ Today, this metaphor of transcendence is popularised by the existentialist movement where the general belief postulates that the absence of a transcendent force, such as God, means

⁴⁹In Karl Marx, *Karl Marx: Early Writings*, by T.B. Bottomore (ed. and transl.), London 1963, 125. Although it is not the aim of this chapter to examine Marxist elements in Clair’s work, it is of interest to examine the extent to which Clair involved his films with contemporary issues.

⁵⁰Dale, “A Clash of Intelligences”, 641.

⁵¹Richard Comstock, “The Marxist Critique of Religion: A Persisting Ambiguity” in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 44, No. 2, June, Oxford 1976, 327. The strong presence of a Marxist quality in his work Claire confesses for himself, “the film was pretty true to Marx’s theory” in R.C. Dale’s, “Films of”, 187.

⁵²See the Introduction to this Chapter.

⁵³Charbonnier, *Monologue du Peintre*, 175.

that humans must be responsible for creating an ethos of personal responsibility outside an institutional belief system.⁵⁴ This personal articulation of being is the only way to rise above the human condition of frailty.⁵⁵ In view of Vieira's autobiographical works, this self-awareness reflects a personal desire as revealed in *Autoportrait*, and yet this condition pertains to mankind in general. In her effort to establish a more universal narrative regarding mankind's unalterable fate, Vieira adopts the narrative and the pictorial expression of the Apocalypse.

In his film, Clair assigns the same fate of spiritual entrapment to both factory workers and prisoners; however the force inducing them to this state of imprisonment is of a different nature for each group. The institution of incarceration restricts the prisoner to rigorous and forced menial labour whilst the factory worker conforms to the capitalist credo which represses mankind both physically as well as ideologically. In making Emile the funniest and thereby the character the audience most likely is to sympathise with in the film, Clair states his intentions as the struggle for the anarchical being, both on a political scale as well as a personal one. Dale remarks: "it deals with the analogous subject of autonomy, or freedom from outside constraint".⁵⁶ To this same effect, Keller's aforementioned observation declares the apocalypse as both an existence arising from external concerns, "history and environmental effects", and of a purely internal nature, "a state of mind". In this instance, a thematic analogy can be established between Vieira's 1932-1934 oeuvre and Clair's script, particularly on the matter of constraint and imprisonment, running from an external dialectic to a purely internal one. Vieira's visions seem to draw upon a parallel notion as she completes *A Nous la Liberté* one year after *L'Arbre en Prison*, as she abandons the imagery of tightly knit nettings to a loosely fitted wire-like helicoidal form to illustrate the barriers between freedom and escape. This

⁵⁴Although Existentialism was branded per se in the 1940's by Jean Paul Sartre, the basis to these beliefs begin to develop in the late nineteenth century with thinkers such as Frederick Nietzsche.

⁵⁵The notion of "Philosophy of tragedy" has been borrowed from Renato Poggioli's interpretation of the tragic sense of life addressed in Leon Shestov's essay entitled, *Doestoyevsky and Nietzsche: Philosophy of Tragedy*, Athens 1969. First published in 1903.

⁵⁶Dale, *Films of René Clair*, 187. Although Dale never quotes Marx in his papers it was Clair himself who described this film as: "pretty true to Marx's theory...that the end product of real revolution is anarchy".

effect, although rather literal in its visual interpretation, hints at an alternate reading where Vieira's theatricality in *A Nous la Liberté*, such as the melodramatic posture of arms extended above the heads alongside over-expressive facial expressions, comes to dictate a state of mind, in particular, spiritual chaos, rather than a physical condition of enclosure. In Clair's script, this notion of psychological imprisonment can be assigned to the factory workers. Constraint is emblematised in the ideology of: "live in order to work", a state of existence indoctrinated into the human psyche running against human instinct. In this manner both works are concerned with mankind's spiritual destiny, calling on the irrationalities of human existence, as a response to the events marked by History.⁵⁷

Conclusion

Carefully exploring the series *A Nous la Liberté* both thematically and pictorially reveals that Vieira's work is intricately connected to contemporaneous artistic developments. Moreover, in the same manner that her work can be contextually situated within the art historical scene, Vieira's choice of theme in the Apocalypse and its respective iconography proves her intentions to expand beyond her previous pictorial efforts as her narrative abandons the purely personal symbolism to a more publicly recognisable visionary narrative.

Compositionally Vieira's series can be linked to an external source, Hayter's 1931 print *Apocalypse (V)* and iconographically to El Greco's *Vision of Saint John*. As a thematic

⁵⁷ Clair created *A Nous la Liberté* in close collaboration with the Belgian Surrealist writer, Albert Valentin. The film was inevitably brought to the attention of the Surrealists, resulting in an article being published by René Crevel and Paul Eluard. In the article, they condemned the narrative's counter-revolutionary quality, as Louis' machine-run factory eventually freed the factory workers from their menial existence without any reference to a revolt. This criticism was directly addressed to Valentin, rather than Clair, in the following manner: "P.S - L'Assistant Albert Valentin, en notre présence, ainsi qu'en celle de Breton et d'Aragon, a lui-même déclaré, sans la moindre pudeur, que ce film était contre-révolutionnaire ... mais s'est refusé à rendre publique cette déclaration ..." in René Crevel and Paul Eluard, "Un Film Commercial", *Le Surréalisme ASDLR*, Vol.4, Paris 1932, 29.

extension to her 1932 œuvre, this series confirms the negative storyline underpinning the otherwise simplistic, naïve and child-like imagery of her paintings. Expression nonetheless once more is intricately connected to the source of her narrative – childhood memories. In this case, the imagery of the Apocalypse can be observed as an introspective vision relating to a spiritual, mental state, as it responds to ongoing historical and social discourses as exemplified by Clair's highly politicised film.

Chapter III

Kô et Kô, 1933 - the literary fantastic

“L’homme, ce rêveur définitif, de jour en jour plus mécontent de son sort ...”¹

Introduction

In 1933 Vieira completed a set of illustrations for a book entitled *Kô et Kô: les deux esquimaux*, alongside her series of paintings entitled *A Nous la Liberté*. Initially intended as a children's storybook, it eventually afforded Vieira her first solo exhibition at Galerie Jeanne Bucher in 1933.² The historian Ana Ruivo defines this achievement as follows: “Par une suprenante approche de l’imaginaire infantile, Vieira da Silva redéfinit son travail de peintre grâce à l’illustration”.³ Ruivo's essay for the exhibition catalogue, *Vieira da Silva: Kô et Kô e outras historias*, marks the only occasion that scholarly attention has been paid to the artist's work as an illustrator.⁴ Ruivo's essay draws solely upon Vieira's capacity as an illustrator, briefly remarking on formalist affinities with the artist's early 1930s paintings, commenting purely on pictorial elements.⁵ According to biographical facts, the text itself was written by colleague poet and writer Pierre Gueguen whilst Vieira's involvement was merely reserved to the task of illustrator.⁶ However, this chapter aims to examine the significance of this work within Vieira's painted oeuvre on the basis of the use of fantasy as a mode of expression in view of the production of her 1932-33 fantastical paintings. I then explore the visual and textual dialogue that develops between the two

¹André Breton, *Manifeste du Surréalisme*, Paris 1924.

²Anne Philip, *L'Eclats de la Lumière*, Paris 1978, 28. As an avant-garde gallery, Galerie Jeanne Bucher, ran a small publishing house known as Editions Jeanne Bucher to accompany the small production of books and catalogues for her artists.

³Ana Ruivo, “D'Autres Histoires”, in *Kô et Kô e outras historias*, exh.cat. Fundação Arpad Szenes-Vieira da Silva, Lisbon 2001, 7.

⁴Other books illustrated and written by Vieira are, *Les Malheurs de Sophie* (1931), *Chansons Infantines* (1933) *Illustrations sous Mémoire* (1934), *Madame la Grammaire* (c.1936), *Caderno da Juventude* (1946).

⁵Ruivo, *Kô et Kô*, 8.

⁶Ibid.

bodies of work, literary and pictorial; the latter testifying further to the artist's negative outlook on life despite the book being initially intended for a young audience. This latter examination is then contextualised in view of the role and legacies of Surrealism within the cultural field of 1930s Paris.

Editions Jeanne Bucher ran a print of 250 copies of the book to accompany the exhibition. Previously published works by Jeanne Bucher included: Jean Lurçat's *Baroques* (1925), Max Ernst's *Histoire Naturelle* (1926), Jean Hugo's *Le Miroir Magique* (1927), Tristan Tzara's *Indicateurs des Chemins du Coeur* (1928), Louis Marcoussis' *Planches de Saluts* (1931), amongst numerous others. This list of artists' names indicates the gallery's strong advocacy of the avant-garde. Historian Muriel Jaër remarked: "Jeanne se passionait pour les createurs du moment dont l'expression était la plus tardi, la plus inconformiste. A la pointe du combat".⁷ In view of Jaër's description of Jeanne Bucher's intentions as a gallery owner it is significant to observe that Vieira's literary œuvre was deemed worthy for publication and exhibition alongside these well established artists of the avant-garde [Pl.40].⁸ What could have drawn Jeanne Bucher to consider Gueguen's and Vieira's book worthy of publication given the gallery owner's commercial intentions for the avant-garde? How far does *Kô et Kô* reflect Vieira's work as an avant-garde artist during these early years?⁹ Furthermore, to what extent are Vieira's painted works, discussed in Chapters I and II, part of this discourse?

The first section of this chapter examines *Kô et Kô*'s illustrations in an attempt to identify possible sources of inspiration with regard to their foreign quality and expression from her painted works. Secondly, I will consider *Kô et Kô* primarily as a fantastic literary phenomenon using Rosemary Jackson's theory of the "modern fantastic". The third section entitled "Eschatological Visions" brings together Vieira's literary work alongside her contemporaneous paintings discussed in Chapters I and II, eliciting strong thematic

⁷Muriel Jaër, "Jeanne Bucher, grand prêtresse de l'art d'avant garde", *Supérieur Inconnu*, No.19, October-December, 2000, 48.

⁸Accessing the exhibition's *Livre d'Or* at the Jeanne Bucher Gallery names such as Max Ernst, Julian Trevelyan, Anton Prinner and Jean Dubuffet are amidst the numerous attendees.

⁹The notion of avant-garde in this chapter as in subsequent ones is based on the argument as set forward by Renato Poggioli in *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, London 1968.

connections with her *petite fille* paintings. Section four entitled *L'Art Moderne* examines the underpinning negative storyline and use of the fantastic in context with her position as an artist working within the field of modern art. Both these qualities present in her work recall Surrealism's own use of the marvelous as a catalyst for critique in the 1930s. Consequently, a dialogue begins to develop between Vieira's historical consciousness and that of the Surrealists in terms of their role within society in a given historical moment. Lastly, this chapter examines Vieira's legitimate liaison with the Surrealists through her work in William Stanley Hayter's print-making *Atelier 17*.

3.1 A Visual Examination

Kô et Kô is the story of the journey of two Eskimos in search of the land of sun and warmth. A quick glance through Vieira's illustrations affords us a series of fantastical visions and desolate landscapes. The remoteness, alien expression and forms of these highly schematised and on many occasion biomorphosised visions, permit us to assume their inception to be *foreign* to the artist's previous work and thereby *hermetic*, as Vieira never incorporates them into her painted oeuvre. This discourse of visual alienation becomes the most likely explanation as to why *Kô et Kô* has failed to be integrated into the scholarly literature on Vieira.

However, though seemingly unrelated to her painted works, through the careful examination of references these illustrations engender clear visual links with the works of artists Vieira became acquainted with during these early years in Paris. Vieira met the Surrealist artist Joan Miró in Hayter's *Atelier* when he joined the workshop in 1931.¹⁰ Although only one print by Miró from this period survives to this day, it is actually his painted works which are of particular significance to our examination, particularly his oeuvre from the mid-1920s. The image most easily discernable as owing a debt to Miró is the fifth plate in Vieira's book entitled *La Mer* [Pl.41], most likely inspired by Miró's *Seascape* (1924) [Pl.42] and *Painting* (1930) [Pl.43]. From *Seascape*, one can see Miró's use of the water, in clear undulating schematic lines against an otherwise saturated

¹⁰For a more detailed examination on Hayter's *Atelier 17* please refer to section 2.2. of this Chapter.

monochromatic background, discernable in Vieira's paintings of the period. From *Painting*, there seems to have been a direct appropriation of the starfish in its skewed monochromatic form; a design never seen again in Vieira's work. There are also strong visual references that strongly recall Miró's biomorphic orange form in *Painting* which Vieira's rendition of a black fish with its open threatening mouth and hair extensions, which are similarly positioned on the canvas surface. Furthermore, similarities in form and colour resonate through Vieira's lean and elongated creature found just beneath the sea-line draws and Miró's eel-like form.

A less direct visual appropriation of Miró's work from 1920s is visible in Vieira's first illustration, *La Hutte de Kô et Kô* [Pl.44] which also references Miró's landscapes, particularly *Landscape with Flower (1927)* [Pl.45], and *Dog barking at the Moon (1926)* [Pl.47].¹¹ The only discernable object in her character's homeland is an igloo, in an otherwise deserted landscape of blackened sky and whitened earth. The limited chromatic expression of Vieira's palette is aligned with her ambition to condense the visual vocabulary of her painted œuvre as she claims: "commencer avec peu de couleurs pour en ajouter au fur et à mesure et non les imposer d'emblée en trop grand nombre et de manière trop affirmé pour ne pas être contrainte dès le départ par leur trop forte présence".¹² The use of a limited palette of saturated colours brings to mind Miró's aforementioned landscapes where there is an almost sensorial element in their desolation, echoing Michel Leiris' notion of "la compréhension du vide" in his description of Miró's work in the journal *Documents* in 1930.¹³ Although Vieira limits herself to a highly restricted colour scheme in this first plate, contrary to Miró's lively use of primary reds

¹¹In all probability Vieira came across *Dog barking at the Moon* by 1933 since this painting by 1929 was considered Miró's most famous and most often reproduced painting, as claimed in "Chronologie", exh. cat., *Joan Miró: 1917-1934*, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris 2004, 342. The year of Vieira's arrival in Paris it was reproduced in André Breton's, "Surréalisme et la Peinture", in *Nouvelle Revue Française*, February, 1928 and exhibited alongside *Landscape with Flower* at Galerie Georges Bernheim that same year.

¹²As quoted in Diane Daval Béran, "Analyse d'Œuvre", in Weelen, Guy; Jaeger, Jean-François and Daval Béran, Diane (eds.), *Monographie*, Geneva 1994, 131. All quotes taken from Diane Beran Daval's work were taken from an interview with the artist in 1991.

¹³Michel Leiris, "Joan Miró", *Documents*, Vol.I, No.5, 1930, 263.

and yellows, both artists cover large areas of surface with monochromatic hues, creating deserted, almost lunar landscapes pervaded by emptiness.

Another plate featuring Miró-like traits is Vieira's *Cerf-Volant* [Pl.46]. An organic existence is lent to an otherwise inanimate object through the use of an almond shaped eye. While the motif of suspended triangular organisms in flight brings to mind Miró's *The Hunter* and *The Tilled Field* [Pl.47] (both of 1923-4), the vision itself, of a child and a kite seems to be directly borrowed from Arpad Szenes' portfolio of subjects and motifs. Arpad's work's, particularly in his series *Enfant au Cerf Volant* 1929-1936, which lingers between the memory of a real event (a child flying a kite) and the imaginary (his representation of the kite as a living form), inspired Vieira to imbue the theme with a fantastical quality which she then may have incorporated into the storytelling of *Kô et Kô*. Like Arpad's *Cerf Volant* print of 1933 [Pl.48], Vieira's kite also possesses the faculty of sight, by way of an almond shaped eye placed upon its triangular form. However, in Vieira's case the print is accompanied by text in which the kite's organic form is explained as follows: "Alors un cerf, qui se promenait entre les arbres de la forêt se transforme en cerf volant et s'envole vers le chateau. Il pecha la petite fille et la mit sur la croupe du cheval de son père".¹⁴ Vieira's fantastical transformation of a stag [*cerf*] to a kite [*cerf-volant*] visually translates the definition of the word itself, "cerf-volant" as flying-stag.

Moving away from the landscape to the actual forms of *Kô et Kô*, as represented by her book cover, *Sur le dos de l'oiseau* [Pl.49] and the front cover plate [Pl.50], both Eskimos not only share the same name but seem to be almost physically bound together as a single entity. Vieira may have borrowed this trait in her main characters from Arpad's own series of paintings entitled *Le Couple* [Pl.51]. Arpad began experimenting with this motif after his marriage to Vieira in 1931. That same year, Arpad completed the print, *Le Couple* [Pl.52] in which he fuses the two interlaced forms to a single outline. Although Vieira's work evades such apparent sentimentality, the quality of this almost symbiotic relationship seems to encompass her characters of *Kô et Kô*. Arpad, in describing his relationship with Vieira, made the claim: "Nous avons tous les deux la même culture et

¹⁴Vieira da Silva, *Kô et Kô*, plates 7-8.

une même grande sensibilité aux mêmes choses”.¹⁵ A similar affinity for her characters may be discerned as Vieira not only grants them the same name, but refers to them throughout the narrative as having a single voice and simultaneous common reactions, causing the reader to begin considering them to be a single entity.

Le Cirque immediately strikes the reader as it is unique within Vieira's narrative and painted œuvre in terms of style of execution [Pl.53]. The predominant pale hues of greens, yellows and blues have been supplanted by earthy (brown) tones against a clear monochromatic backdrop, eradicating the horizon line as seen in *L'ours et son fils ourson* [Pl.54] and *Les phoques* [Pl.55], which until then had been characteristic of her landscapes. However, in *Le Cirque* the complete frontality of her spatial forms and the use of a terracotta colour, renders her composition almost prehistoric in terms of execution, recalling the art found in caves and on stones that was being discovered in Africa and the Americas at that time. Illustrations of these ancient forms of art were available in two art journals of the time - *Cahiers d'Art* and *Documents*. One can draw distinctive visual parallels between Vieira's composition of the circus and an illustrated article published in *Documents* in 1930 entitled “Dessins Rupestres du Sud de Rhodesie” [Pl.56].¹⁶ In *Le Cirque* the entire image is centred on a circular arena that creates a clearly spatially enclosed composition. In the archaic vision, similar circular lines can be observed although they are representative of “running waters” whilst humans and animals can be identified on either sides. In Vieira's work, given her choice of motif these lines are transformed into the spectator's benches at a circus. The motif itself also proved foreign to Vieira's œuvre, likely inspired from living in close quarters at Villa Brune with the American engineer-turned-artist Alexander Calder, who throughout the summers of 1930 and 1932 put on shows of his mechanised *Circus* [Pl.57] in his *Atelier*.¹⁷

The decorative plates, which Vieira intended the reader to cut out in order to create paper figurines to accompany the reading of the book [Pl.58], reference the clear

¹⁵Anne Philip, *L'Eclats de la Lumière: entretiens avec Marie-Helene Vieira da Silva et Arpad Szenes*, Paris 1978, 66-7.

¹⁶Léo Frobenius, “Dessins Rupestres du Sud de Rhodesie”, *Documents*, No.4, 1930, 187.

¹⁷Alexander Calder, *An autobiography with pictures*, New York 1967, 281.

spatial grids established by the Uruguayan Joaquín Torres García. This playful activity may also recall Torres García's tendency to transform the schematized forms in his paintings such as *Constructif avec figure étrange* (1931) [Pl.59] into wooden toys.¹⁸ In his attempt to create a universal constructive visual language Torres García structured his paintings in a clear grid-like formation, where each figure or form would be contained within its own space. This self-containment is what may have led Vieira to turn this grid-like framework into a child's game. Furthermore, despite a spatial resemblance with the Uruguayan's painters works, there are also strong schematic influences in her depiction of objects, specifically the frontal view of a ship located in the bottom left corner of her cut-out but otherwise centrally located in *Constructif*. On the one time Vieira commented on the Uruguayan's work she remarked in retrospect: "Torres García: une tour blanche, noire, grise, bleu de cobalt, terre rouge, des échelles, des horloges, un monde sévère et gai, un monde où je suis entrée en 1929 et que j'habite toujours".¹⁹

The appropriation of pictorial sources for Vieira's illustrations from the works of her contemporaries is of a more immediate nature than is exhibited within her painted works of the time, such as the *A Nous la Liberté* series examined in Chapter II. In the development of a fantastical storyline, Vieira adopted Miróesque biomorphosised forms, her husband's child-inspired printed motifs and Torres García's grid-like surfaces, as further testimony to Vieira's work being in constant dialogue with her surroundings and particularly, with other members of *Atelier 17*. However, as the following sections examine, the storyline underpinning *Kô et Kô*, despite its foreign pictorial forms, elicits immediate thematic connection with her *petite fille* paintings, discussed in Chapter I. In this fashion, the alien quality of these illustrations is constrained to style and motif as Vieira continues developing a storyline which runs parallel to her painted œuvre.

3.2 *Kô et Kô* - The Literary Fantastic

¹⁸ This painting is from Vieira's private collection although acquired later in life.

¹⁹ Artist's interview with Guy Weelen in March 1975 as cited in, "Vieira au fils des jours – Eclats multiples pour une esquisse de portrait" in Weelen, Guy, Jaeger, Jean-François and Daval Béran, Diane (eds.), *Monographie: Vieira da Silva*, Geneva 1994, 41.

The fantastic visions in Vieira's illustrations are accompanied by an equally marvelous storyline. The following section examines *Kô et Kô's* storytelling within the theoretical framework of the literary fantastic as described by critic Rosemary Jackson and the novelist J.R.R. Tolkien.

Kô and Kô is the story of two Eskimos who embark on a long and treacherous journey in their attempt to escape from the dreary dark nights of a Polar winter and find the sun. During their adventures they encounter talking animals and magical figures that assist them in their quest. Gueguen constructs the plot for *Kô et Kô* following the blueprint of earlier literary fantasies such as Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), which tells the story of a girl named Alice whose desire to enter into a beautiful garden takes her into a fantastic realm where she undertakes an arduous journey meeting talking animals in a world ruled by playing cards.²⁰ *Kô et Kô's* simple narrative plot recalls Carroll's, as the two characters embark on a fantastical journey because of an inner impulse - a *desire*. Unlike Carroll, Gueguen places his fantastical narrative in the empirically known world and juxtaposes it with supernatural figures and animals who undergo transfigurations. This structural difference between these two forms of fantasy writing conform to what scholar and writer J.R.R. Tolkien described in his essay "On Fairy-Stories" as High Fantasy and Low Fantasy.²¹ The difference between the two realms is measured by the extent to which the narrative is divorced from our own "primary world". High Fantasy, unlike Low Fantasy, indicates a world that features arrestingly strange fantastical events governed by its own laws, creating a complete set of new values to define this new 'reality'. Low Fantasy, on the other hand, describes non-rational occurrences within our realm of what we consider "reality" yet its presence remains unexplained.²² This latter scenario represents the framework within which Gueguen set *Kô et Kô*, as both the characters (Eskimos) and the location (the North Pole) constitute part of the reader's "primary world". Moreover, the element of fantasy goes unexplained, as

²⁰Possible references to Carroll's book may be found in Vieira's imagery in paintings such as *Le Jeux de Cartes* (1937), *La Morte du Roi de Pique* (1937).

²¹J.R.R. Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, London 1964.

²²Kenneth J. Zahorsky and Robert H. Boyer, "The Secondary World of Fantasy" in Roger C. Schlobin (ed.), *The Aesthetics of Fantasy in Literature and Art*, Sussex 1982, 56-7.

unrealistic occurrences take place within a climate of complete belief.²³ In *Kô et Kô*, the authoritative voice of the narrator in the introductory sentences sets the style in which the rest of the story is to be delivered; that is, in absolute confidence and certainty of events: “Kô et Kô avaient très froid dans leur hutte. Ils voulaient voir le soleil et ils se mettent en route”.²⁴ When the story is overtaken by fantastical events, the narrator maintains his/her introductory tone that is unaffected and descriptive: “tout à coup un de ces phoques se transforme en oiseau et vient vers eux en disant: ‘venez, je vous ferais passer par la mer’”. A similar acceptance of these transformative events accompanies the main characters as they immediately jump onto the back of this newly-transformed bird to continue with their quest for the sun and warmth. During their second encounter with a fantastical creature, a six-legged horse, the event is described as follows: “un bonhomme avance sur un cheval qui a six pattes. Le bonhomme veut paraître si terrifiant que le chateau ...”²⁵ In this instance, every other element introduced by the narrator instills fear except the horse itself [the fantastical element]. Moreover, the narrator's voice reveals no sense of surprise; nor do Kô and Kô find its presence at all extraordinary.

This quality of balancing the effects between the not entirely real (the horse with six legs) and the not entirely ‘unreal’ (the vision of the North Pole), lends itself to the “alterity” of the spectral region of the fantastic which the literary critic Rosemary Jackson defines as the *paraxial area*: “whose imaginary world is neither entirely ‘real’ [object], nor entirely ‘unreal’ but is located somewhere indeterminately between the two.”²⁶ To similar effect, literary historian Lynette Hunter ascribes a parallel categorisation of imagery projection to fantasy, where impulses run between the conscious [the object] to the unconscious mind, [the image]. She declares it: “a non-real strange terrain of our perception but representation is what makes it possible for it to linger over [its]

²³Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: the literature of Subversion*, New York 1981, 33.

²⁴Vieira da Silva, *Kô et Kô: les deux Esquimaux*, Paris 1933, plate 1. Please note that the quotes used for *Kô et Kô* are drawn from a document submitted to me by the Fundação Arpad Szenes-Vieira da Silva and not from the 2005 Edition of *Kô et Kô, les deux esquimaux*. Thereby, no page numbers are available.

²⁵Vieira da Silva, plates 4 and 7.

²⁶Jackson, *Fantasy*, 19-20.

intermediacy in a world of its own".²⁷ Hunter observes that the fantastic only materialises through visual or pictorial form. Similarly, Jackson's use of the word *paraxial* immediately posits the fantastic within the framework of optical projection, as it indicates an area where light rays "seem to unite at a point after refraction", where "object and image seem to collide".²⁸ Furthermore, in referring to the spectral region of fantasy as the *paraxial*, Jackson defines a similar coexisting structural relationship between the object [real] and the imaginary world, where "paraxis is the telling notion in relation to the place, or space, of the fantastic, for it implies the inextricable link to the main body of the real".²⁹ In the storytelling of *Kô et Kô* an undeniable link is established between the narrative to the real and object world as the plot is situated in a realistic site, the North Pole. It is only after this relationship is established with the reader's "primary world" that the narrative evolves "into another mode [fantastic] which would seem to be marvelous were it not for the initial grounding in the real which it shades and threatens".³⁰

Jackson's latter concept of the fantastic as a threatening, vacuous area in relation to the real creates a further correspondence with the psychoanalytic concept of the *uncanny* with regard to the conscious [known] and the unconscious [unknown] mind.³¹ In the aforementioned quote, Hunter declares the fantastic to be the projection of our perceptions, hence the result of a mixture of both conscious and unconscious material. Jackson observes this dualism as present in Freud's categorisation of the *uncanny*, [*das Unheimlich*] in its semantics – "it uncovers what is hidden and, by doing so, effects a disturbing transformation of the familiar into the unfamiliar".³² A similar unveiling process occurs in the production of the fantastic as it transforms the real through a kind of "discovery. It does not introduce novelty so much as uncover all that needs to remain hidden if the world is to be comfortably known".³³ Early in her analysis, Jackson establishes a

²⁷Lynette Hunter, *Modern Allegory and Fantasy*, Hampshire 1989, 51.

²⁸Jackson, *Fantasy*, 19.

²⁹*Ibid.*

³⁰*Ibid.*, 20

³¹*Ibid.*, 65.

³²*Ibid.*, 64.

³³*Ibid.*

similar dualism in the creation of literary fantasy, as she defines the literary fantastic as an expression of *desire*.³⁴ Jackson argues that fantasy can “tell of” desire in its expression, in the same manner that it can “expel” desire.³⁵ In this instance fantasy represents the impossible enterprise to realise desire, yet its very existence testifies to that which is an “unseen and unheard of culture: silenced invisible, covered or absent”.³⁶ This inevitably creates a determinable link between the fantasising process and the social/historical context within which it is created.³⁷ That is, its mere existence represents a struggle for a discourse which lies beyond the structures of the conscious mind “and it is this which leads to its problematisation of language of word, in its utterance for desire”.³⁸ This phenomenological characteristic inherent in the creation of the fantastic, as Jackson goes on to declare, is then “frequently shown in graphic forms” as tension builds “between the laws of human society and the resistance of the unconscious mind to those laws”.³⁹ It is, therefore, social historical consciousness that leads mankind to subvert reality into the unfamiliar, the new, the fantastic – something that Jackson declares its basis for representation to be of a pictorial nature [image].

Jackson's visual and humanist vision of the literary fantastic departs from J.R.R. Tolkien's theory on fantasy as described to in his 1938 lecture “On Fairy stories”.⁴⁰ Tolkien argued that fantasy becomes a transcending order of reality, a form of escapism from the human condition in an attempt to establish a superior and alternate reality.⁴¹ He wrote:

³⁴From the introductory pages of her analysis Jackson declares that it is rather “absurd to understand its [fantasy] significance without some reference to psychoanalysis” [Jackson, 4] which brings us once more upon Freud's definition of the phantasying process as a wish-fulfilment as ascribed to in Vieira's painting *Autoportrait* in Chapter II.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 4.

³⁶*Ibid.*

³⁷*Ibid.*, 6.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 62.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 6-7.

⁴⁰Although this lecture was first delivered in 1938, it was not published until 1947.

⁴¹This point, the transcendent quality of fantasy as a “superior alternate” to reality marks the fundamental difference between Jackson's and Tolkien's engagement with reality as Jackson argues fantasy to represent a subversion of reality, something unfamiliar and new.

There are hunger, thirst, poverty, pain, sorrow, injustice, death. And even when men are not facing hard things such as these, there are ancient limitations from which fairy-stories offer a sort of escape, and old ambitions and desires (touching the very roots of fantasy) to which they offer a kind of satisfaction and consolation.⁴²

Tolkien's theory of fantasy as a desire for escape aligns with Freud's day-dreaming process in the pursuit of wish-fulfilment.⁴³ As early as 1908 Freud declared:

Happy people never make phantasies - only unsatisfied ones. Unsatisfied wishes are the driving power behind phantasies. Every separate phantasy contains the fulfillment of a wish, and improves on an unsatisfactory reality.⁴⁴

Like Freud, Tolkien aligns the fantasy creating process to an *unsatisfactory reality* in the same fashion that Jackson aligns the fantasy mode to a form of compensation for a given social context. In all three examples, fantasy becomes a form of desirability – wish-fulfilment, a desire – rather than an achievable possibility. This categorical difference is the same one Jackson draws upon in her definition of the *paraxial area* as the spectre of fantasy, for this space determines the area between the realm of the possible (object world) and the image (world of projected desire). Moreover, in view of the drive behind the creation of the fantastic it does not only represent one's desire for something new and thus unfamiliar, but in its ability to express this need to a specific historical consciousness, its mere creation becomes a form of protest against the present, the *unsatisfactory reality*. To this end, Jackson makes the following claim: “fantasy characteristically attempts to compensate for a lack resulting from cultural constraints: it is a literature of desire, which seeks that which is experienced as absence or loss”.⁴⁵

In *Kô et Kô*, the reader is made aware of the narrative plot early on in the story: a quest for a land far away from the characters' own; a land of sun and warmth. In this manner, the narrative immediately embraces Tolkien's notion of flight and escape, literally

⁴²Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, 58.

⁴³Hunter, *Modern Allegory*, 43. Hunter aligns Freud's concept of desire within repression and neurosis alongside Tolkien's Christian desire.

⁴⁴Sigmund Freud, “The Poet and Day-Dreaming”, in *Collected Papers* Vol.IV, Joan Rivière (transl.), London 1925, 176.

⁴⁵Jackson, *Fantastic*, 3.

imbedded in the physical transposition of the main characters as they seek an alternate and superior existence. This quest suggests a clear understanding of *absence*, represented in their present living conditions and also through the knowledge of it, *loss*. These two concepts are revisited at the conclusion of the narrative. When the characters reach the *desired* land, their disappointment and disillusion becomes apparent. They remark: “Tout cela est très jolie, mais nous voulons encore une autre chose. Maintenant nous voulons le ciel et les étoiles”.⁴⁶ When Kô and Kô are transported into a literally superior realm – the land of stars – the narrative begins to coincide with the painted visions of Vieira’s autobiographical painted œuvre, portraying this fateful journey as she did in *Autoportrait* (1932) and *A Nous la Liberté* (1933-34).⁴⁷

3.2.1 Eschatological Visions

As characters, *Kô et Kô* convey a clear disenchantment with the world. Their solution to this problem is provided by a realm which is other than their own in the sky rather than on the earth. The illustration that represents this vision is of two angels transporting Kô and Kô to the land of the stars [Pl.60]. This final image, featuring two ascending figures with their arms outstretched over their heads in a V formation recalls historian Nelson Aguilar’s remarks on *A Nous la Liberté*: “le véritable sujet du tableau: l’ascension”.⁴⁸ The notion of transcendence through the elevation of her figures develops in Vieira’s earliest autobiographical painting, *Les Balançoires* (1931), whose fantastical narrative, despite its undeterminable surroundings, only becomes legible once it is associated with a state of mind rather than a specific event.⁴⁹ Following on from this work, Vieira completed *Autoportrait* in 1932, where the presence of a child climbing a ladder captures the essence of desire to escape, to transcend life [Pl.21].⁵⁰ It is not until her series *A Nous la Liberté* (1933-34) that a more concise rendering of an eschatological yearning is achieved through

⁴⁶ Vieira da Silva, *Kô et Kô*.

⁴⁷ For further information on these two paintings please refer to Chapter I and II respectively.

⁴⁸ Nelson Aguilar, *Figuration et spatialisation dans la peinture moderne : le séjour brésilienne de Vieira da Silva au Brésil (1940-1947)*, PhD dissertation, Université Jean Moulin, Lyon 1984, 81.

⁴⁹ See Chapter I, section 1.3.1.

⁵⁰ See Chapter I, section 1.4.1.

the inspiration of Hayter's prints entitled, *L'Apocalypse* (1931).⁵¹ The systematic presence of autobiographical elements in all these works, the *petite fille*, in either a red or blue dress, compels us to examine these paintings as if they represent a single narrative with a common trajectory for “le ciel et les étoiles”. This desire for transcendence beyond material existence coincides with historian Mara Donaldson's description of apocalyptic eschatology:

Apocalyptic literature was an underground literature written pseudonymously to encourage and strengthen those whose hope had been stripped away. It was an attack against the status quo, now so radically expressed that a vision of hope for the future could only be imagined as something beyond this world and its promises for salvation.[Isa 24-7]⁵²

Reflecting this point, Vieira's narrative of transcendence can be seen as an escape from the ordeals of reality, with the fantastic serving as a mode for the peculiarly disenchanting. Donaldson extends this argument as follows: “the gift of biblical studies to fantasy literature is virtually self evident” and although it is neither “exemplified” nor “illustrated” it is “enacted” directly within the contemporary world.⁵³ Vieira was exposed to the idea of juxtaposing biblical scenes with contemporaneous historical circumstances by her mother's readings during the First World War.⁵⁴ The lasting impression and significance of this vision for Vieira may be accounted for by her description of the Apocalypse as a purely fantastical phenomenon as late as 1988: “les anges avec les trompettes, des animaux monstreaux. C'était l'apocalypse”.⁵⁵ Yet according to an earlier interview, these events also represented a threatening and looming force over mankind's existence: “La pensée de l'apocalypse hante les hommes depuis longtemps”.⁵⁶ In this instance, Vieira's vision of the apocalypse can be compared to Jackson's description of the *paraxial* area as the prophetic vision that “shades and threatens” mankind's present existence.

⁵¹ See Chapter II, section 2.2.

⁵² Mara E. Donaldson, “Prophetic and Apocalyptic Eschatology”, *Semeia: Fantasy and Bible*, No.60, 1992, 114.

⁵³ Donaldson, “Apocalyptic”, 115.

⁵⁴ See Chapter II, section 2.3.

⁵⁵ Daniel Le Comte, *Visite Privée*, Centre Georges Pompidou, 26', Paris (1988) 1993.

⁵⁶ Philip, *L'Elats de la Lumière*, 119.

Furthermore, in conjunction with Donaldson's aforementioned remark concerning eschatological visions as a form of protest, Vieira's use of the fantastic reveals at the imaginary what she had lost in terms of faith (reality): that is, the fantastic became an expression for disenchantment and disillusion.

3.3 L'Art Moderne

Kô et Kô's wish for *quelque chose d'autre* at the end of the book, alongside the title of her series of paintings *A Nous la Liberté* are direct expressions of Vieira's negative conception of the existing status quo.⁵⁷ *Kô et Kô* merely vocalises the underlining narrative thread which runs through Vieira's autobiographical paintings of disillusionment and disenchantment with life. The fateful journey which concludes *Kô et Kô*, also rendered pictorially in Vieira's autobiographical paintings such as *Autoportrait* and *A Nous la Liberté*, makes manifest a sentiment of *agonia* for the human condition as a state of existence between birth and death. This transcendentalist narrative reveals a predication, through which Vieira discloses a "state of affairs" that alludes to the "tragic sense of life".⁵⁸ The aura of negativity that underpins Vieira's early autobiographical work coincides with her deliberate adoption of the "child-like" pictorial expression, and consequently, with her induction into *l'art moderne*.⁵⁹

In the 1957 interview with Georges Charbonnier, Vieira made the following remark: "Les gens disent souvent: "Un artiste est une tour d'ivoire." Moi, je me sens l'opposé, le contraire, juste, l'opposé d'un tour d'ivoire. Il me semble que tous les événements du monde sont passés sur moi".⁶⁰ Vieira indicates that there are two opposing artistic camps with regard to the position of the artist in relation to society. She directly borrows her reference to the artist as a *tour d'ivoire* from the myth expressed in the attitude of "art for art's sake", where art is autonomously created apart from society and its success is to be

⁵⁷See Chapter II, section 2.3.

⁵⁸Poggioli, *Avant-Garde*, 65.

⁵⁹See Chapter I, Introduction.

⁶⁰Georges Charbonnier, *Le Monologue du Peintre - Vieira da Silva*, Paris (1957) 2002, 175.

measured formally. Vieira however positions herself (and, consequently, her work), in the opposing camp, where the artist becomes the personification of the battleground of History: used, nurtured and moulded by surrounding events. In 1978 Vieira's husband Arpad described his wife as the bearer of History, remarking that "ela tem como que o peso do mundo em cima dos ombros".⁶¹ On another occasion Arpad tells how this burden translates as an emotional, psychological charge: "Vieira pense et imagine ce qui peut arriver de plus terrible. Son imagination est très néfaste pour sa santé". To this comment Vieira herself added: "Je lutte continuellement pour échapper à l'angoisse".⁶² It is in view of this internal agonistic struggle that we can understand how Vieira's critical consciousness overrode the surfaces of her autobiographical canvases, bringing an emotional charge to bear her pictorial expression. It is thereby through the codified expression of a purely personalised system of illustration - the child-like and the fantastic - that the artist conveys a state of existence, a state of mind.

The historical awareness inherent in Vieira's figurative work is both a phenomenon particular to her and an aesthetic formula that she appropriated from within the confines of *l'art moderne* circa 1930. Vieira's child-like narratives have rarely been classified as avant-garde, and it is not within the scope of this project to make such an attempt. However in assessing the extent to which Vieira's work assimilates avant-garde practices, both pictorially and psychologically, we begin to understand her apprehensions regarding the function of art, and thus of her role as an artist within society. According to historian Renato Poggioli, author of *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, critical consciousness is one of the principle traits of avant-garde art, "shown by the frequent concept of the artist as victim-hero".⁶³ By describing herself as scarred by historical events, Vieira placed herself on one of the tiers of this duality – that of the "victim". However, Vieira's struggle also assumes a hero-like aspect through her ability to alienate herself in her historical awareness from the society that surrounded her. Poggioli designates this rupture between

⁶¹ "She carries the weight of the world upon her shoulders" in Anon., "Vieira da Silva: a pintura e a vida", *Jornal Expresso*, Lisbon, 25/7/81. Translation my own.

⁶² Philip, *Eclats de la Lumière*, 78.

⁶³ Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, (transl.) Gerald Fitzgerald, Cambridge 1968, 66.

the artist and society as *alienation*, the process of estrangement that enables the avant-garde artist to become wholly aware of the situation afflicting society that “has lost its sense of the human condition and its own historical mission”.⁶⁴ With this view in mind, the artist’s position of superior knowledge is of a purely mental capacity, in their ability to draw upon and express this state of *agonia*.

Vieira's awareness of this breach between art and society as implied by her early work was externalised in 1931 when she and her husband Arpad joined a group of left-wing intellectuals known as *Amis du Monde*. The group developed in conjunction with Henri Barbusse's international newspaper *Monde* (1928-1935). The artists’ positions within the group consisted in providing correspondents and help the newspaper report contemporary events. Although it expounded Marxist doctrines, Barbusse's newspaper did not adhere to them but aimed to provide “un reflet exact de la vie mondiale”.⁶⁵ Barbusse intended to foster human culture as part of his commitment to the notion of a “révolution dans les esprits” rather than allow the newspaper to become an organ of Communist propaganda.⁶⁶ The nature of Barbusse’s leftist conceptions, where revolution consisted of an internal transformation rather than an external one, may have likely provided Vieira with a blueprint for possible social transformative parameters within the function of the arts. Member artist Etienne Hadju explained the proceedings of their group meetings as follows:

On se demande ... si le langage de l'art moderne était valable pour comprendre la nouvelle façon de voir le monde ou si au contraire le publique auquel il s'adressait risquait de ne pas saisir sa forme abstrait.⁶⁷

⁶⁴Ibid., 109.

⁶⁵Guessler Normand, “Henri Barbusse and His Monde (1928-35): Progeny of the Clarté Movement and the Review Clarté”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol.11, No.2/3, *Special Issue: Conflict and Compromise: Socialists and Socialism in the Twentieth Century*, July, California 1976, 176. *Monde* developed after Barbusse's disappointment with the complete indoctrination of his earlier publication *Clarté* (1921-1928) re-entitled in 1928 as *Lutte de Classes*

⁶⁶Ibid., 175.

⁶⁷Diane Daval Béran, “Biographie”, in Weelen, Guy; Jaeger, Jean-François and Daval Béran, Diane (eds.), *Monographie*, Geneva 1994, 399.

In his claim Hajdu describes the group's awareness of their position as artists' within society and their role within it: creating and communicating to a greater public. In this claim he also states the group's concerns with the new pictorial expressions and the possible communicational gaps being generated between the artist and its public.

These debates concerning the popularisation of culture to be achieved by bridging the gap between art and public became a state affair with the rise to power of the Popular Front in 1936. Public debates took place at la Maison de la Culture concerning the cultural action of breaking down the barriers between people and culture, audience and performer, creator and cultural consumer, making art a historically conscious production.⁶⁸ Although there is no evidence of Vieira's participation within these debates in 1936 when they become officially public, her participation in the early discussion under Henri Barbusse's tutelage of moderate left-wing politics, provided her with the example where although a message to the public requires to be transmitted, it is done without committing to a specific political agenda such as Socialist Realism.⁶⁹

Vieira's association with the social mission of the arts related to her early exposure to the world of journalism: "meu avô teve uma grande influência na minha carreira. Posso talvez dizer que sou produto do jornalismo. Se meu avô não tivesse abraçado o jornalismo, teríamos ficado no campo. Acontece também que aprendi muito em Lisboa graças aos jornalistas".⁷⁰ In this instance, Vieira observed a parallel function between journalism and the arts as a means of disclosing the knowledge of the world to the world. However a key difference arises from the fact that her work reveals a particular knowledge, *her* knowledge of the world, establishing herself as an interpreter of sorts between the external world and her audience, recalling her remark in Chapter I: "le

⁶⁸For further reading see Pascal Ory's, *La Belle Illusion*, Paris 1975 and Serge Fauchereau's, *La Querelle du Réalisme*, Paris 1987.

⁶⁹See Chapter VI for Vieira's involvement in state commissions.

⁷⁰ "my grandfather [owner of the daily newspaper *O Seculo*] had a great influence over my career. I could even say I am the product of journalism. If my grandfather had not embraced journalism I would not be in this field. It also happens that I learned a lot in Lisbon thanks to the journalists" in Nuno Rocha, "Maria Helena Vieira da Silva: para mim, viver é pintar", *Diario Popular*, Lisbon, 5/12/1969, 33.

spectacle autour de moi”.⁷¹ In a late interview Vieira responded to Michel Butor’s claim: “Il y a une drôle de folie et vous les peintres vous devez être au but de cette folie”, as follows:

Peut être que nous voyons ces choses en transcendance, un émerveillement ... on sait que nous voyons peut être avec acquit, plus de passion que les autres personnes. Nous voyons des choses que n’est pas facile à expliquer mais qu’était extraordinaire et faire de ça quelque chose. J’ai senti ça avec beaucoup de force.⁷²

This self-proclaimed consciousness conforms with the “hero” counterpart to Poggioli’s dual function of the avant-garde artist as “victim-hero”.

Hadju nonetheless observed the inherent estrangement between the artist’s representation and public reception: “le publique auquel il s’adressait risquait de ne pas saisir sa forme abstrait”. Arguably, Hajdu’s reference to ‘abstraction’ does not necessarily refer to non-figurative forms but rather to the narrative force which accompanies the modern artist’s choice of expression. For example, in Vieira’s particular case the “child-like” in her autobiographical works, the simplicity of her visions, the use of the fantastic correspond to a manifestation of state of existence, a state of mind, rather than relate to a specific event. Although Vieira’s artistic mission remains the same throughout the 1930s, we observe that Vieira’s transformation in her pictorial expression is representative of this attempt to breach the communicational gap between her artwork and her public. To this end, Vieira’s husband described Vieira’s paintings and his work towards the later 1930s as follows: “Nous nous acheminons vers le réalisme, peut être parce que la réalité aujourd’hui est le surréalisme pure”.⁷³ The following section examines how Surrealism

⁷¹ See Chapter I, Introduction.

⁷² Michel Butor, “La Nuit sur le Plateau”, France Culture, Paris 3/10/1988.

⁷³ Unpublished letter from Arpad Szenes to Julian Trevelyan, ca. 1943, Julian Trevelyan Archives, Trinity College, Cambridge. Arpad’s artistic formula assuming surreality to be representative of reality was against the Congress’s condemnation of Surrealism by implication when they made the claim: “socialist realism is the enemy of everything supernatural and mystic, all other-worldly idealism”; in Nikolai Bukharin, “Poetry, Poetics and the Problems of Poetry in the USSR” in *Problems of Soviet Literature: Reports and Speeches at the First Soviet Writer’s Congress*, H. G. Scott(ed.), New York 1935, 250-252. As cited in Lewis, *Politics of Surrealism*, 126.

provided Vieira with the pictorial tools through which she was able to manifest this form of critique.

3.3.1 Surrealism and the marvelous

Rosemary Jackson described the “modern fantastic” as consisting of all the “negative terms according to the categories of nineteenth century realism: thus, the im-possible, the un-real, the nameless, formless, shapeless, un-known, in-visible”.⁷⁴ She then concludes that all the categories “under attack” correspond to “the ‘bourgeois’ category of the real”.⁷⁵ Although Jackson constructed this theory in 1981 with relation to a strictly literary context, we find a parallel aesthetic model operating within the artistic milieu of inter-war Paris, as Surrealist critic Louis Aragon remarked: “It is up to surrealism to take stock of the marvelous in 1930”.⁷⁶ In 1924 André Breton in his First Manifesto championed the Imagination as the only intact human quality given “Parmi tant de disgrâces dont nous héritons”.⁷⁷ These *disgrâces* in Breton's text align with negative bourgeois norms and it is the Imagination alone that which “me rend compte de ce qui *peut être*”.⁷⁸ The closest vision we get to what may constitute this “surrealité” is his vision of the *marvelous*: the “Le tissu des invraisemblances adorables”, a web entailing “La peur, l’attrait de l’insolite, les chances, le goût du luxe ...”⁷⁹ This complementary vision thus indicates something other than the present condition of the ‘real’, for which the *marvelous* operates as a “catalyst” in the breakdown of preconceived bourgeois reality.⁸⁰ Breton then adds, “Tranchons-en : le merveilleux est toujours beau, n’importe quel merveilleux est beau, il n’y a même que le merveilleux qui soit beau”.⁸¹

⁷⁴Jackson, *Fantastic*, 26.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Louis Aragon, “The Challenge of Painting”, in Eluard, Paul; Aragon, Louis; Soupault, Georges; Breton, André and Tzara, Tristan (eds.), *The Surrealists Look at Art*, California 1990, 50.

⁷⁷Breton, *Manifestes*.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Breton, *Manifestes*.

⁸⁰Aragon, “The Challenge”, 48.

⁸¹Breton, *Manifestes*.

Jackson's aforementioned theoretical modelling of a *paraxial area* – the spectral region of the fantastic – is hardly distinguishable from Breton's borrowing the marvelous as a fundamental thought for the Surrealist visionary equation. In Paul Reverdy's words: "L'image est une création pure de l'esprit. Elle ne peut naître d'une comparaison mais du rapprochement de deux réalités plus au moins éloignées".⁸² Breton interpreted these two camps to be the worlds of dream and reality, the conscious and the unconscious. In Jackson's case, these parallel dimensions constitute the unreal (the spectral of the fantastic) and the real. Moreover, before Tolkien's sublimation of Freud's exploration of desire as the literature of fantasy,⁸³ in the *First Manifesto of Surrealism*, in his efforts to dislodge social norms, Breton already championed Freud's examination of the human psyche as "cette part considérable de l'activité psychique ... ait encore si peu retenu l'attention", in other words, the unconscious.⁸⁴ Once again, Jackson's conjunction of her designation of the *paraxial area* to Freud's "unconscious projections" of "concealed desire"⁸⁵ – the uncanny – aligns with Breton's own belief regarding the externalisation of these inward visions, which as historian David Lomas adds aim to "outlaw the bourgeois values of the period".⁸⁶ Lastly, the mechanism of conceiving these mental images as projections is earlier on ascribed to as fantasy by Jackson and the Surrealists, as pictorial rather than linguistic desire. On this account Aragon remarks that: "the marvelous is always the *materialisation* of a moral symbol in violent opposition to the morals of the world".⁸⁷

Aragon's extreme written language, in particular his use of the word *violent*, is manifest of the extent to which Surrealism sought to subvert bourgeois values to create a schism in the cultural order between art and society. This intention is what defines Surrealism as avant-garde and prevents Vieira being similarly labelled as she never tended

⁸²Paul Reverdy, "L'Image", Nord-Sud, No.13, March, 1918. Published in Paul Reverdy, *Nord-Sud, Self-Defence et autres Ecrits sur l'Art et la Poesie (1917-1926)*, Paris 1975, 73.

⁸³Hunter, *Modern Allegory*, 43.

⁸⁴Breton, *Manifestes*.

⁸⁵Jackson, *Fantasy*, 64-5.

⁸⁶David Lomas, *The Haunted Self: Surrealism, psychoanalysis, subjectivity*, New Haven 2000, 96.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 48. *Italics my own.*

towards this action. Vieira in fact opposed the extremism in Surrealist thought as she remarked on Breton's notion of burning down all museums as follows: "J'aime beaucoup les musées. Les surréalistes ont dit qu'il fallait brûler les musées. Je ne l'accepte pas".⁸⁸ However, despite this radical difference in their ulterior objectives, both Vieira and the Surrealists share an awareness of a historical culture with which they were unsatisfied and used the fantastic as their mode of criticism. For Vieira, fantasy served her ultimate goal, where critique resulted from the appropriation and subversion of recognizable foreign forms into new fantastical meanings, i.e. Arpad's motif of *Enfant au Cerf-Volant*.⁸⁹ The Surrealist Max Ernst's collage and frottage works come to mind as legitimate models for this subversive intent in the use of fantastical narratives.⁹⁰ Although Ernst's work differs from Vieira's in terms of subject, technique, and its levels of eccentricity, they both ultimately aim at a common goal that evokes self-critique through the use of fantasy. According to historian Werner Spies, Ernst manipulated existing objects by reversing the ordinary vision from the real to the imaginary and the fantastic, thus questioning "the visual expectation of the period by formulating a critique of perception".⁹¹ In *Kô et Kô* Vieira operates a similar mode of interpretation and commentary, and on a parallel critical journey, questions the human condition and humanity's destiny. Within art history, Ernst's fantastical works are considered a part of his Surrealist practices. Vieira's association with Surrealism is more elusive as she was never directly involved with the movement itself. However, the self-reflective and critical nature inherent to her work enables one to argue that the Surrealist consciousness did become an integral quality in her work.⁹²

According to the historian Peter Harcourt the Surrealists stand for the following:

⁸⁸ Luc Vezin, "Entretien Vieira da Silva: Les naissances successives, *Beaux Arts Magazine*, 1988, 39.

⁸⁹ See section 1.1.

⁹⁰ Vieira may have come across Max Ernst's frottage books as they were all published by Editions Jeanne Bucher. Furthermore her husband, Arpad, was highly receptive of this imagery in his contemporaneous prints, such as his print *Lovers* which clearly recalls Ernst's *Conjugal Diamonds* in *Histoire Naturelle*. Other fantastical narratives by Ernst published before *Kô et Kô* are: *La femme 100 têtes* (1929), *Rêve d'une petite fille qui voulut entrée au Carmel* (1930) and *A l'intérieur de la Vue, 8 poemes visibles* (1931/2).

⁹¹ Werner Spies, *Max Ernst Collages, The Invention of a Surrealist World*, John William Gabriel (transl.), London 1991, 53.

⁹² A similar tone of protest overwhelms her 1932 painting *Autoportrait* discussed in Chapter 1, section 1.4.1.

As a view of life, surrealism begins with the recognition of the disruptive violence at the centre of man and with his essential isolation within the civilised conventions of polite society - conventions apparently designed to frustrate his instinctual needs. It thrives upon sharp contrasts of unexpected juxtapositions, upon images that acknowledge the unalterable irrationalities of human life. For it is essentially pessimistic. Like Freud, its patron saint and intellectual apologist, surrealism has gloomy prospects for the future development of man.⁹³

Following this description of Surrealism's negative view of the human condition and ultimate fate, in addition to their essential isolation from society and use of the marvelous, Surrealism can be seen as the most legitimate aesthetic, as well as the psychological force, behind Vieira's creative narrative. Chapters I and II discussed Vieira's belief in the violence inherent to mankind and its self-destructive nature. In this chapter we have examined Vieira's inherent pessimism and "gloomy prospects for the future development of man" in light of her literary work, *Kô et Kô*, a final and legitimate verdict testifying to her agonistic struggle to combat her cosmic melancholic vision.

In 1929, the philosopher Walter Benjamin examined the Surrealist political contribution as a *profane illumination*.⁹⁴ This claim rested on the conviction that Surrealism's negative consciousness and its political aspirations coincided in terms of morale: "Surrealism has come ever closer to the Communist answer. And that means pessimism all along the line. Absolutely. Mistrust in the fate of literature, mistrust in the fate of freedom, mistrust in the fate of European humanity..."⁹⁵ The Surrealists believed that in their joint creative effort rather than use art as a form of "propaganda" (i.e. Social Realism), should conceive of itself as a "form of research into the workings of thought, which would make a contribution to knowledge".⁹⁶ Historian Stephen Harris' use of the word *knowledge* in this instance refers to the Surrealists' "poetic exploration of

⁹³Peter Harcourt, "Luis Bunuel: Spaniard and Surrealist", *Film Quarterly*, Vol.20, No.3, Spring 1967, 2.

⁹⁴Raymond Spiteri, "Surrealism and the Political Physionomy of the Marvellous", in Spiteri, Raymond and LaCoss, Donald (eds.), *Surrealism, Politics and Culture*, London 2003, 52.

⁹⁵Walter Benjamin, "Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia" in Demetz, Peter (ed.) and Jephcott, Edmund (transl.), *Reflections: essays, aphorisms, autobiographical writings*, New York 1978, 189.

⁹⁶Stephen Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought in the 1930's*, Cambridge 2004, 2-3.

unconscious thought” as their contribution to the “present and the future”.⁹⁷ Art should be used as a poetic tool, a means rather than an end in the realisation of social transformation: “in this way Surrealism would be ‘at the service of the Revolution’”.⁹⁸ Harris further explores the strategies of the avant-garde dialectic inherent within the Surrealist movement and its relation to modernism: “Art would remain autonomous in its reconfiguration as a kind of science, as poetic research, but it would no longer be separate in the modernist sense, as an end in itself”.⁹⁹

In establishing Art as a *means* rather than an *end*, the Surrealists set themselves against the formalism and craft of modern art by prioritising content over form.¹⁰⁰ It is in view of this Romantic (Hegelian) conception of art, of content superseding form that Vieira's autobiographical oeuvre begins to acquire a certain thematic legitimacy alongside the cutting edge ideology of historical consciousness of the artistic milieu of Surrealism.¹⁰¹ Firstly, in Vieira's 1931-1934 child-like paintings, we can observe a dual regressive measure as she deliberately primitivised her pictorial strategy, relying on a more personal form of narrative - the naïve – as well as finding its expression in memory work. In this manner, Vieira reveals an early understanding of Breton's conviction by turning away from the external world to concentrate on the mechanisms of the mind.¹⁰² Secondly, joining Barbusse's group *Amis de Monde* in 1931, Vieira positioned herself within a pro-active artistic milieu that rejected the modernist ideal of art as an autonomous construction. Thirdly, Vieira's need for storytelling, in view of her painted works and her children's

⁹⁷Ibid.

⁹⁸Ibid., 4. The Surrealists however were criticised at large, including by Benjamin himself, for their hesitancy before political militancy; Spiteri, “Surrealism”, 51.

⁹⁹Ibid. Harris bases his argument particularly on Schulte Sasse's introduction in Peter Bürger's, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Shaw, Michael (transl.), Minneapolis 1984.

¹⁰⁰Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought*, 21.

¹⁰¹Contrary to the Romantics however Vieira never intended the eventual dissolution of the institution of art as such but rather use art as a mode to express self-criticism of the present. Within a more contemporary context Peter Bürger's *Theory of Avant Garde* (1984) this notion of dissolution materialises in his argument of the 1920's movements [Dada and Surrealism] where he claims the avant-garde aimed at the reintegration “of art into the praxis of life” [Bürger, *Avant-Garde*, 22.]

¹⁰²See Chapter I and IV.

storybook *Kô et Kô*, reveal a tendency towards communicative narrative, which in both instances represent a criticism specific to the historical culture.

3.3.2 *Atelier 17*

Vieira's point of contact with Surrealism was established through her participation in William Hayter's print-making *Atelier* as early as 1929. Beyond subscribing to purely practical elements such as print-making techniques, the *Atelier* offered Vieira another singular feature as historian Carla Espósito remarks: "sa réputation d'un lieu d'idées et de rencontres".¹⁰³ By 1932 a larger number of Surrealists became involved, amongst them Yves Tanguy, Joan Miró and Max Ernst, as they were attracted by Hayter's original and modern approach to print-making, an art-form long overlooked by modern artists. By making the *Atelier* a space for technical research and aesthetic exploration, successful experiments and discoveries became public knowledge amongst the artists in the workshop, or as historian Carla Espósito phrased it, "s'exprimait en osmose".¹⁰⁴ It is because of the workshop's layout, where artists were required to work in *lieu*, that young art students such as Vieira were able to work alongside more experienced artists and be exposed to the practical and theoretical mechanisms behind the production of the most contemporary aesthetic forces.

The limited literature on the *Atelier's* early Parisian period between, 1927 and 1939, proves that its influence within the avant-garde scene has been overlooked by contemporary historians. A possible reason lies in Hayter's own position vis à vis the Parisian modern art scene; although the Surrealists became a powerful presence, its founder never fully committed to their ideals. Historian Joann Moser proclaims that "he [Hayter] always remained on the fringes of the movement. He objected to its emphasis on dream imagery and to the literary and political preoccupations of Breton's inner circle".¹⁰⁵ Moser further remarks that although Hayter officially joined Breton's group in 1933, he

¹⁰³ Carla Espósito, "Stanley William Hayter et l'*Atelier 17*", *Nouvelles de l'Estampe*, 127, March, 1993, 9.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁰⁵ Joann Moser, "The Impact of Stanley William Hayter on Post-War American Art", *Archives of American Art Journal*, Vol.18, No.1, 1978, 4.

never fully integrated into the movement as he did not wish to adhere to its political agenda. Furthermore, his interest in formal preoccupations and non-figuration permitted artists such as Jean Helion and Jean Arp to participate in the *Atelier's* activities, much to the dislike of some Surrealist members.¹⁰⁶ Hayter's juxtaposition of interests from Surrealism to non-figuration, demonstrates his rather eclectic collaboration with the avant-garde. However it is in view of this position of Hayter's and the *Atelier's*, functioning on the periphery of the avant-garde that may have provided Vieira with exemplary aesthetic and ideological parameters, as her position remained peripheral to the avant-garde throughout the inter-war period.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to begin using sources such as, *Kô et Kô* within the analytical framework of Vieira's painted œuvre. More specifically, to observe and examine the function of fantasy as a form of protest and escapism within specific narrative scripts of inter-war Paris.

Her illustrations are further evidence of Vieira's active dialogue with the various visual material made available to her, including images from published periodicals, paintings and wire sculptures. The simplicity of their expression engenders a similar simplistic interpretation of the accompanying text. However, *Kô et Kô* operates under the same seemingly simplistic mechanism as Vieira's *Les Balançoires* painting, where a complex underlying content is veiled by the simplicity of her pictorial expression.¹⁰⁷ Examining the narrative within Jackson's theory of the fantastic, *Kô et Kô* is suggestive of protest and an expression for escape. Within the context of 1930s Paris, the Surrealist agenda of the marvelous corresponded to this aesthetic theoretical gateway. Her exposure to Surrealism is most evident through her association to Hayter's workshop. Surrealism however also accesses Vieira's work from a psychological condition and through its mode of expression through the fantastic. Surrealism's negativity relating to

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. See Chapter II, section 2.1.

¹⁰⁷ See Chapter I, section 1.2.1 when Vieira claims: "Je ne voulais pas de l'évidence mais je voulais qu'il y ait beaucoup de choses sur mon tableau et pourtant je voulais faire très simple".

the present historical culture coincided with Vieira's own pessimism and *agonia*. Furthermore, by examining Vieira's position within Poggioli's theoretical framework of the avant-garde artist as *victim-hero* we can observe the extent to which her artistic perceptions and ambitions could be designated as avant-garde. At no point are Vieira's intentions nihilistic, negating previous art forms or try to provoke a cultural schism. Although Vieira believed herself to be in a position of superior knowledge relating to the effects of the humanity and the world, the same way the Surrealists believed themselves in their collective, at no point does Vieira provide a utopian alternative existence. The extent of her incorporation into this revelatory dialogue, given that her "humanitarian" mission does not provide a utopia or a solution, makes Vieira assume her position as artist as merely a messenger of human awareness.

Chapter IV

Self-Imaging: Identity as an Artist, 1930-1932 and 1936-1939

“Il y un plaisir à peindre, mêler un regard extérieur à un regard intérieur, mais c’est long de trouver ça”. *Vieira da Silva, 1974.*¹

Introduction

This chapter examines the visual trajectory of Vieira’s self representations completed between 1930-1932 and 1936-1939. During the earlier years, Vieira clearly identified her paintings as self-portraits, but by 1936, her paintings lacked this self-referential labeling and her self-images were substituted for alternate identities. This chapter shows that certain motifs within Vieira’s paintings of 1936-1939 are the artist’s alter egos and, thereby representative of a continuous self referential narrative to her self-portraits of 1930-1932. Vieira concluded her series of self-portraits with *Autoportrait* (1932), a painting in which she departs from the traditional visual expectations suggested by the painting’s title, depicting a child in a red dress climbing a ladder. In this painting, Vieira draws an image that runs beyond the external boundaries of the skin and captures an image that rests solely in the depths of the mind. The painting is part of the “petite fille” series observed in Chapters I and II with paintings such as *Les Balançoires* and *A Nous la Liberté III*, where the first person narrative hides within the third person singular. This same effect occurs in 1936 when Vieira adopted the use of alternate identities, as she continued to express her persona through the hybrid forms of mermaids and harlequins. These alternate personifications carry their own symbolic meanings within an art historical context, through myth and tradition, breaking away from the personal *hermeticism* inherent in Vieira’s depiction of her child self in her fantastical paintings.

¹André Parinaud, “Vieira da Silva: peindre c’est marier le regard intérieur au regard extérieur”, *Galerie-Jardin des Arts*, April, Paris 1974.

This chapter observes the visual transformation of Vieira's self-portrait narratives from mirror reflection to alter egos as the consequence of the complex juxtaposition of cultural and social discourses in inter-war Paris on the life of the artist. Vieira assumes three key positions in these paintings as author, subject and object. In an attempt to reconcile all three identities, Vieira resorted to purely internal imagery, aligning her work to Breton's Romanticist conception of an "modèle intérieur" [internal model].² These early explorations of the subject led much of Vieira's subsequent imagery to be anchored on self imagery; a pictorial trait more often observed amongst the work of female Surrealist artists. Although official members of the Surrealist group, these women remained peripheral to Breton's nucleus of male artists given their female gender. Historian Gwen Raaberg remarks that the marginality of women from the Surrealist group in fact generated an independent Surrealist entity, a "second generation of Surrealists, distancing themselves from Breton and the movement as a whole".³ In many ways, their peripheral role and lack of a creative identity as poet-creators of the movement allowed them the opportunity to explore their subjectivity, their position as *women* poet creators, using their own bodies as mapping grounds. A feminist theoretical framework that addresses these same issues - where boundaries are drawn on the body of women themselves - is Simone de Beauvoir's in her book entitled "The Second Sex" (1949). In her book, de Beauvoir directly addresses Breton's use and definition of women in the creative process, assessing the need for women to re-define their objectified forms to that of subject. It is therefore within this framework of representation that I examine Vieira's 1930-1932 self portraits.

The second section to this chapter closely examines Vieira's use of alter egos in her visual narrative, with particular attention to two paintings: *La Sirène* of 1936 and *Les Arlequins* of 1939. The aim of exploring Vieira's use of alter identities in conjunction with her self-portrait paintings of 1930-1932 is to establish not only a common narrative

²Breton's concept of an *internal model* [modèle intérieur] was published in *Le Surréalisme et la Peinture* in 1928, although extracts from this text were also published from 1925 onwards in issues of *La Revolution Surréaliste*.

³Gwen Raaberg, "The Problematics of Women and Surrealism", in Caws, Mary Anne; Kuenzli, Rudolf; Raaberg, Gwen (eds.), *Surrealism and Women*, Massachusetts 1991, 2.

ground amidst her 1930s figurative work despite constant stylistic transformations, but also examine the manner in which Vieira addresses through these visual transformations of her persona, the cultural discourses of inter-war Paris.

4.1 *Aurportraits* 1930-1932

In 1930 Vieira completed two self-portraits that fall within the traditional genre of self-portraiture, as the artist created her image by studying her reflection in a mirror resulting in *Autoportrait* (I) [Pl.61] and *Autoportrait* (II) [Pl.62].⁴ The artist's reflected image was an objective imitation of the subject. However, despite the similar activity that Vieira engaged with for the production of these mirror reflections, each image relates in its own right distinct circumstances.

In *Autoportrait* (I), Vieira's figure stands at a distance as she renders her form all the way to the waist, dissolving any of her distinctive features, such as her almond-shaped eyes, hooked nose and heavily set eyebrows. No attempt has been made to enhance her image, as the painting reveals a severe looking young woman with her hair tightly pulled back with an over-emphasized stern gaze and unsmiling lips. Her choice of dress – plain and dark – is as unassuming as the interior of the room which she stands in, which includes a small unidentifiable painting hanging on the wall over her left shoulder. The physical distance from the body to the canvas surface corresponds to the physiological distance Vieira developed between herself (the subject) and her reflection (the object of contemplation), which enabled her to look upon her form in the same manner that she would look upon a foreign object. This early self-portrait most closely resembles the surviving corpus of portrait paintings she completed that year, such as *Rosa* 1930, where we observe parallel renditions of arched eyebrows and frowning lips, rather than her subsequent self-representation – *Autoportrait*(II) (1930).

In this second painting there is a significant compositional shift, as Vieira brings her body to the forefront of the composition and her gaze becomes the overwhelming

⁴The numbering of the paintings has been introduced in this dissertation by the author for clarification purposes only.

characteristic of the painting. The placing of the figure renders her facial features clearly, which become a trademark of her self-representations, particularly her piercing large almond-shaped eyes, imposing nose and the clearly outlined dark eyebrows emphasizing the length of the eyes. In the same manner that Vieira's own features become more uniquely rendered, the environment within which her form is placed also becomes more personalised. The interior setting assumes the function of a background space in this painting rather than a decorative backdrop, recalling Henri Matisse's composition *La Leçon de Piano* (1916) [Pl.63]. *Autoportrait* (II) presents early traces of Matisse's influence within Vieira's oeuvre, as one can clearly observe a Matisse-like interior with a large open window framed with arabesque railings.⁵ As in Matisse's painting, the perspectival presence of the table at the bottom right corner breaks down the flat backdrop-like illusion of the wall space. In both paintings, these horizontal surfaces allude to the subject of the painting; whilst in Matisse's work this surface represents a piano, in Vieira's painting the distinctive paint marks discerned on the table surface reflects the sitter's occupation. However, a fundamental distinction needs to be made with regard to the compositional layout. Unlike Matisse's nude female statuette positioned in the left hand corner of his canvas, in Vieira's work, her overpowering presence and confident pose holds the viewer's gaze. This comparison highlights Vieira's challenge to the traditional role of women in painting. Vieira subverts the role of woman as "object" of the male gaze and narrative, emblematised by Matisse's sensual female statuette, for that of subject and author. The painting's title (*Autoportrait*) along with the inclusion of the attributes of the sitter's profession serve to further her cause. Furthermore, the gaze that Vieira instills in her deep set eyes as she looks straight out to the beholder breaks down the customary binary system of contemplation by altering the relationship between the object and the beholder as the former ceases to belong to the inanimate world of 'things' and returns the viewer's gaze. This transformation becomes a challenge inherent in self-portraiture for women artists as the "power of [the] image to mediate between art object and human

⁵See Chapter I section 1.2. In 1932 Matisse's influence becomes easily discernable, as Vieira begins to experiment with creating works through the uncontrolled motor of the hand, which liberated her artistic inhibitions.

subject” endows artists like Vieira with the power “to negotiate the territory between “images of women” and “images of woman artist”.⁶

One year later Vieira made a bolder statement with regard to the sitter/artist dialogue in her painting *Autoportrait* (III) where she depicts herself in the act of completing her reflection, creating a duplicate self-image as she draws her form before the viewer’s gaze on the sheet of paper before her [Pl.64]. Although this double image implies the presence of a mirror, the mirror itself is absent. Its position and function is overridden by the viewer’s gaze as Vieira stares straight out and renders her own form visible. In this fashion, the same reflective qualities of a mirror are attributed to the viewer’s gaze as their perceptions rely solely on external visible elements. This process is known as the ‘objectification’ of the subject, a process consciously addressed by Vieira through the duplicity of her own form within the same image. This awareness reveals the foundations of an ongoing dialogue threaded through her self-portraits thus far, each time more boldly announcing her intentions by negating the traditional role of woman and sitter as passive and there to be viewed. In *Autoportrait* (I) Vieira hardly draws any distinction between her self-portrait and other portraits, rendering her own image of a ‘woman as object’. In *Autoportrait* (II) the painting breaks down this structural objectification since the image’s object has boldly fastened her eyes onto the viewer’s gaze, conscious of her own objectification and negating a passive role, giving a specific identity to this vision, as ‘woman as Vieira’. A similar reading can be attributed to *Autoportrait* (III) where Vieira depicts herself as a painter, capturing her role of ‘Vieira the artist’. Self-portrait painting permits Vieira to assume the double role of subject and author, revealing the artist’s conscious objectification of her own form. In this manner, as she holds full knowledge of the subject, she is aware of the illusory effect of these external mirror-reflections of her form, whilst the internal qualities of the subject remain distant and grave within the object of contemplation. It is only after the careful examination of

⁶Whitney Chadwick, “How do I look?”, exh. cat. *Mirror, Mirror: self-portraits by women artists*, National Portrait Gallery, London 2001, 21.

each of these images in succession that we are able to explore the complex interplay of cultural discourses underpinning her self-representations.

The inherent duality inscribed by Vieira's self representations is reflected by Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytical theory entitled 'the mirror stage'.⁷ Despite the potential for extensive citations of this theoretical model within the discourse of feminine self-representation, only its central premises are used in this thesis. Lacan claims that when a child first sees itself and differentiates its body from that of its mother's, it experiences the first effects of the "specular image" of the I.⁸ This sense of identification of the self remains nonetheless, alienated from its source, as its definition is based on an external notion of unity defined in relation to the image of an 'other' - its mirror reflection.⁹ Historian Elizabeth Grosz explains that this sense of identity becomes "precarious" as it is always modeled on another, seen in the mirror, arguing that a specular image provides no sense of "stability nor internal cohesion".¹⁰ Lacan, explains this lack of cohesion on the basis that the specular image by codifying external boundaries (the skin) engenders a sizable and symmetric form, yet highly contrasting with "the turbulent movements that the subject feels are animating him".¹¹ In this instance, the subject is divided into two, between the image of the projected self (the external) and the perception of oneself (the internal).

Lacan's dialectic in the definition of the self is that which we observe in Vieira's self-portrait paintings, particularly in *Autoportrait* (III). The duplicity of Vieira's image in this latter painting bears reference to its alienated destination from Lacan's reference to those "phantoms that dominate" one's internal existence undisturbed.¹² Further evidence of the artist's conscious exteriorisation of her figure form in this later painting can be

⁷This theory was first expounded at a Congress of Psychoanalysis in Paris in 1936. However the citations used in this thesis have been taken from Lacan's 1949 presentation at the International Congress of Psychoanalysis in Zurich.

⁸Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: a selection*, Alan Sheridan (transl.), London 1977, 2.

⁹Elizabeth Grosz, "The Subject", in Elizabeth Write (ed.), *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: a critical dictionary*, Oxford 1992, 413.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Lacan, *Écrits*, 2.

¹²Ibid., 2-3.

determined from the highly stylised mask-like screen that represents the face. This effect of purely external representation is enhanced by specific pictorial decisions in depicting her own image. Vieira's rendering of her long, drawn oval face, elongated nose and compressed mouth recall Amadeo Modigliani's enigmatic female models. Modigliani-style features can also be seen in Vieira's portraits of Arpad completed during that same year [Pl.65]. Despite being known as a gregarious man, Vieira renders Arpad in a seemingly melancholy mood, his long drawn face, with sad eyes, resting on his arms recalls Modigliani-like postures such as that in *The Young Apprentice* (c.1918) [Pl.66] where the model is depicted resting his arm upon the table and leaning his head upon it. Vieira completed another portrait of Arpad, with the same brooding melancholic mood with his forehead resting on the palms of his hands and downcast eyes. Arpad's elongated jaw, pursed lips, small mouth and pronounced chin bring to mind Modigliani's painting *Blaise Cendrars* (1917) [Pl.67]. However, it is Vieira's use of a veiling effect over the eyes by failing to draw the irises that has drawn me to compare her work alongside that of Modigliani. Vieira's eyes have a blank gaze, as if two brown monochromatic blinds were drawn down over them. With regard to Modigliani's use of single coloured eyes, historian Simonetta Fraquelli remarks: "the sitter appears absorbed in his or her thoughts".¹³ A similar observation can be made regarding the figure in *Autoportrait* (III) as this image generates a parallel isolationist effect between viewer and object for although we have a clear outline of their external figures, no traces regarding the sitter's inner life or "phantoms" are revealed.

In that same year, 1931, Vieira completed *Autoportrait* (IV) [Pl.68]. On a formal level, she developed a more dynamic dialogue between figure and background. In this painting Vieira re-distributes the balance of power between the objects in the foreground and background area by placing her reflection left of the image's central vertical axis, while drawing a closed door on its right-hand side. This focal division is further stressed by Vieira's body, which is slightly shifted to the side as if she were allowing us a full view of

¹³Simonetta Fraquelli, "A Personal Universe: Modigliani's Portraits and Figure Paintings", exh. cat., *Modigliani and his Models*, London 2006, 32.

the door. Meanwhile, her eyes are averted toward the viewer, as is she is aware of the shared presence between her self-image and that of the closed door. It was half a century later that Vieira hinted that this composition posed an existential problem, as she remarked:

À mes yeux, la porte est un élément très important. J'ai depuis longtemps le sentiment d'être devant une porte fermée, des choses essentielles que je ne puis connaître ni voir se passent de l'autre côté. Et c'est la mort qui m'ouvrira la porte.¹⁴

In this account, the door becomes a symbol of all which is and remains unknown and impenetrable in relation to greater existential questions, prefiguring Vieira's subsequent self-portrait painting of 1932 *Autoportrait* [Pl.21].¹⁵ However, in line with the underlying narrative of her previous self-portraits relating to the notion of a deliberate obstruction and of the inaccessibility of any further knowledge on the subject, the door serves a parallel function to earlier pictorial decisions in *Autoportrait* (III), such as the blank gaze, demarcating the boundaries between the external and internal knowledge of the subject.

In 1932 Vieira resorted to completely obliterating all external elements in the description of the self and concentrating solely on the "phantoms that dominate" the mind with *Autoportrait*.¹⁶ This vision passes through all external appearances of Vieira's image, communicating only an internal model of the mind, a reflection of a state of mind expressed by the means of the fantastic and marvelous, as a young girl climbs a rope ladder against a nebulous blue backdrop.

On the rare occasion that Vieira talked about portraiture painting in her interviews she remarked: "Arpad est la seule personne au monde qui me voit à la fois à l'intérieur et à l'extérieur. Lui seul me connaît complètement".¹⁷ Vieira suggests an awareness of the composite operation in portrait painting, the need to include an external as well as internal perception of the object in question, in this case, the sitter. During the process of

¹⁴Anne Philip, *L'Eclat de la Lumière*, Paris 1978, 110.

¹⁵See Chapter I, section 1.3.1, regarding the transient condition that affects human existence, which generates a narrative thread through these two later self-portraits.

¹⁶The symbolism behind this painting is discussed at length in Chapter I, section 1.3.1.

¹⁷Philip, *L'Eclat de la lumière*, 82. This statement was made after Arpad had completed his numerous portraits of Vieira in Brazil between 1940 and 1947.

completing a self-portrait, this distinction becomes more pronounced, as the artist has full knowledge of the subject's perceptions as they are one and the same. Therefore, if this balance is not correct, Grosz's examination of Lacan's theory becomes relevant to this examination as this external reflection fails to offer "stability or internal cohesion".¹⁸ Thereby, Vieira's visual trajectory from *Autoportrait (I)* through to *Autoportrait (1932)*, illustrates the gradual definition of alternate discourses, Vieira as "object", as "artist" and as "subject", revealing the artist's awareness and her efforts to dismantle the inherent limitations of traditional modes in self-portraiture.

4.2 Legacies of Surrealism

The confluence of Vieira's far-reaching concerns extends beyond the limitations of traditional self-portrait paintings, finding a supporting contemporaneous theoretical framework in Breton's text *Le Surréalisme et la Peinture*, with regard to the limitations of paintings published in 1928. Breton declared that painting functioning merely as, "le besoin de fixer les images visuelles"¹⁹, limited itself to serving the simple purpose of "conservation et au renforcement de ce qui existerait sans eux".²⁰ To this limiting effect, he provided a solution by declaring paintings as places of imaginary transfer where resolution came by way of the eye:

m'est impossible de considérer un tableau autrement comme une fenêtre dont mon premier souci est de savoir quoi elle donne... et je n'aime rien tant que ce qui s'étend devant moi à perte de vue.²¹

Historian Haim Finkelstein draws an analogy between the window metaphor and Breton's concept of an "modèle intérieur" as two parallel concepts that correspond to his "evocation of unknown territories". The window, he argues, "appears to imply an unhindered view to a distant horizon" that exists beyond the limits of the naked eye,

¹⁸Grosz, "The Subject", 413.

¹⁹ André Breton, *Le Surréalisme et la Peinture*, Paris 1965, 2.

²⁰ Breton, *Surréalisme*, 4.

²¹ Breton, *Surréalisme*, 2-3.

resorting to the power of the imagination in the same manner that the “internal model” requires the same faculty to materialise the inner visions and workings of the mind.²² Finkelstein thus observes the borderline scenario for this internal/external vision is the eye itself, from where an image can either be projected outwardly or inwardly. Therefore whenever they remain closed, Finkelstein remarks, they represent the liminal threshold which stands between the internal and the external world of the artist.²³ As an example of this threshold vision he presents Max Ernst’s painting, *Pietà or Revolution by Night* (1923) [Pl.69], as manifested through the closed eyes of the kneeling figure as he holds another man in his arms. The origins of this imagery are found in Giorgio de Chirico’s earlier painting *Le Cerveaux de l’enfant* (1914) [Pl.70] where we observe again the figure form of a half naked man with his eyes closed. In both instances, the figure with the closed eyes has been seen to represent the artists’ fathers.²⁴ However, as historian Paolo Baldacci points out, de Chirico attributed to his own persona - masked behind the father-like figure - the powers of philosopher and poet. He remarked on his own visionary qualities as following: “Il n’y a que ce que mes yeux voient ouverts et plus encore fermés”.²⁵

Vieira’s self-portrait series reveals a parallel narrative of awareness regarding the presence of an external and an internal vision. Moreover, akin to Ernst’s and de Chirico’s work, although the “unknown territories” are hinted at by way of the screen-like gaze in *Autoportrait* (III) and the symbol of a closed door in *Autoportrait* (IV), there is a deliberate veiling effect as to what these “unknown territories” consist of. To this effect, these two paintings represent the liminal threshold between purely external conceptions, such as *Autoportrait* (I) and (II), to relying purely on the powers of the imagination, such as in *Autoportrait*. In observing this dialectical visual trajectory in Vieira’s self-portraits, Breton’s description of the evolution of the creative process behind *Le Surréalisme et la Peinture* come to mind, as it is indicative of a process of abstraction from the objective

²²Haim Finkelstein, *The Screen in Surrealist Art and Thought*, Aldershot 2007, 94.

²³Finkelstein, *The Screen*, 136. Finkelstein developed this idea based on Max Ernst’s words in his article “what is Surrealism?” of 1935.

²⁴Ibid., 136.

²⁵Paolo Baldacci, *De Chirico: The Metaphysical Period, 1888-1919*, Milan 1997, 245.

world to a purely psychological model of vision. When juxtaposing Vieira's self-portrait works with Breton's concluding words to his first paragraph, the following occurs:

Il y a que d'autres ont vu, disent avoir vu, (*Autoportrait* (I), (II), (III)) ... il y a aussi ce que je vois différemment de ce qui voient tous les autres (*Autoportrait* (III) and (IV)) et même que je commence à voir *qui n'est pas visible* (*Autoportrait* (IV) and *Autoportrait*).²⁶

In retrospect in 1952, Breton explained this dialectic more succinctly: "L'objectif final était de concilier dialectiquement ces deux termes violemment contradictoires pour l'homme adulte: perception physique, représentation mentale ...".²⁷ In this manner, Vieira's series of self-portraits clearly illustrates the process of identifying the limitations of objective representation through mirror reflections, such as in *Autoportraits* (I) and (II), to exploring the boundaries between external projection and the internal "phantoms" with *Autoportraits* (III) and (IV), and the eventual removal of all external factors and simply rendering visible the "unknown territories" of the mind with *Autoportrait*.

4.2.1 The woman in Surrealism

The interminable conflict between women's objectification and their knowledge of self as subjects within Surrealism developed once women crossed the boundaries from their male endorsed signs of muses, woman-child [*femme-enfant*] and object of desire, to that of independent creative subjects.²⁸ A large section of the theory supporting the reception of Surrealist tenets by female members artists during the inter-war period, is largely ascribed to Simone de Beauvoir's analysis in the *Second Sex* (1949) of the role of women in Breton's novels and his inability to "parle de la femme en tant qu'elle est sujet".²⁹ With reference to *Nadja* (1927) De Beauvoir claimed that although *woman* possessed the power of clairvoyance and prediction of the future over men, they were dependent on

²⁶Breton, *Surréalisme*, 1.

²⁷ These words by André Breton, "Trait d'Union", in Marguerite Bonnet (ed.), *Perspective Cavalière*, Paris 1970, 11 were written for a preface to a catalogue exhibition *Peinture Surréaliste en Europe*, Sarrebruck, 1952

²⁸Gwen Raaberg, "The Problematics of Women and Surrealism", 2.

²⁹Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe*, Paris 1972, 364.

their male counterparts to enable them to love, and thereby only then becoming whole.³⁰ De Beauvoir then pointed out a similar half-function is attributed to women in *Arcane 17* (1942) where Breton's definition of *femme-enfant* reiterated the same dependent variable as it operated as the complementing "l'autre" sex: "en elle et seulement en elle me semble résider à l'état de transperance absolue l'autre prysme de vision ..."³¹ De Beauvoir classified this vassal role attributed to woman in Breton's novels as "l'indispensable médiateur"³² in her poetic injunction, for woman operated solely in collaboration with man and never independently, resulting in Breton's failure to treat women with the stature of subject.³³ De Beauvoir attributed the mystery of woman to man in another chapter entitled "Mythe et Réalité" in the claim:

Chacun n'est *sujet* que pour soi; chacun ne peut saisir dans son immanence que soi seule: de ce point de vue l'autre es toujours mystère. Aux yeux des hommes l'opacité de pour-soi est plus fragrante chez l'autre féminin; ils ne peuvent par aucune effet de sympathie pénétrer son expérience singulier.³⁴

In this manner, the essence and therefore, subject of the female "other", would remain a mystery to man.

In many ways, one could argue that men's inability to penetrate the experience of *woman* limits a man's visual discourse to the outer boundaries of a woman's body. Subjected to this discourse, the body as such became an empty vessel of communication for women, alienated in its objectified form from its "solitude subjectif de la conscience".³⁵ In "Mythe et Réalité" it was de Beauvoir who first intimated at this schism between the contingent body and its psyche when she declared: "son corps n'est pas pour

³⁰Ibid., 360.

³¹André Breton as cited by de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe*, 363. De Beauvoir defined *other* as "la vérité de la vie et la poésie et qui seul peut délivrer l'humanité".

³²De Beauvoir, *Deuxième Sexe*, 360.

³³Ibid., 364. To this effect, this secondary and supporting role attributed to women by artist writers like Breton that led to the title of the book to *Le Deuxième Sexe*.

³⁴Ibid., 387. De Beauvoir's reference to women's "expérience singulier" refers to motherhood and birth. De Beauvoir also notes that this same effect occurs amongst women regarding men's "expérience singulier".

³⁵Ibid., 388.

elle un clair expression d'elle même; elle s'y sent aliénée".³⁶ By examining Vieira's 1930-32 paintings we can observe this estrangement between the body (mirror reflection) and the subject (Vieira) as she continuously redefines her self-image as author and subject in an attempt to disengage from the male dominated discourse of her female body as an object, continuously re-engaging in new communications with the viewer. It is in view of this unattainable desire that Vieira anchored many of her subsequent images in self-representations, creating strong parallels with the art of many female Surrealist contemporaries.

The opening lines of historian Whitney Chadwick's book *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism and Self-Representation* re-frame de Beauvoir's concept of alienation between body and subject:

In mobilising the body as a primary signifier of its cultural politics Surrealism established new parameters within which women artists begin to explore the complex and ambiguous relationship between body and female identity ... a collective body of self-portraits and self representations that in taking the artist's own body as a starting point and in collapsing the interior and exterior perceptions of the self continues to reverberate in contemporary practices of women ...³⁷

Chadwick's reference to an "ambiguous relationship" corresponds with de Beauvoir's reference to the female "nature physiologique" as "très complexe" in its dual interface to cohere the self as "objet" (body) and the self as "sujet" (identity).

Surrealism's incomplete portrait of 'woman' as subject and its legitimisation of a highly personal narrative by way of the *modèle intérieur*, offered ample fertile creative ground for women artists to explore these aspects in the definition of the self as author, subject and object within their narratives. Historian Katharine Conley explains this complex role by describing how women artists assumed their new roles as poet-creators whilst sustaining their 'old' roles as muses and objects of desire as well: "les femmes ont joué un rôle au moins double: compagne-muse-modèle d'une part, créatrice artistique

³⁶Ibid..

³⁷Whitney Chadwick, "An Infinite Play of Empty Mirrors", in Whitney Chadwick (ed.), *Mirror Images: women, Surrealism and Self-Representation*, Cambridge 1998, 1.

d'une autre".³⁸ Their initial objective was to break down the traditional conception of the objectified woman on the canvas, leading many women artists to use their own figures to explore this subversive intent. In this manner, they explored their subjectivity on the battlefield itself of traditional female representation - their bodies.³⁹ This practice persisted through the inter-war period even when the title was not designated "as self-portrait per se".⁴⁰ Chadwick points out a number of examples of many women artists relying on their own bodily features to represent female forms on their canvases, such as Leonor Fini's reiterated use of her "catlike" eyes and "sensuous" mouth, or for that matter Remedios Varos' abundant hair and "heartshaped" head made her an identifiable hallmark within her oeuvre.⁴¹ Conley suggests that this consistency developed from the twofold operation that women artists were subjected to: firstly, their inherited consciousness as objects and secondly, their newly acquired identity as authors.⁴² Essentially, Conley posits that the duality of the female role as both subject and object permits female artists to explore and investigate the definition of self through self-imagery yet most significantly, "*à partir des yeux de la femme*".⁴³ In this view, extending on Finkelstein's examination, the eyes represent the liminal threshold of knowledge between the external and internal self of the *female* artist.

In her 1930-1932 self-portrait paintings Vieira examines the subject of self through its objectified form yet rapidly transgresses to the edge of the liminal threshold in 1931, permitting her to complete a fantastical vision in 1932 that continues to bear the title of self-portrait. In this painting, Vieira pursues the self-narrative through the objectification of her form as the child of her childhood memories – "ce petite fille", also depicted in her earlier painting *Les Balançoires*.⁴⁴ However, once Vieira abandons the naïve and child-like expression, the *petite fille* disappears altogether making her last appearance in *A Nous la*

³⁸Katharine Conley, "La nature double des yeux (regardés et regardants) de la femme dans le surréalisme" in (eds.) Georgiana M.M. Colville and Katharine Conley, *La Femme s'entête*, Louvain 1998, 71.

³⁹Chadwick, "Infinite Play", 5.

⁴⁰Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, Hampshire 1985, 66.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Conley, "Nature Double", 71.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴See Chapter I, section 1.3.

Liberté III in 1934. Despite an absence of figures in Vieira's spatial structures between 1934-35, the artist introduces the figure of the mermaid in 1936 and the harlequin in 1938.⁴⁵ I argue that these new characters are more than mere images and are in fact an extension of the the ongoing internal/external dialectic, or rather subjective/objective field, already underpinning the narrative of Vieira's self-portraits completed between 1930 and 1932.

4.3 Alter Egos

Vieira's use of alter egos is aligned with Sigmund Freud's early attempts at explaining the splitting up of the ego in the creative work of literary authors, particularly, the manner in which authors "personify the conflicting trends in their own mental life in many heroes".⁴⁶ Freud argued that, unlike the common man's attempts to communicate his day-time phantasies, the writer in the form of "*ars poetica*" softened the "egotistical character" of his narrative "by changes and disguises" and offering "a purely aesthetic representation of his characters".⁴⁷ Freud observed that this sort of personification of the self permitted authors to breach the interpretative barriers between the self (the artist) and the viewer.⁴⁸ Within a parallel visual framework, the emergence of new characters within Vieira's oeuvre fulfilled a similar role, as they embodied the experience of the artist's ego through their foreign bodies and symbolic forms. Therefore, the introduction of alter egos in 1936 represents an extension of Vieira's continued attempt to renegotiate the communication barriers between her narrative, embedded in the subjective solitude of the ego, and her audience. This is visible when examined against the visual trajectory of her self-portraits between 1930 and 1932.

According to the theory of the philosopher Max Scheler, alter egos become external characterisations of personal attributions realised through internal perceptions of

⁴⁵ For Vieira's spatial structures see Chapter V.

⁴⁶ Sigmund Freud, "The Poet and Day-Dreaming", in *Collected Papers*, Vol.IV, Joan Rivière (transl.), Edinburgh 1925, 180.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

the self. The consciousness of the self is therefore seized by present and past experiences “against a background of an ... *all-embracing* consciousness which contains my (one’s) experience as well as the experiences of others”.⁴⁹ In this manner, one’s perception of oneself becomes more accessible to its expression as the alter ego makes consciousness a public thing or “an event in the world like any other thing”.⁵⁰ In Vieira’s case, the presence of the mermaid and harlequin on the canvas surface, the former recognised as a mythological figure and the latter as a theatrical character, create through their “public” characterisation the possibility of creating a common stream of consciousness in the realm of minds of both artist and the public.⁵¹

In many ways, this all-encompassing consciousness is intimated early on in Vieira’s child-like oeuvre, and is most clearly articulated in her series *A Nous la Liberté*. Although earlier hints of this unalterable journey to which humanity is destined – that of death – are to be discerned in the imagery’s symbolism in *Autoportrait*, the personal nature of the title inscribed this experience to be particular to Vieira, the subject rather than as an all embracing message of consciousness.⁵² By introducing two easily recognisable figures, the mermaid and the harlequin, on to her canvas surface, Vieira extends the narrative of her paintings onto a more public platform for their potential interpretation. Moreover, by their very symbolic nature, (for instance the mermaid as a messenger of doom) Vieira perpetuates the negative underlying narrative concerning human fate and our inherently violent nature.⁵³ Moreover, historical events in Europe in 1936, particularly the Civil War ravaging neighbouring Spain, may have prompted Vieira to re-introduce the subjective narrative voice within her paintings by way of alter egos, after a short period of highly

⁴⁹Walker Percy, “Symbol, Consciousness and Intersubjectivity”, *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol.50, No.15, July 1955, 631.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Alfred Schuetz, “Scheler’s Theory of Intersubjectivity”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol.2, No.3, March 1942, 333.

⁵²See Chapter I, section 1.3.1.

⁵³See Chapter II, Introduction.

formal spatial frameworks between 1934-1935, as internal manifestations of distress and turmoil caused by these external causes.⁵⁴

4.3.1 *La Sirène, 1936*

In 1936 Vieira completed a painting entitled *La Sirène* [Pl.71]. This painting caught historians' attention because of its regressive stylistic expression, characteristic of her 1930-1934 oeuvre. It is the image of a mermaid, placed centrally on the canvas surface against a sea-like backdrop with colourful lettering running alongside the edges. In 1971, Vallier examined this painting from a purely formalist perspective, concluding her evaluation with the heading: *Atermoiement* [procrastination] as she declared: "le sujet lui-même, la simplicité avec laquelle il est placé au centre du tableau ... son aspect volontairement primitif".⁵⁵ Vallier describes the painting's pictorial narrative as naïve in conception, in a similar vein to the naivety of the work's overall composition.⁵⁶ In 1994, Daval Béran revealed the Luso-latin roots inherent within this imagery, as she declared that the naïve and child-like composition of the painting was characteristic of Portuguese fishing canvases and restaurant signs.⁵⁷ Daval Béran also noted that the peripheral lettering created further cultural links to Vieira's Portuguese background as these words were extracted from Luis de Camões' epic poem, *Os Lusíadas* of 1572 (*The Lusíads*). However, despite Daval Béran's efforts to trace the origin of this imagery, establishing strong links between the subject and the artist, Daval Béran concluded her analysis as follows: "Malgré l'originalité du thème, l'artiste n'oublie pas ses recherches structurels".⁵⁸ The formalist tendencies in both Vallier and Daval Béran's work result in a critical oversight relating to the thematic discourse that threads through Vieira's inter-war

⁵⁴ Like many artists active in France during that time Vieira participated in supporting the Spanish Republican army by drawing the curtain backdrop for a politically active theatre group entitled "No pasaran" (No passing): the Republican slogan protesting against the advancing Nationalist forces. In 1939 Vieira cooperated with Jeanne Bucher in putting together an exhibition to raise funds for the children of the war.

⁵⁵ Dora Vallier, *La Peinture de Vieira da Silva: Chemins d'Approche*, Paris 1971, 42.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁵⁷ Diane Daval Béran, "Analyse d'Œuvre", in Weelen, Guy; Jaeger, Jean-François and Daval Béran, Diane (eds.), *Monographie*, Geneva 1994, 161.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 162.

figurative œuvre. Although on a visual level this painting represents a regression in terms of Vieira's child-like and naïve expression, in terms of content, this cultural discourse engenders a subjective continuity which underlines the visual explorations characteristic of Vieira's 1930-1934 self-representations.

In 1998 Gisela Rosenthal assigned the role of *alter ego* to Vieira's mermaid figure as featured in *La Sirène*. Her examination is founded upon the dualistic nature of the mermaid as a creature of both land and sea, establishing an analogy with Vieira's own creative trajectory: "[s]he [Vieira] was afraid of losing her way as she journeyed into the unfamiliar world of pictorial space, and missing her goal when confronted with the many options that her work displayed at the moment".⁵⁹ Rosenthal identifies the form of the hybrid mermaid (half-human half-fish), as a "functional analogue" to Vieira's own pictorial insecurity, the reason for her choice of the mermaid as her alter ego.⁶⁰ Despite Rosenthal's examination of Vieira's use of an alternate identity, this action is relegated to a pictorial function rather than a narrative one, and places her examination of *La Sirène* into the same formalist framework as that of her predecessors.

However, an alternate analytical framework can be applied to this painting on the basis of the social discourse that develops out of Vieira's choice of the mermaid as an alter ego. With all her beauty and sensuousness, the mermaid is an emblem of femininity; an object of desire. In many ways, the presence of the mermaid on Vieira's canvas recalls the objectified presence of her own figure based on her observation of herself in the mirror in paintings such as *Autoportrait (I)* and *(II)*. Within folk literature, the mermaid is not only a carrier of beauty but her role consists of foretelling doom; the sound of her voice announces the arrival of a storm and sailors' imminent deaths.⁶¹ This power recalls Breton's designation of the role of woman in *Nadja* as "seer", a "clairvoyant", a necessary quality in the Surrealist poet-creator. Through this single entity, Vieira conveys both the objectification of femininity in the figure of the mermaid and the power proffered to them

⁵⁹ Gisela Rosenthal, *Quest for Unknown Space*, Cologne 1988, 33.

⁶⁰ The term "functional analogue" is taken from Samantha Kavky, "Authorship and Identity in Ernst's Loplop", in *Art History*, June, 2005, 359.

⁶¹ Paul Sébillot, *Le Folklore de France: Vol. II*, Paris (1905) 1968, 35.

by the male creative discourse. Alongside the visionary effect in *A Nous la Liberté*, in *La Sirène* the narrative functions as a metaphorical analogue to her powers of predication, as the text in the painting reads as follows: “Where is frail man to turn for succour/Where may he live out his brief span in safety, secure in the knowledge that the heavens will not vent their indignation on so insignificant an insect?”.⁶² The context from which these lines were taken - Camões’ canto I - relates to the adventures of the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama and his crew as they ventured into unknown sea territories and were obliged at times to anchor near the shores of Africa to shelter against the raging sea. The existing literature surrounding the text relates this imagery to the representation of a metaphorical reading, describing this journey as an “event transcending history, redefining the course of human affairs in the divine plan”, where History provides him with its heroes – the Portuguese – and the subject – Vasco da Gama’s 1497-98 passage to India.⁶³ The nature of the narrative in Vieira’s work, finds the subject in History and its hero in her own persona as the artist, recalling her use of the spiritual imagery of the Apocalypse in her own description of the fate awaiting mankind in *A Nous la Liberté*.⁶⁴ In this later painting, Vieira uses the symbol of the mermaid to delineate her own position within this narrative, this time once more, as messenger of human fate.⁶⁵

4.3.2. Les Arlequins, 1939

La Sirène was soon overshadowed by the development of Vieira’s second alter ego, the harlequin. With her painting *Les Arlequins* (1939) [Pl.72], Vieira established immediate associations with the *commedia dell’arte* characters re-introduced by Picasso in his work from 1915 and then popularised within *l’art moderne* in the aftermath of the First World War by artists such as André Derain and Gino Severini [Pl.73]. Very few of these works contained recognizable references to or depictions of the artist per se, resulting in the

⁶²Luiz Vaz de Camões, *The Lusíades*, (trans.) William C. Atkinson, Middlesex, 1952 and 1973, chant 1/106, 56. The juxtaposition of word and image is unique to this painting as Vieira never repeated this practice, except in her children’s literary works. See Chapter III.

⁶³Landeg White, “Introduction” in Luis Vas de Camões’, *The Lusíads*, Oxford 1997, xiii.

⁶⁴See Chapter II, section 2.2.

⁶⁵See Chapter III, section 3.2.

artist's more oblique presence on the canvas. Unlike Vieira's mermaid painting, where self-reference is inferred via the artist's Luso-Latin connections or through her later 1939 sketch entitled *La Sirène et Autoportrait* [Pl.74], Vieira's harlequins stand mid-way between evident self-portraits and the male Surrealist mode of representing the 'self' through alter egos.

Unnoticed thus far by the literature, Vieira disguises herself as a harlequin in *Les Arlequins*, standing against the bright left hand wall of the room alongside Arpad's disguised form recognised by his elongated face and yellow hair. Significantly, the harlequin's gender can be easily identified given that she represents herself with fully developed breasts. Although her identity is merely hinted at, her and Arpad's figures are clearly set apart from the dancing harlequin forms, as they stand and observe the ongoing activity in the room. As for the remaining harlequins, their forms lack a concrete material presence within the box-spaced room as their movement is restricted to the surface of its walls, leaving the centre of the room unoccupied. The dancing harlequin forms seem to emerge from the walls' chequered surface, forcing their way away from their two dimensional chequered outfits into the three dimensional space of the room. This pictorial quality recalls the initial appearance of the harlequin form in Vieira's 1938 canvas entitled *Les Losanges* [Pl.75]. In this earlier painting the illusion of movement is created purely on the basis of a pictorial quality – repetition – in terms of form and colour. Vieira thus transforms these stretched chequers into identifiable figures with pointed hats, the harlequin. Daval Béran observed the formation of two spatial categories within *Lonsanges*: a clear interior room backdrop alongside an "écran transparent" that covers the foreground area.⁶⁶ Nonetheless, the narrative only unfolds on the chequered screen whilst the room in the background remains uninhabited:

L'apparition des personnages se produit à l'intérieur d'un quadrillage losangé détaché du fond de la pièce...les danseurs se assimilent complètement aux murs, donnant l'impression d'être aspirés ou au contraire violemment expulsés selon le sens du regard.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Daval Béran, "Analyse d'Œuvre ", 156.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 156-157.

Beran's reference to a violent expulsion or sense of aspiration can be drawn from the illusion of movement based on Vieira's extension of her rhomboid shapes in the centre right section of the canvas, as her figures come into existence. Yet, the very nature of their forms being conceived from a plane chequered screen, alludes to the forthcoming recurrent theme of the harlequin's entrapment, for although a spacious boxed stage is provided for them, the subjects remains entangled within the two dimensionality of their theatrical disguise. Vieira once described the apparition of figure forms upon her canvas surface as purely symptomatic: "il y a un visage, un silhouette, un personnage: ils ne sont jamais délinérés. Ce sont eux qui s'imposent. Il me reste à les dégager, à les laisser apparatre, a leur donner libre access".⁶⁸

Although there is a clear formal argument for the emergence of the harlequin within Vieira's work, the underlying symbolism of this form within the larger art historical panorama cannot go unnoticed. On this matter, historian Serge Lemoine remarked: "la richesse des combinaisons plastiques qu'offre son costume à carreaux" as well as "sa résonance poetique", Vieira "reprend ici l'un des thèmes les plus anciens de la peinture occidentale, celui de l'arlequin, que l'on retrouve de l'Ecole de Fontainebleau à Picasso, en passant par Callot, Watteau, Cézanne".⁶⁹ Vieira's painting *Les Losanges* reinforces Lemoine's reference to the pictorial richness inherent in the chequered form of harlequin. Lemoine also observes its poetic quality in view of the art historical context within which these figures were used. Far from the traditional gaiety of the French harlequin figure, in 1915 Picasso created a somber and highly fragmented-looking harlequin, completed while his partner Eva was on her deathbed in a hospital [Pl.76]. Despite the negative narrative surrounding the completion of *L'Arlequin*, in its fragmented form and stoic form against a black background, its most recognisable attribute is its smile. The opposition between the artist's emotional inner turmoil at the time of completion and its painted expression demonstrates the ambiguousness inherent in the poetics of the harlequin form. Historian Kenneth Silver refers to Picasso's "reversion to a *commedia dell'arte* subject" as

⁶⁸Weelen, "Fil de Jours", 35.

⁶⁹Serge Lemoine, *Donation Granville. Tome 2. Œuvre s réalisées après 1900*, Dijon 1976, 292.

representative of “a hermetic withdrawal toward private symbols at a moment of personal crisis”.⁷⁰ In other words, he adopted the harlequin as his alter-ego strictly within the boundaries of “the personal and idiosyncratic”.⁷¹ However, two years later, by the time of Picasso’s completion of *Parade*, this otherwise highly personalised form has adopted “a social and public” character and meaning.⁷² It is not until 1921 with his painting *Three Musicians* that Picasso reconciles these two opposing symbolic realms: the gay versus the solemn, and the personal with the public within a single image [Pl.77]. Art historian Theodore Reff assigned a real life character to each of the three musicians, of which Harlequin was Picasso himself. Reff calls the painting an eulogy for Picasso’s “lost bohemian youth ... and the gaiety of Apollinaire and Jacob”.⁷³ Silver further extends upon the symbolism of the image into an ode to all things past as he remarks: “It must have seemed that his [Picasso’s] youth was completely over, and in the juxtaposition of the bright carnival colors of the figures and the deep tones of the ground we find the visual signs for happy memories mixed with a sense of loss”.⁷⁴ Art historian Alfred Barr offers a parallel description of contradicting forces that despite the “rich colours and decorative dress, the effect is somber, the subject is gay, but the strange masque and the hieratic array of the trio give the composition a solemn, even sinister majesty”.⁷⁵

A parallel juxtaposition of contradictory public and private impulses are made manifest in Vieira’s *Les Arlequins*. Although the subject of the dance corresponds with the symbol of the harlequin, her use of a dull gray palette instead of traditional, colourful hues of red, green, black and white transforms the gay theme of dance into a somber event. It is in the very nature of this unexpected juxtaposition of narrative forces, between the subject – the theatrical gaiety of the harlequin – and the pale dullness of the composition that Vieira expresses her innermost “phantoms” of present and past experiences

⁷⁰Kenneth Silver, *L’Esprit du Corps*, New Haven 1989, 126-127.

⁷¹Ibid., 127.

⁷²Ibid., 127.

⁷³Theodore Reff, “Picasso’s Three Musicians: Maskers, Artists and Friends”, in *Art in America - Picasso Special Issue*, December 1980, 130.

⁷⁴Silver, *Esprit de Corps*, 315.

⁷⁵Alfred Barr, *Picasso: 50 years of his art*, New York 1946, 122.

characterised as wandering in fear and disillusionment. That same year Vieira completed another harlequin painting entitled *Drapeaux Rouges* [Pl.78]. Amidst the chequered banners in various hues of red against a dark grey background Vieira includes the crucified forms of harlequin with their arms stretched out on either side and their heads hanging down. Colour once more assists Vieira in setting the tone and mood of the painting, which is both somber yet violent. According to Vieira, this painting represents her closest attempt at addressing specific historical events – “des meetings du Front Populaire”.⁷⁶ The inclusion of a highly symbolic personal language constructed of alter egos in this painting testifies to the importance of the environment within which Vieira completed both these works. In December of 1939 Britain and France declared war on Germany. By the time Vieira completed these paintings she knew that war in Europe was imminent. Thereby the presence of the red harlequin banners in 1939 represent a lost hope as the efforts non-violence, equality and peace, died alongside the Popular Front’s loss of power in 1937. It is with this view in mind that one may conjecture that the macabre image in *Drapeaux Rouges* of crucified harlequins set against the red Popular Front banners owes its sinister palette and morbidity to Vieira’s mood and outlook; they become symbols of lost hope and disillusion. As for the dancing harlequins in *Les Arlequins*, a similar mood pervades Vieira’s somber and dull coloured work despite the gaiety of its subject - the dance. In fact, in this very contradiction lays the foundations of Vieira’s critique, where gaiety seems to be part of harlequin’s theatricality, yet artifice remains their metier.⁷⁷

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was twofold. On the one hand, it aimed to create a continuous narrative between Vieira’s self representations of 1930-1932 and her 1936-1939 use of alternate identities. On the other hand, this chapter aimed to attribute Vieira’s need for self-expression through self-images to the fact that she only not was an artist, but a woman artist responding to a specific cultural field.

⁷⁶As explained by the artist in an interview in 1978 interview with Anne Philip, *Eclats de la Lumière*, 94.

⁷⁷Silver, *Esprit de Corps*, 268.

After a careful visual analysis of Vieira's 1930-1931 self-portrait series, these paintings illustrate the gradual move of Vieira's narrative away from her studies of objectified mirror reflections in *Autoportrait* (I) and (II), to the liminal threshold in *Autoportrait* (III) and (IV), and eventually conforming her image to a purely internal vision in *Autoportrait* .

Supporting this artistic expression is a contemporaneous aesthetic movement consisting of Breton's Romantic conception of a "modèle intérieur" in his text *Surrealism and Painting*. On a psychoanalytic level this expression was examined with regard to Jacques Lacan's theory of the "mirror stage". It is on the basis of Lacan's analysis that a clear categorical divide is established between the self and the alienated "ego" through the "specular image". This duality is that which begins to demarcate the internal self from its objectified external body. On the basis of this dialectic a genre based framework is examined considering Simone de Beauvoir's inference of the "body" of *woman* being a foreign entity from the subject of *woman*. At which point the internal/external dialectic derived from Lacan's psychoanalytic theory is observed from an alternate perspective, that of subject/object respectively. It is within this theoretical framework that Vieira's visual trajectory of self-portraits was examined, as they manifest a dialogue between her objectified form – the external mirror reflection – and its subjective quality, the artist's full knowledge of the subject.

In 1936 Vieira arrived at a compromise. She gave specific form to these internal manifestations through the use of recognisable foreign entities: a mermaid and a harlequin. Through these figures Vieira realised a more accessible and discernable script to her paintings as they established clear narrative threads within the art historical panorama, thus breaching the gap between viewer and image. In this manner, Vieira throughout this period did not cease to communicate what was essentially the first person single narrative voice in her paintings, but the body through which she communicated this narrative underwent substantial transformations.

CHAPTER V

Perspectives: 1934-1940

“On ne peut pas revenir en arrière” *Vieira da Silva, 1972.*¹

Introduction

This chapter examines Vieira’s use of perspective to depict space. Between 1934 and 1940 Vieira delineated space in her image through the format of ‘boxed’ rooms. The paintings featuring this ‘boxed’ perspective will be examined in direct relation to the artist’s claim that in art *one cannot go backwards*; a suggestion that refers to a contemporaneous rather than an anachronistic implementation of an otherwise ‘outdated’ pictorial device, that of linear perspective. This observation permits us to extend the formal and contextual analysis of Vieira’s images featuring boxed rooms from this representational strategy’s historical inception in Siennese *trecento* painting to a more contemporaneous artistic framework; for example, the perspective of Paul Klee’s pedagogical rooms and Max Ernst’s 1920s Dada collages.

Vieira’s use of perspective has proved perplexing for most historians and art critics. This prejudice informs the comment made by Alphonse Layaz in his 1989 interview with Vieira where he remarks: “Ce qui m’étonne dans votre œuvre c’est la perspective. Un clin d’œil à la Renaissance”.² However, Layaz’s attempt to link Vieira’s work to the classical model was immediately contradicted by Vieira:

Elle (la perspective) est donnée d’une autre manière. Comme thème de l’espace, comme thème du temps. Comme une manière de faire respirer le tableau. Tous les peintres font respirer leurs tableaux. C’est ma manière. Je me suis souvent posée la question: je fais une chose qui n’est pas la vraie perspective ... Cette perspective a aussi une raison d’être parce que dans notre tête, nous voyons le temps et l’espace un peu comme ça, non?³

¹Pierre Schneider, *Les Louvre Dialogues*, Paris (1972) 1991, 258.

²Alphonse Layaz, “Maria Helena Vieira da Silva”, in *VOIR: Le Magazine des Arts*, No.59, May, 1989, 40-41.

³ *Ibid.*

Vieira clearly states that her work features a non-conventional transmutation of an otherwise traditional pictorial device, as she declares that her use of perspective does not conform to the definition of *true perspective* - “la vraie perspective”. This rebuttal is immediately combined with Vieira’s initial rejection of Renaissance perspective: that the notion of “true” perspective corresponds to a scientific and mathematical basis. In contrast, the perspective which she defines as “cette perspective” belongs to the psycho-physiological experience of space: “nous voyons le temps et l’espace un peu comme ça”. This distinct categorisation of space, within art history, from an empirical concept to a mathematical construct, corresponds to the historical transition that defined the Renaissance spatial formulation in opposition to its medieval predecessors. In this manner, Vieira engendered a strong historical discourse relating to her own collaboration with *l’art moderne*. Vieira was well aware of its contextual anachronism: “je realise ce que plus les autres ne veulent pas faire”. However, this force was also accompanied by an internal, subjective impulse:

Un jour, juste après la guerre, Wols m’a demandé: “Dites-moi, j’aime beaucoup ce que vous faites, mais pourquoi faites-vous la perspective?” J’ai répondu que je savais que ça ne se faisait pas dans l’art moderne, mais qu’il fallait que je le fasse quand même.⁴

This chapter argues that by utilizing empirical spatial constructions, Vieira was able to adopt a formal language that harmonized with the underlining subjective quality inherent in her work, as discussed in Chapter IV. This enabled form once more to become a means rather than an end, as Vieira continued to engender a correspondence between her choice of subjective narrative and empirical expression.⁵ Moreover, the two impulses that challenged Vieira’s œuvre throughout the 1930s, external art historical culture and internal subjective forces, are those which mark her art out as intellectual in nature rather than accidental in conception and intent.⁶

⁴Schneider, *Louvre Dialogues*, 257.

⁵See Chapter I, Introduction.

⁶Historian Dora Vallier’s argument in *La Peinture de Vieira da Silva: Chemins d’Approche* (Paris 1971) initially brought the highly intellectual content of Vieira’s work to my attention.

In 1956, the artist declared that her move from Lisbon to Paris in 1928 was founded “unicamente por motives intellectuais, em detrimento de qualquer motivo práctico”.⁷ A certain logical progression can therefore be seen when only six months after her arrival in Paris in January 1928, she departed for Italy to study the Old Masters, believing that the Siennese were the source behind the inception of *l’art moderne*:

Vous savez, c’est l’art ancien qui m’ouverte à l’art moderne. Quand je suis venue à Paris, en 1928, on voyait partout, dans la rue, dans les galeries, les peintres de l’Ecole de Paris, de merveilleux Modigliani et de Braque. Il y en avait partout. Mais c’est quand je suis allée en Italie, à Sienne surtout, que j’ai découvert l’art moderne dans les peintures anciennes et dans les paysages. Il n’y a eu en fait qu’une peinture.⁸

It is significant to observe that Vieira’s praise of the *Ecole de Paris* is based on her ability to trace their efforts through past artistic discourses within art history. Vieira favoured the notion of artistic continuity as she identified the same pictorial interests in the work of the Siennese and the moderns referring to it as a single effort: “qu’une peinture”. This concept of historical continuity represented a fundamental artistic challenge to Vieira: “je suis très étonnée quand j’entends dire qu’il faut détruire pour construire. Il n’y a aucune commune mesure. Détruire c’est plus facile”.⁹ The notion of destruction corresponds to the nihilistic attitude which determined the anti-traditionalism of the concept of *tabula rasa* found amidst the Futurist, the Dadaist and the Surrealist movements.¹⁰ Vieira criticised this conceptual break as a less challenging option within art historical culture and instead opted for continuation and reconstruction.¹¹

Amongst the moderns, the Cubists received her highest praise:

The museums are truly delightful. I visit them and I am happy to look. But ancient painting has always been something rather distant from me. I’m sure that if Cubism had emerged from nothing more than a vague imagination of black objects, because they had just contemplated them with fresh eyes, Cubism would have been a mere aesthetic. But it has brought up to date in

⁷ “solely intellectual motives, to the detriment of any practical motive” in Anon., “Diz Maria Helena Vieira da Silva, ‘Paris continua a ser o centro do mundo artistico’”, *Diario Popular*, Lisbon, 10/4/1958. Translation my own.

⁸ Anon., “Entretien avec Vieira da Silva”, *Zodiaque*, 1969, 6.

⁹ Luc Vezin, “Entretien Vieira da Silva: les naissances successives”, *Journal de Beaux Arts*, October, 1988, 39.

¹⁰ Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, London 1968, 61-65.

¹¹ See Chapter III, section 3.3.1.

contemporary life a whole series of forms and has found new relationships between them. That is why it has lasted.¹²

Within a single thought Vieira makes reference to the remoteness of the language of ancient painting, praises Cubism and dismisses the *tabula rasa* in modern painting.¹³ This statement proves most revealing as it deciphers Vieira's position within the artistic milieu of inter-war Paris. Cubism offered a constant compositional structure to Vieira's use of figuration that permitted her to narrow the temporal gap between various epochs in painting. Furthermore, by rooting their subject in already recognizable forms, the Cubists concentrated their efforts on updating these subject forms to more contemporaneous representations, side-stepping the need to develop their art work into purely imaginative creations.¹⁴ However, on another occasion, Vieira dismissed the anecdotal detail of nineteenth century academism, when praising the uniformity of pictorial development in Western painting, as its one disturbance: "celle de l'académisme du XIX siècle qui a étouffé sous le conventionnel et le anecdotique".¹⁵ On the basis of Vieira's historical views, her admiration for Cubism related to its ability to balance artistic endeavour between two artistic extremes in art - abstract and figurative painting. With respect to the latter, Cubism presented Vieira with the opportunity to re-examine figuration outside the confines of academic naturalism. Although their subjects were rooted in the observation of nature, through the portrait or still-life, Cubists restrained themselves from complete reliance on the model.¹⁶ Vieira's dismissal of either 'extreme' aesthetic form stresses her belief in the *constructive* nature of art history, threading its way from the Old Siennese Masters to the *Ecole de Paris*.

It is in view of the historical qualities that Vieira located within Cubism that she established the normative grounds for her own appropriation of historical artistic devices, such as linear perspective. Although on a visual level these spatial projections resemble the empirical

¹²Claude Roy, *Vieira da Silva*, Barcelona 1989, 29. No indication is given as to the date of this remark, nor the original source from which it was taken. The text was already translated by author Claude Roy.

¹³Vieira's notion of "ancient painting" corresponds to her conception of the continuous historical period embracing *l'art moderne*. In this case Vieira is probably referring to the Siennese Masters.

¹⁴Christopher Green, *Cubism and its Enemies*, New Haven 1987, 187-202.

¹⁵Anon., "Entretien Vieira", 7.

¹⁶Green, *Cubism*, 47.

work of the Old Masters as an index for spatial organisation, Vieira attends to a particular subjective impulse that attests to their production as reflective of artistic concerns of the inter-war period. In order to address these issues appropriately this chapter has been divided into two main parts. The first section determines the nature of Vieira's perspectival systems to be based upon the use of empirical and formal constructions of space. This determination is based upon Vieira's claim that both Paul Klee and the Cubists were using similar perspectival systems during inter-war Paris. It is with this view in mind that this chapter features juxtapositions of Vieira's spatial structures with Klee's theoretical formulations on space and the Cubists' perspectival frameworks of the 1920s. By using these examples, with a particular focus on Picasso's paintings from the early 1920s, a better understanding of Vieira's conception and use of perspectival space in her work executed in inter-war Europe will be achieved.

The second part of this chapter, examines perspective as a symbolic and narrative device which complements and reinforces Vieira's underpinning subjective content, aligning once more to Breton's "modèle intérieur". In Chapter IV, I examined the role of harlequin as a form of alternate identity. Following on from the theatricality of this motif, in this chapter I examine Vieira's use of boxed space in relation to the notion of *theatrum mundis*, expanding on Gisela Rosenthal's original idea.¹⁷ However, this chapter updates this Renaissance idea of the theatrical space positing it as an allegorical reflection of reality in inter-war Paris, using Antonin Artaud's theatrical manifestoes entitled *Le Théâtre de la Cruauté* (Theatre of Cruelty). The subjective nature of Vieira's stage-like construction can only be concluded when these boxed spaces are examined in conjunction with Paul Klee's Bauhaus perspective rooms and Max Ernst's collage work, particularly *The Master's Bedroom* (1921), as exemplary perspectival spatial constructions completed in post-Cubist inter-war Europe.

5.1 The Siennese Model

The Siennese Masters became a continual point of reference for Vieira in her artistic life, as she noted as late as 1991: "Tu le croiras, si tu veux, j'ai fait une découverte. Tu sais je possède ce

¹⁷Gisela Rosenthal, *Quest for Unknown Space*, Cologne 1988, 37

superbe grand livre sur les Siennois. Pour une fois, ces reproductions sont très bonnes”.¹⁸ Although a book on Siennese painting had been published in Paris as early as 1929, there is no evidence as to how long Vieira had owned her book, whether she bought it soon after her trip to Italy or if it was an acquisition later in life.¹⁹ However, there is evidence that by the time the artist couple moved to their new atelier on rue Saint-Jacques in 1938, Vieira had reproductions of Ambrogio Lorenzetti’s fresco *Allegory of Good Government* (1338-1340) pinned up on her studio wall [Pl.79].²⁰ That same year Vieira completed *Procession religieuse*: a painting set apart from the rest of her work due to its horizontal format (measuring 15 x 60cm), religious theme and spatial modelling [Pl.80]. Vieira’s composition consists of figures represented in geometricised form with triangular bodies and spherical heads, lined up against each other as they climb the surface of the canvas, from the bottom to its top edge. This vertical tendency to mark distance in a pyramidal form was characteristic of medieval painting articulated in Lorenzetti’s aforementioned cityscape, *Good Government*. Similar to Vieira’s painting, Lorenzetti’s follows the model of spatial continuity based on surface climbing effects where depth is indicated by vertical displacement and the foreground occupies the lowest areas of the picture, with the background located at the highest points.

An earlier and clearer example of vertical displacement can be observed in Duccio di Buoninsegna’s model for his altarpiece *Entry to Jerusalem* (1308-1311) at the *Maestà*, which depicts Jesus approaching the gates of Jerusalem as a crowd of onlookers witnesses the event [Pl.81].²¹ The historian John White attributed this vertical distance to the Old Masters’ attempt to reconcile the three dimensional aspect of their surroundings (the empirical experience) with the two dimensionality of the pictorial surface. He characterised this tension on the canvas as a

¹⁸Guy Weelen, “Vieira da Silva: Au fils du Jour”, in Weelen, Guy; Jaeger, Jean-François and Daval Béran, Diane (eds.), *Monographie*, Geneva 1994, 37.

¹⁹Although there is no indication of the date that book was acquired in this statement recorded by Guy Weelen on May 1991, the art journal *Cahiers d’Art* advertise the publication of a series of books entitled *Peinture Siennoise*, *Peinture Byzantine*, *Giotto* and *The Italian Renaissance*, as early as 1929.

²⁰This was noted by Guy Weelen in the artist’s *Catalogue Raisonné*, Geneva 1994, 50.

²¹There is no surviving evidence as to whether this particular altar-piece was illustrated in the early books on Siennese art. However *Entry to Jerusalem* was part of Duccio’s most famous series of frescoes at the *Maestà*, the Cathedral of Siena, which Vieira must have come across during her travels through Italy in 1928. This does not necessarily imply that Vieira’s work directly corresponds to *Entry to Jerusalem* but rather that her work *Procession religieuse* seems to be based on a similar spatial model.

form of spatial conflict: “a tug-of war between the demands of realism and of surface pattern”.²²

In 1934, Vieira completed an earlier version of her 1938 painting, *Procession religieuse*, entitled *La Cortège* [Pl.82]. The figures in this painting are modelled on trapezoid and circular figures forms positioned one behind the other as they climb the canvas surface in a procession. According to Gisela Rosenthal this painting represents Vieira’s earliest formal examination on the qualitative properties of repetition.²³ A similar description is provided by Diane Daval Béran and Nestor Aguilar, as they argue that Vieira’s only concession to perspective in this aerial view is the slight diminution of her forms in the upper most section of the canvas surface.²⁴ It is, however, Dora Vallier who recognises Vieira’s figural reductionist tendencies in this painting, having been executed with the intention of rendering active the spatial construction. Repetition, “c’est un tout autre principe constructif: un déroulement de la forme fondé sur le rythme de son apparition”.²⁵ Adding to Vallier’s point, it is worth noting that in 1934 the periodical *Cahiers d’Art* published an article on an ethnographic exhibition entitled *La Danse Sacrée*. In the accompanying illustrations, modelled clay figurines, almost identical to Vieira’s own in *La Cortège*, are positioned against a white background representing the variable formations of the sacred dance [Pl.83.]. The caption accompanying these images declares them to be “formes fondamentales de la danse en coeur, ses formes sont symboliques”.²⁶ A similar symbolic function can be attributed to Vieira’s reductionist schematic figures in *Cortège*, as the artist’s interest shift momentarily from the subject to elaborate compositional structures based on formation and alignment – pictorial opportunities that can be devised on the planar surface of the canvas. Formal investigations can be observed in Vieira’s subsequent works, as she

²²John White, *The Birth and Re-Birth of Pictorial Space*, London 1967, 27, 63.

²³Gisella Rosenthal, *Quest for Unknown Space*, Cologne 1998, 29.

²⁴Diane Daval Béran “Analyse d’Œuvre ” in (eds) Guy Weelen, Jean-François Jaeger and Diane Daval Béran, *Monographie: Vieira da Silva*, Geneva 1994, 141 and Nelson Aguilar, *Figuration et Spatialisation dans la peinture moderne brésilienne: le séjour de Vieira da Silva au Brésil (1940-1947)*, PhD dissertation, Université Jean Moulin, Lyon 1984.

²⁵Dora Vallier, *La peinture de Vieira da Silva: Chemins d’Approche*, Paris 1971, 36.

²⁶C. Sachs, “La Danse Sacrée: à propos de la exposition au Musée d’Ethnographie au Trocadéro,” *Cahiers d’Art*, V-VIII, Paris 1934, 158-164.

abandons the symbolic figurines altogether for abstract pictorial devices such as line and colour, as noted in paintings such as *Untitled* (1935) [Pl.84] and *Composition* (1936) [Pl.85].

While Vieira thoroughly investigated the two dimensional aspect of the canvas surface plane and continued to explore breadth and length, she also completed a series of paintings where the third dimension – depth – was included. In 1934-35 Vieira completed her first boxed interior entitled *Atelier Lisbonne* [Pl.86]. This painting alludes to Vieira's Lisbon studio during her short sojourn there in 1934, although the work itself was completed upon her return to Paris later that same year. In terms of conception and execution, this painting was completed from her memory of the studio and thus fully constructed on the basis of perception: in other words, it is empirically constructed.²⁷ Within the art history, Vieira's application of linear constructions based on the foundations of memory and perception coincide with the work of her late medieval predecessors as it is based on a rudimentary spatial structure, consisting in the coordination of its floor, ceiling and wall variables. This empirical formulation of space with its inherent spatial inconsistencies can be detected in Duccio's panel depicting the *Last Supper* (1311) in the *Maestà* [Pl.87]. Although he renders the central ceiling lines so that they approximately recede to a vanishing point, the figure forms in the foreground sitting around a rectangular table fail to fit into the hollow body of the interior background space. This results in spatial tension between the signs of recession in the upper section of the panel and the surface patterns of painting in the lower sections of the panel.²⁸ This spatial conception has been attributed by the historian Erwin Panofsky as being the result of the confluence of Byzantine and Gothic elements in Italian *trecento* art.²⁹ White has expanded upon this synthesis of pictorial conventions to argue that the basis for pictorial advancement in fact lies in Duccio's *conservatism* - his "willingness to retain conventions", such as the Byzantine surface climbing effect (amidst the seated at the table) alongside the Gothic tendency towards natural observation to achieve depth (in the form of the receding beams) that generates

²⁷Section 4 closely examines the relationship between perspective and memory in relation to Dora Vallier's initial association established in *Chemins d'Approche*, 39.

²⁸Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, Cambridge (1925) 1991, 54.

²⁹Panofsky, *Perspective*, 54.

inconsistencies that result in what White declares to be “more daring representational effects”.³⁰

Similar spatial inconsistencies characterise Vieira’s *Atelier Lisbonne*. The most revealing aspect of an absent quantitative method to her application of linear perspective, (i.e. the Renaissance model), is the presence of a displaced back wall that remains slightly skewed to the left of the centre of the canvas. Rather than resulting in the achievement of the illusion of depth, the receding floor boards run vertical alongside the canvas plane (alluding to *La Cortège*’s surface climbing effect). In addition, the receding side panel walls do not converge at a single focal point, but instead create a background surface area that results in the viewer’s gaze running through numerous directional tracks of movement and countermovement. Contrary to her predecessors’ practice of hiding disjointed orthogonals with figures and objects, Vieira mediates this un-coordinated spatial structure and stresses spatial homogeneity by drawing wire-like forms as coordinates to help the viewer orientate themselves within the space.

Unlike her historical predecessors’ work, Vieira’s conflicting spatial constructions are deliberately rendered on the canvas surface. In this instance, the following questions remain to be answered: why did Vieira opt for this rudimentary approach to spatial construction? And what are the possible implications of this implementation of pictorial forms?

5.2 Klee’s writings

In a documentary film produced to accompany Vieira’s retrospective exhibition at the Petit Palais in 1988, Vieira made the following declaration in defence of her use of perspective: “il y avait un peu chez Klee. Il avait donnée de la perspective quand il était professeur”.³¹ By 1934 Klee had attracted significant public acclaim in Paris where his work had been exhibited on over fifteen different occasions in public spaces since his first appearance in Paris at Galerie Vavin-Raspail in 1925. Furthermore, as advertised in the journal *Cahiers d’Art*, William Grohmann’s

³⁰White, *Pictorial Space*, 63.

³¹Daniel Le Compte, *Visite Privée*, audiovisual 26’, (1988) 1993.

monograph on Klee had been published in France in 1929.³² This volume features one of Klee's Bauhaus drawings of a room in perspective, entitled *Perspective with Open Door* (1923) [Pl.88]. According to Daval Béran's biographical accounts, Vieira became acquainted with Klee's art in 1933 when she came across an illustrated leaflet of his work in the studio of the Swiss artist, Hans Schiess.³³ A year later, Schiess published an article on Klee in *Cahiers d'Art* entitled "Notes sur Klee: à propos de son exposition à la Galerie Simon", in which he quotes at large Klee's writings and features illustrations of his works.³⁴ Schiess' enthusiasm for his compatriot's works may have been transferred to the young and impressionable Vieira.

Klee taught at the Bauhaus from January 1921 until April 1931. From 1931 to 1933 he maintained a post as lecturer at the Dusseldorf Academy. Although his pedagogical sketchbook was published in 1925 it was not until after World War II that these notes were translated from German into French and English.³⁵ The only evidence of Klee's work and thought processes that Vieira had to work with at the time were Klee's published paintings. A key set of paintings pertaining to these studies are Klee's perspectival projections completed between 1921 and 1925. Further proof of their originality and Klee's acceptance into the cutting edge aesthetic circles of the Parisian avant-garde is the inclusion of his *Perspective with Inhabitants* (1921) in the leaflet catalogue for a Surrealist exhibition at Pierre Galerie in 1925 [Pl.89].

In his pedagogical writings, Klee declared that in attempting to achieve 'spatio-plastic' representation through linear perspective one could fall prey to "monotony" – a stasis. This fear was instilled in him by the motionless view points created by *classical* linear perspective of the Renaissance mathematical concept. On this matter he remarked: "Form as movement, as action is a good thing, active form is good. Form as rest, as an end, death".³⁶ As a solution, Klee observed the need for the creation of several viewpoints in order to acquire "active and

³²*Cahiers d'Art*, VI, 1929.

³³Diane Beran Daval, "Biographie" in *Monographie*, Weelen, Guy; Jaeger, Jean-François and Daval Béran, Diane (eds.), Geneva 1994, 397.

³⁴Hans Schiess, "Notes sur Klee: à propos de son exposition à la Galerie Simon", *Cahiers d'Art*, V-VIII, Paris 1934, 178-84.

³⁵Paul Klee, *Pedagogical Sketchbook*, New York 1944.

³⁶Paul Klee, *Notebooks Volume I: The Thinking Eye*, London 1973, 169.

operative movement” and thus form “becomes structured along the way”.³⁷ In this manner, space becomes an organic form, a means of “growth” within the pictorial space whose essence is fundamentally located in “formation”.³⁸

From this brief recapitulation of Klee’s notes, his words can be seen to resonate throughout Vieira’s own use of perspective, particularly in relation to his reference to its organic function (Vieira’s “breathing space”) and need for multiple points (Vieira’s imperfect spatial structures).³⁹ This analogical framework permits us to update the context of Vieira’s perspective projections away from their *trecento* conception to more contemporaneous European artistic sources. In her defence of perspective, Vieira claimed that it provided her canvases with “breathing space”. Although one could easily attest to the opening out of space by way of the inclusion of a third dimension – that of depth – there is an almost “organic” quality to Vieira’s spatial construction in *Atelier Lisbonne*. Tension is created as the viewer’s gaze is obliged to follow individual spatial structures as Vieira fails to create a single focal point. The concept of space as a biological experience extends upon Klee’s observation of space as a “pulsating”, “organic” device based upon the illusion of movement and countermovement.⁴⁰ In Klee’s paintings, these paths are laid out with his strict use of lines spreading throughout the wall surfaces up to the ceiling, yet these lines simultaneously force the viewer’s gaze to the end back room. This phenomenon is transcribed in Klee’s notebooks as follows: “In the work of art, paths are laid out for the beholder’s eye, which gropes like a grazing beast ... The pictorial work springs from movement, it is itself fixated movement, and it is grasped in movement”.⁴¹

The notion of a pulsating space becomes even more apparent in Vieira’s 1940 painting entitled *Atelier* [Pl.90]. The chequered panel walls and floors of the projected room seem to flow with the rhythmic movement of the central dancing figures creating through its rippled aspect a visual sensation of pulse manifested along the walls as rhythmic undulations.

Rhythm is devised by way of repetition of form and colour in Vieira’s paintings. The clearest example of the qualitative effect of these two pictorial devices can be discerned in her

³⁷Ibid., 171, 169.

³⁸Ibid., 169

³⁹For full quote see footnote no.2.

⁴⁰Klee, *Notebooks*, 217.

⁴¹Ibid., 57.

second boxed room entitled, *Chambre à Carreaux* (1935) [Pl.91]. In this painting, Vieira again draws the interior of a box-spaced room, as in *Atelier*, yet every surface is covered by a chequered pattern of variable coloured tiles. In *trecento* works, patterned floors were utilised as coordinate systems predating the systematization of mathematical space.⁴² In *Chambre à Carreaux* the check-board tiles become an index for spatial values, thus replacing the geometrical wire frameworks in *Atelier Lisbonne*. Although Vieira's use of tiles is often attributed to her Portuguese heritage, on one occasion she remarked: "Sienna m'a beaucoup marquée. Il y avait aussi des carreaux à Sienna, des noirs, des jaunes, de Lorenzetti".⁴³ Here Vieira specifies the artists that she bore in mind, specifically mentioning the Siennese artist - Lorenzetti. Pietro Lorenzetti's *Birth of the Virgin* of 1342 [Pl.92] bears a significant resemblance to Vieira's work, in its use of a chequered surface, as his patterned floor extends, unseen, under the bed, yet the sensation of projected space is continued by way of the chequered bed-cover on which the subject lies. In *Chambre à Carreaux*, Vieira responds to the *trecento* strategy of floor and ceiling foreshortening, by utilising the guiding geometric principle of object diminution and spatial conversion towards the back section of the room. Nevertheless, the unity which she creates between the top and bottom panel contradicts the direction of the remaining side panels where optical movement forces the viewers gaze back to the foreground area of the room. Optical mobility is further encouraged by Vieira's use of colour. Any accidental gaps in the tiles' colour scheme momentarily breaks-up the composition, creating completely new chromatic rhythms, thus avoiding the possible danger of monotonous patterns. On the basis of the alternative pictorial devices of colour and repetition, Vieira engages with optical illusion and spatial conflict in order to generate innumerable depictions of space.

By regarding Vieira's treatment of space as a "never-ending metamorphosis"⁴⁴ common ground may be established between her rudimentary and systematic generation of three dimensional space based on the *trecento* model and Klee's modern concept of space as an "organic" and mutable form. Within the history of Western art, the *trecento* period marks the transitive stage between the two dimensional medieval conception of space and the

⁴²Panofsky, *Perspective*, 47.

⁴³Layaz, "Vieira", 40.

⁴⁴Klee, *Notebook*, 14.

Renaissance's three dimensional notion of space through the creation of what is today known as the classic conventions of *central* perspective: "infinity", "immutability" and "homogeneity".⁴⁵ Therefore, in its spatial definition, *trecento* space denotes everything that is indefinite and provisional, organic and mutable, embodying in its mutability the opposite of the absolute state of classical perspective. Vieira therefore embraced this historical moment in the evolution of pictorial space as a means to capture its incessant mutations; the fundamentals inherent in Klee's poetics of modern space.

5.2.1 On Perspectivism

Klee's writings examined the visual limitations inherent in classical linear perspective. In 1916 Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset formalised an argument against the "ubiquitous and absolute point of view" in Renaissance perspective, arguing that the confidence of the Renaissance artists in their representation of visual truth was representative of the small horizons that the philosophers themselves had set as the ultimate truth.⁴⁶ Ortega explained the phenomenon of multiple perspectives as follows: what is "truth, what is real, the universe, life – whatever you may want to call it – breaks up into innumerable facets ... of which each one is perceived by an individual".⁴⁷ An individual's perspective is thereby only representative of a single component of larger reality, of which each view is as real and as true as the other. If these views are placed side by side, it is only then that they complete the panorama of truth. Ortega argued:

There is no absolute space because there is no absolute perspective. To be absolute, space has to cease to being real - a space full of phenomena - and become an abstraction. The theory of Einstein is a marvellous proof of the harmonious multiplicity of all possible points of view. If the idea is extended to morals and aesthetics, we shall come to experience history and life in a new way.⁴⁸

⁴⁵Panofsky, *Perspective*, 29.

⁴⁶José Ortega y Gasset, *The Modern Theme*, London 1961, 90, 94. Perspectivism as an underlining philosophical framework was borrowed from Stephen Kern, *The culture of Time and Space 1880-1918*, London 1983.

⁴⁷José Ortega y Gasset, *El Espectador I*, Barcelona 1916, 90. Translation my own.

⁴⁸José Ortega y Gasset in *The Modern Theme* (London 1961, 143) as cited in Kern, *Culture of Time*, 153.

According to historian Stephen Kern, as Ortega had foreseen, this new doctrine affected many aspects of life outside the realm of philosophy. Albert Einstein had published his theory of relativity that same year, 1916, substantiating the philosophical rhetoric of *Perspectivism* within the field of exact science, stating that, “every reference body has its own particular time”, breaking down the old notion of the absolute space and single time frame.⁴⁹ Arguably, what may have affected Vieira most directly were the social and political implications which were to develop out of the philosophical rhetoric of multiple perspectives, given that it was clearly aligned with ideas of “pluralism and democracy against monism and monarchy”.⁵⁰ Although Vieira did not hold steadfast to any political group, she was exposed by way of her participation in *Amis du Monde* to the whirlwind of social and political change.⁵¹

Moreover, in her 1957 interview that I have frequently cited, with Georges Charbonnier, Vieira’s refutation of the notion of ‘absolutes’ extends to the concepts of relative truths addressed by Ortega y Gasset:

C’est l’incertitude que je me base/Pour moi tout est relatif. Ce qui est certitude pour moi n’est certitude pour un autre ... Le monde change. Les yeux changent. Les gens ont des yeux ... Moi, je crois qu’il y a des hommes qui voient autrement les uns que les autres. Tout est tellement subtil.⁵²

Vieira addresses the belief that particular knowledge is a phenomenon subject to individual perception and discernment. This belief is already demonstrated by her box spaced rooms as they are constructed on a subjective, empirical account of space with their rudimentary planes and linear projections, thus failing to create a single focal point. Another example of her box spaced rooms can be found in her painting entitled *La Scala* (1937), named after the opera house in Milan, Italy [Pl.93]. In this painting, Vieira adapts the tiled surface of *Chambre à Carreaux* and opts for a patterned spiral-like network of almond-shaped eyes, covering the surface of the walls. Each eye symbolises a member of the audience, as they surround the

⁴⁹Kern, *Culture*, 184-5. Einstein’s theory of relativity demolished the conventional sense of the stability of entire material bodies that is to say, there are no rigid bodies.

⁵⁰Ibid., 152

⁵¹See Chapter III. Section 3.3.

⁵²Georges Charbonnier, *Monologue du Peintre*, Paris (1957) 2002, 172.

centre space of the stage. Each pupil, colourfully rendered in bright monochromatic tones, observes a different angle of the stage and thereby attains an alternate perspective, altogether undergoing an inimitable experience. This vision brings to mind a pictorial equivalent to Vieira's aforementioned expression: "Les yeux changent. Les gens ont des yeux ... Moi, je crois qu'il y a des hommes qui voient autrement les uns que les autres".

5.3 Picasso and his late Cubist works

In an effort to further justify her appropriation of such a seemingly anachronistic pictorial device, Vieira expanded her contextual basis to include the French artistic effort: "Il y a même des explications. Le Cubisme a pu amener à la perspective aussi d' une autre manière".⁵³ Vieira specifically traced her sources of perspective within the contemporary art scene to Cubism. As no further explanation other than this quote was provided by the artist, this section examines examples of Cubism's use of space against the historical framework of *trecento* painting, to assess the extent to which Vieira's boxed spaces can be seen to represent her own apprehensions regarding the synthesis of these two chains of thought.

A connection between these two historical movements was noted by the historian Theodore Reff in 1980, in light of Christopher Geelhaar's examination of Picasso's *Carnival at the Bistro* (1908) renamed *Last Supper* in 1931 [Pl.94].⁵⁴ Reff mentions the re-occurrence of this theme of a seated group of figures around a table, on several occasions within Picasso's later oeuvre, such as *Parade* (1917) [Pl.95] and *Three Musicians* [1921] [Pl.77]. The 1908 sketch was apparently never completed as a painting but is presumed to have been converted into the still life entitled *Table with Loaves and Bowl of Fruit* (1908-9) [Pl.96].⁵⁵ The literature on the artist has thoroughly examined Picasso's transformation of the animate objects in the 1908 sketch of human figures into inanimate ones of a loaf of bread, a fruit bowl and the draped curtain in the backdrop. The historian Neil Cox described this effect as follows: "Picasso decided to transform

⁵³Comte, *Visite Privée*.

⁵⁴Theodore Reff, "Picasso's Three Musicians: Maskers, Artists and Friends", *Art in America - Picasso Special Issue*, December, New York 1980, p.124-142.

⁵⁵Reff, "Musicians", 130.

his cast of characters into inanimate objects, and to let their heads and torsos vanish into spaces and shadows".⁵⁶ The only object that remains constant throughout the gradual spatial flattening of Picasso's series from its inception in *Carnival*, to the final execution in *Table with Loaves*, is the table. Between Picasso's first intimation of the subject in the study for *Carnival* and his subsequent *Study for Carnival at the Bistro* (1908) [Pl.97], we observe a slight dislocation of the table's foreshortened perspective, accompanied by Picasso's flattening of the background space, merging the reduced number of figures (he eliminates two from the composition) with the faceted backdrop. The spatial dislocation becomes more pronounced in the final composition of the still life as Picasso entirely eliminates the faceted figures' background for a curtain drop and raises the back edges of the table until it is almost flat against the canvas plane. The significance of this spatial organisation does not only depend on Picasso's early intimations of a more traditional theme from Christian art, but rather the spatial evolution that this early Cubist painting undergoes by abandoning a foreshortened view for a surface climbing effect.⁵⁷ In this fashion, Picasso reversed the Renaissance's perspectival achievements and themes, as evident in *Carnival at the Bistro* and reverted back to medieval spatial pyramids in *Table with Loaves and Bowl of Fruit*. Although Reff noted the work's association with a Giottoesque theme, it is historian Pepe Karmel that draws more concrete analogies between *trecento* works and Picasso's Cubism.⁵⁸ In view of *Entry to Jerusalem* (1308-1311), Karmel remarks that the "archaic convention" of surface climbing effects to render depth provides, "an important model for the spatial organisation of 1908-1909 Cubism".⁵⁹ In this manner, Picasso's revival of older forms of spatial representation can be aligned with

⁵⁶For further analysis see Neil Cox, *Cubism*, London 2000, 110-118. Also Jean Sutherland Boggs, *Picasso and Things*, exh. cat., Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland 1992, 68-71.

⁵⁷Neil Cox compares this painting with Jan de Molder's altar piece of the *Mass of Saint Gregory*, ca. 1513-14. Although a Renaissance work, its spatial illusions are nearer to those of the pre-Renaissance, as Cox notes, remarking on the upturned table scene.

⁵⁸For Reff it was only in view of the original composition of *Carnival* that Picasso's theme coincided with the *trecento* master's works: "its hieratic, symmetrical and stiffly frontal design suggests not so much a celebration but a *Last Supper* painted by an unorthodox follower of Giotto" in Reff, "Musicians", 130.

⁵⁹Pepe Karmel, *Picasso and The Invention of Cubism*, New Haven 2003, 26.

White's estimation of Duccio's "conservatism", remarking on the Old Master's contentment "to work within the limits" that the archaic Byzantine frontal settings "imposed".⁶⁰

The marked conflicts that develop within Duccio's work, particularly in panels such as the struggling planimetric figures in *Last Supper* against a clearly projected room bring to mind similar compositional dilemmas that can be observed in Picasso's post First World War Cubists works. In these paintings, Picasso reverses the process of spatialisation that can be observed in *Loaves and Fruit Bowl* as he re-engages with the task of generating a background setting, as exhibited in *Carnival* whilst containing the subject of these compositions within their planimetric forms.⁶¹ Works such as *Table before an Open Window* (1919), *The Three Musicians* (1921) [Pl.77], *Mandolin and Guitar* (1924) [Pl.98], *Studio with Plaster Head* (1925) and *Bottle of Wine* (1926) also engage with these issues.⁶² However, a conflicting spatial order takes effect between the planimetric subject and the three dimensional surrounding space. The following description of *Mandolin and Guitar* by Christopher Green highlights the oppositional mechanism operating behind this anachronistic confluence: "the absolute lack of modelling or atmospheric modulations and way the composition is built of flat shapes that cross over and deny implied spatial divisions pulls these intimations of depth up to the surface".⁶³ In many ways, Picasso's deliberate "failure" to create spatial unity between his planimetric subject and three dimensional space establishes a visual correspondence with *trecento* compositional conflicts, as previously observed in Duccio's *Last Supper* fresco, between the upper and lower sections of the panel. Although the spatial incongruence in Picasso's work does not completely expel the subject from its stage-like backdrop, the subjects in many of these works "appear to stand in front of the "space-box" rather than in it".⁶⁴ This optical resistance emerges from oppositional forces created through the inclusion of a third dimension to the background space,

⁶⁰White, *Pictorial Space*, 82.

⁶¹Christopher Green, *Cubism*, 71.

⁶²Vieira may have come across an illustration of *Bottle of Wine* as it was illustrated in the journal *Cahiers d'Art* VI, nos. 7-1, (1931) and exhibited alongside *Open Window* and *Studio with Plaster Head* in Paris at his 1932 retrospective exhibition at Galeries Georges Petit. Furthermore, this latter, was also illustrated in *Documents* II, (1930).

⁶³Green, *Cubism*, 69.

⁶⁴Panofsky, *Perspective*, 56.

separating the subject from its spatial surrounding. Cox remarks that this tension was sought after by the Cubists and Cézanne as a model:

to respond accurately to the conditions under which we see the world, or rather contemplate it. Cézanne realised that the everyday world constantly oscillates in perception between breadth and depth, but as an artist he attempted to capture the strange dynamic of this oscillation...⁶⁵

It is in this view of this conceptual framework within which the Cubists elaborated their notion of space, contrary to Renaissance spatial illusionism, but embedded in *trecento* spatial tension that affords Vieira a legitimate reading to her aforementioned claim: “Le Cubisme a pu amener à la perspective aussi d’une autre manière”.

Kenneth Silver refers to the juxtaposition of Cubist subjects with stage-like structures as a literal attempt to place “modernism, as it were, within a traditional frame of reference”.⁶⁶ Picasso’s deliberate appropriation of stage-like settings represent for Silver a “brilliant way of bringing Cubism into the fold of tradition”⁶⁷, specifically the French tradition of painting as it was rooted in the direct observation of nature. This deliberate return to traditional tropes represents Cubism’s efforts to maintain a rapport with the French ‘realist’ tradition in painting.⁶⁸ It is in view of this struggle to remain within the tradition of French art history that Vieira observed and admired the “interplay of artistic polarities” inherent in the Cubist effort, a struggle which for her constituted the fundamental challenge to the conception of *l’art moderne*.⁶⁹

In reference to Picasso’s work, Vieira once made the claim: “Picasso ... ce peintre qui peint, et fait une chose incompréhensible, cela m’a beaucoup aidée a comprendre beaucoup de choses ... J’ai acheté un petit livre de poche ... J’ai dit: cela y est, maintenant je comprend tout”.⁷⁰ Despite her fervent admiration for Picasso, there is little evidence of Cubist influence in Vieira’s work, except for some tame allusions and awkward spatial constructs in her still lifes of

⁶⁵Cox, *Cubism*, 98.

⁶⁶Kenneth Silver, *Esprit du Corps: the Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and First World War, 1914-1925*, Princeton 1989, 319.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸See Green, *Cubism*, 187-202.

⁶⁹Silver, *Esprit*, 316.

⁷⁰André Parinaud, “Entretien Vieira da Silva”, *La Galerie*, June, Paris 1974, 31.

the 1930s.⁷¹ Vieira's admiration for Cubism was expressed via a different trajectory: through the intellectual estimation in which she held it, because of its constructive collaboration with the art historical structure, rather than expressing her admiration on a visual level. In this regard, Vieira's link to Cubism was similar to that of many young artists of the time, as Green has observed, "to be a young Cubist was to come second".⁷² In their attempt to escape this penumbra, young artists followed what art critics of the time believed to be an edifying path, "where modern revivals of past styles ... could seem not to be a retreat but rather genuinely progressive, and in which the most effective way to arrive to a new independent art ... outside the confines of Cubism".⁷³ The theoretical foundation of Panofsky's theory of "reversals" of 1925 can be found in this trend:

When work on certain artistic problems has advanced so far that further work in the same direction, proceeding from the same premises, appears unlikely to bear fruit, the result is often a great recoil, or perhaps better, a reversal of direction. Such reversals ... create the possibility of erecting a new edifice out of the rubble of the old; they do this by precisely abandoning what has already been achieved, that is, by turning back to apparently more "primitive" modes of representation.⁷⁴

Young artists such as Vieira were engaged in a conscious effort to break away from contemporary visual modes in order to create an aesthetic edifice that permitted them to develop new independent art forms and expressions.

5.3.1 Vieira and Picasso

In Chapter IV we examined the emergence of the subject of the harlequin from a formalist basis. However, the premise of the spatial tension that develops between Vieira's planimetric figure forms and Cubism's perspectival projections remains to be discussed.

⁷¹Dora Vallier's book examines possible Cubist influences within Vieira's work, arguing that "l'espace. Le système Cubiste en fera son axe" on the basis of its ability to fragment, rejoin and reconstruct spatial structures in Vallier, *Chemins*, 9.

⁷²Green, *Cubism*, 63.

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Panofsky, *Perspective*, 47.

Daval Béran identifies Vieira's painting *Les Losanges* (1938) as the artist's earliest attempt to incorporate figure forms into her box-spaced rooms [Pl.75].⁷⁵ However, the subject of harlequin in its chequered disguise remains entangled within the two dimensionality of his theatrical disguise. In 1939 Vieira completed *Les Arlequins* where she expanded these spatial formulations onto the four panelled walls of the room, so that the forms are interlaced with the texture of the chequered wall [Pl.72]. Vieira thus retained an initial spatial divide between the planimetric conception of the subject and the three dimensional nature of her boxed spaces. This compositional structure aligns with Picasso's use of a three-dimensional 'swelling forward' of his forms against a shallow, stage-like backdrop. The apparent conflict that develops between the subject and spatial surroundings parallels Duccio's own spatial effects, as exhibited by his *Last Supper* (1311), as two distinct spatial structures are referred to on a single surface. In Vieira's paintings, *Losanges* and *Arlequins*, despite the presence of harlequins, the rooms remain uninhabited. In Picasso's case, a parallel effect is achieved, as the framing stage-like background seems to remain empty. Both artists engaged with the same compositional struggles that characterised the work of the *trecento* Masters, a three-dimensional systemisation of space alongside the two dimensional rendition of the subject.

5.4 The Theatre

The presence of harlequins in Vieira's boxed-rooms creates an immediate connection to the world of the theatre and the stage; a place of make-believe, fantasy, marvel and allegory. On one occasion Vieira made a remark regarding the essence of theatre: "ça (le théâtre) n'existe pas et pourtant ça ressemble à une autre chose".⁷⁶ This latter expression alludes to the theatre's capacity to portray a foreign existence other than the world of the 'real'.⁷⁷ Rosenthal intimated at the cosmological, universal value of this stage world when she designated Vieira's

⁷⁵See Chapter IV, section 4.1.

⁷⁶Undated quote by Vieira da Silva cited in Alberte Grynepas Nguyen's, "Introduction" in Weelen, Guy and Jaeger, Jean-François (eds.), *Vieira da Silva*, Paris 1993, 11.

⁷⁷The concept of the theatre as other-worldly became ingrained in Vieira's mind early on when at age five she was taken to a theatre production of Shakespeare's comedy, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* according to Diane Beran Daval, "Biographie" in Guy Weelen et al. (eds.), *Monographie*, Geneva 1994, 373.

dancing figures in the painting *Atelier* (1940) as part of a “*theatrum mundi*, the theatre of the world”.⁷⁸ Another painting that deserves to be included within this framework of analysis is Vieira’s 1939 painting *Les Arlequins* (1939).

The idea of the *theatrum mundi* was largely developed during the Renaissance when writers began to use the theatre “as a symbolic tool, a means of cognition” between its ability to present an image of a universal heaven and simultaneously address mankind’s daily existence.⁷⁹ A common attitude at the time toward this theatrical achievement was one of critique, given theatre’s tendency toward “pretense” and “simulation” of every day reality. The play-writers defended their intentions in the following manner:

this feigning was analogous to the feigning inherent in everyday life, and that it was also a highly significant feigning that could reveal truth and thus teach men in the “theatre of the world” of their own nature.⁸⁰

Despite its fairy-tale characters and creatures, the make believe world became analogous with the human condition. Giulio Camilo, the forefather of this emblematic staging of universal truth was convinced, according to historian Richard Bernheimer, that he could “reconstruct man himself” by “providing him with windows” and thus re-frame his mind from personal awareness to a whole, universal understanding.⁸¹ In this manner, the theatre divested itself of its charge of a “sacramental universe”⁸² and was realised as a “mirror world”.⁸³

In the intellectual sphere of 1930’s Paris a similar argument was being re-instated by Antonin Artaud that reflected the social and political themes of the times. Artaud published two manifestoes, in 1932 and 1933, concerning a new theatrical practice that he entitled *Le Théâtre de la Cruauté*.⁸⁴ In view of the use of the *theatrum mundi* as an emblematic tool mirroring the

⁷⁸Rosenthal, *Unknown Space*, 37.

⁷⁹Richard Bernheimer, “Theatrum Mundi”, *The Art Bulletin*, Vol.38, No.1, March 1956, 225.

⁸⁰Harriett Bloker Hawkins, “All the World’s a Stage: some illustrations of the Theatrum Mundi”, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol.17, No.2, Spring 1966, 175.

⁸¹Bernheimer, “Theatrum Mundi”, 230.

⁸²Hawkins, “World’s a Stage”, 175.

⁸³Bernheimer, “Theatrum Mundi”, 243

⁸⁴This essay was first published in *La Nouvelle revue française*, No.229, October 1932. It was later included in Artaud’s book *Le Théâtre et son Double*, 1938 (The Theatre and its Double). This manifesto may have come across Vieira’s hands sometime between its two publications in 1932 and 1938. Antonin Artaud himself in the 1920s had

affairs of the world, in his manifesto Artaud declared a similar need for the contemporary theatre to respond to the very issues which are inherently ailing mankind, rather than varnish the theatre with falsities of a civilised humanity as portrayed in contemporary spectacles.⁸⁵ Artaud's ambition was to access man as a whole, "le recto mais aussi le verso de l'esprit; la réalité de l'imagination et des rêves y apparaîtra de plainpied avec la vie".⁸⁶ He explained the operative mechanism of this external-internal field that was to develop between the spectacle and the audience as follows: "Les images et les mouvements employés ne seront pas là seulement pour le plaisir extérieur des yeux ou de l'oreille, mais pour celui plus secret et plus profitable de l'esprit".⁸⁷ The surrounding environment, that is the quantitative aspects of the theatre, the stage and the size of the auditorium, complimented Artaud's ambitions to produce a qualitative effect on his audience as he declared: "Ainsi l'espace théâtral sera utilisé, non seulement dans ses dimensions et dans son volume, mais, si l'on peut dire, *dans ses dessous*".⁸⁸ The underlying ambitions of Artaud's *Théâtre de la Cruauté* and Camilo's *theatrum mundis* are of a comparable nature; despite the centuries that divide both works, they both aimed at accessing "*l'esprit*" – the essence in mankind. Camilo convinced his audience that he aimed to reconstitute man by "skillfully fashioning a certain mentality".⁸⁹ Moreover, Camilo's final bearing would establish a more universal understanding by letting the spectacle's sense of order and scope impress the audience's minds so that they would have, "their frame of reference altered from small and self-centred ways of thought to an awareness of the whole".⁹⁰ A similar, all-encompassing effect is borne by Artaud's work as he writes in 1933, "le spectacle ... roulera sur des préoccupations de masses, beaucoup plus pressantes et beaucoup plus inquiétantes que celles de n'importe quel individu".⁹¹

joined the Surrealist group, although this relationship soon broke up when the latter group joined the Communist party.

⁸⁵Antonin Artaud, *Le Théâtre et son Double*, Paris (1938) 1964, 186.

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷Ibid., 188.

⁸⁸Ibid. Italics are included in the original text.

⁸⁹G. Cousin, in a letter addressed to Giulio Camilo of 1558, as cited in translation by Bernheimer, "Theatrum Mundi", 230

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹Artaud, *Le Théâtre*, 134.

In her 1939 painting *Les Arlequins*, Vieira visually transcribed what Artaud aimed to represent in theatrical terms, by way of a stage and the harlequin figure: “des thèmes qui répondent à l’agitation et l’inquiétude caractéristique de notre époque”.⁹² Vieira’s vision of entangled harlequins, trapped within their own theatricality communicates the message of an inevitable catastrophe. Vieira worked with the harlequin figure in 1939, the year France and Great Britain declared war on Germany. In *Les Drapeaux Rouges*, Vieira’s disenchantment and disillusionment is most clearly made manifest by her crucified harlequins forms placed against a dark red backdrop – a symbolic image of lost hope [Pl.77].⁹³ The purpose of disguising mankind in harlequin outfits, including Vieira herself in *Arlequins*, plays a further role within the conventional readings of the *theatrum mundi* in that from one “point of view, the stage is an image of the comedy of our life, though from another point of view the scene of the world is tragic and the game ends in a funeral. In both instances the stage feigns and teaches”.⁹⁴ As discussed in Chapter IV, by using the harlequin Vieira feigns comic deliverance through our tragic existence.⁹⁵ Moreover, Vieira’s own disguised form as harlequin places herself as subject to an existence of artifice, thus suggesting the all-encompassing narrative relating to humanity, “the comedy of *our* life”.⁹⁶

5.5 The Impassable Wall

The year Vieira completed *Les Arlequins*, she and her husband Arpad fled Paris and returned to Lisbon for what turned out to be their last one. Vieira’s early concerns with security were with regard to her husband’s Hungarian nationality after the arrest of her German colleague: “Max Ernst, par exemple, a été arrêté. J’ai été affolée, j’imaginai l’arrestation d’Arpad, car pour

⁹²Ibid., 186. See Chapter IV, Section 4.3.2 to further examine Vieira’s use of the harlequin as an alternative form of identity.

⁹³ See Chapter IV, section 4.2.

⁹⁴Hawkins, “Theatrum Mundi”, 175.

⁹⁵It is of interest to note that a similar chronology aligns the concept of *commedia dell’arte* with the *theatrum mundi* as the former originated in Italy circa 1550.

⁹⁶This imagery with its accompanying narrative finds a visual parallel in Vieira’s 1932-1934 autobiographical oeuvre entitled, *A Nous la Liberté* as she includes her own form of the petite fille amidst the numerous figures ascending into the territory of the unknown. See Chapter II, section 2.2.

l'opinion publique la Hongrie était l'allié de l'Allemagne nazie".⁹⁷ During this self-imposed exile Vieira completed her second Lisbon studio painting, this time simply titled *Atelier* (1940). It is this painting that Rosenthal designates as *theatrum mundis*, however following a close examination, this stage proves to turn its vision away from preceding universal readings to purely personal ones, hence transcribing as *theatrum egos*.

The title of the work as studio relegates the "stage" of this box-spaced room to a private affair. For Vieira the studio is a place where the creative process begins and ends on the canvas surface. In this case, this particular space becomes a container for the creative self within which private fantasies, memories and recollections roam free within its four walls. Vieira ascribed such properties to her first studio painting of 1934-5 *Atelier Lisbonne* as she declared: "J'ai mis dans ce tableau tout ce que j'aimais".⁹⁸ It was Dora Vallier who first observed that Vieira's introduction of linear perspective within her œuvre was connected to the mnemonic function:

Lorsque la perspective apparaît pour la première fois dans son œuvre, elle est clairement associée à la mémoire ... à Paris Vieira da Silva peint son atelier à Lisbon; l'espace qu'elle construit en fonction de l'imaginaire point de fuite de la perspective est celui du souvenir. Pure projection délestée du réel.⁹⁹

Although Vieira, by way of perspective, is employing what in formalist idioms strictly adheres to pictorial regressive tendencies, that which defines the nature of this space rather than form (structure) is the *ousia* (substance).¹⁰⁰ In his examination of perspectival systems Panofsky described this phenomenon as follows: "Perspective in transforming the *ousia* (reality) into the *phainomenon* (appearance) seems to reduce the divine to a mere subject".¹⁰¹ Within an alternate framework of analysis Vieira's *Atelier* painting elevates space (in its three dimensionality) from a mere structural framework to represent the presence of an immaterial,

⁹⁷Anne Philip, *L'éclats de la lumière: entretiens Marie-Hélène Vieira da Silva*, Paris 1978, 73.

⁹⁸Dora Vallier, *Chemins d'Approche*, Paris 1971, 40. Vallier does not specify the sources or the dates from where this quote was taken or extracted.

⁹⁹Ibid., 40. Vallier in the 1982 edition of *Chemins d'Approche* writes an entire section on Vieira's use of perspective. However, as suggested in the above quote her examination is clearly embedded in the vocabulary and within the context of *classical* perspective.

¹⁰⁰This notion of *ousia* within the perspectival framework has been borrowed from Panofsky, *Perspective*, 72.

¹⁰¹Panofsky, *Perspective*, 72.

intangible space, collaborating directly with the narrative of the painting as both structure and subject in this work dissolve into a single compound – memory work.

The personal narrative contained within Vieira's earliest box-spaced rooms is merely hinted at in *Atelier Lisbonne* by way of a child's game - a steam train circulating through the studio floor. The foreign nature of this object within the room itself and within Vieira's oeuvre altogether (for we are never to see it again) creates significant liaisons within the art historical culture of the School of Paris, particularly with Giorgio de Chirico's own trains in his early metaphysical paintings. Its chronological meter reading, as the passing train emblematises the passing of time, in many ways aligns with Vieira's own description of *Atelier Lisbonne* as a mnemonic container.¹⁰² Although no such statement accompanies her painting *Atelier*, the title of the painting draws immediate inferences with her earlier studio work and she substitutes the train's solitary presence for a stream of chronologically induced recollections representing different instances in Vieira's life. This autobiographical time-line begins with a figure of a child in a red dress playing the piano. The presence of a child in a red dress draws immediate thematic links with Vieira's painting 1932 *Autoportrait* and her self-referential narratives as a "petite fille" in her oral testimonies.¹⁰³ The piano corresponds to Vieira's early passion for music: "j'avais un piano qui avait une belle sonorité. J'avais beaucoup de plaisir à jouer, et puis j'ai senti que cela s'arrêtait, que cela n'allait pas plus loin".¹⁰⁴ This childhood vision is soon overlapped by dancing figures forming a "ronde". In a letter from Vieira to British artist Julian Trevelyan circa 1936-37 Vieira makes reference to her favourite Parisian past-time as she writes: "Nous voulons vous voir, vous devez venir nous voir, on se verra et on dansera une ronde comme ça".¹⁰⁵ In her writing she indicates toward a small pencil sketch she completes of four figures (Vieira and Arpad, Trevelyan and his wife) dancing in a circle, creating a similar vision of merriment as portrayed in *Atelier*. But two figures, a couple, exiting the "ronde" can be discerned in the foreground. This event can be attributed to Vieira's self-imposed exile from Paris in 1939 as she accompanies her husband Arpad to Lisbon. This form of mnemonic survey

¹⁰²James Soby, *Giorgio de Chirico*, New York 1955, 48.

¹⁰³See Chapter I, section 4.1.

¹⁰⁴Parinaud, "Vieira da Silva", 30.

¹⁰⁵Unpublished letter from Arpad and Vieira da Silva to Julian Trevelyan, Julian Trevelyan Archive, Wren Library, Trinity College, Cambridge.

extends all the way to the present, Vieira in her 1940 Lisbon studio as she sits in the far left corner of the room. Her seated self is rendered with the conviction of immovability and permanence, a quality which is only particular to her present form, as the characters within the mnemonic streamline seem to dissolve into space, creating a clear contrast between the intangible objects from the past and the corporeal present.

Moreover, Vieira's presence within the painting contemplating her own life narratives creates a disruption of the visual pyramid as the dancing figures become a shared experiential ground with the viewer. In materialising these images, Vieira is letting the viewer into the private realm of her thoughts, where the pulsating effect of movement and counter movement of the chequered walls correspond to the organic locality of their inception - the psyche. In addition to the precedents and parallels so far discussed, corresponding visual paradigms to Vieira's perspectival rooms are the works of artists Max Ernst and Paul Klee completed in the early 1920s. The extensive literature on these artists has consigned these rooms to a similar basic configuration of mental spaces, or in Freudian terms, "psychical localities".¹⁰⁶ Although both Haim Finkelstein and Rosalind Krauss establish an operative association between Freud's "mental apparatus" and Max Ernst's Dada collage works, it is of significance in observing these specific spatial structures as "representation[s] or evocation[s] of a mental space".¹⁰⁷ As discussed in Chapter IV, Vieira's tendency toward internal modelling can be identified as far back as her self portrait *Autoportait* (1932) where she surpasses all external boundaries of the skin and relies solely on the internal model of the mind [Pl.21]. In 1934 when Vieira engages in formal explorations such as linear perspective, this does not signify disengagement with the underlying subjective narrative of her œuvre, but rather extends its topographical mapping through internally projected geometrical indexes. Vieira's work does not cease to draw upon and develop its visual language based on the internal model of the mind, but the pictorial, spatial language she chooses for its expression is continuously re-examined. Dora Vallier

¹⁰⁶Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, James Strachey (transl.), Hamondsworth 1976, 536. For further studies on the psychoanalytic framework of these works see Heim Finkelstein's, *The Screen in Surrealist Art and Thought* (Aldershot 2007); Hal Foster's, *Prosthetic Gods* (Cambridge 2004); Rosalind Krauss', "The Master's Bedroom", *Representations* (Autumn 1989).

¹⁰⁷Finkelstein, *The Screen*, 139.

observed the historical significance in *Atelier Lisbonne* in view of the application of perspective in conjunction with memory work as follows:

toutes les conditions étaient réunies pour instituer ce dialogue avec la mémoire, propice à l'éclosion du passé dans le présent. Le présent de son tableau, visualisé en dessous par le passé de la peinture...¹⁰⁸

To a certain extent, Vieira's use of perspective parallels her initial intentions regarding her use of a naïve and child-like expression during the 1930-1934 period.¹⁰⁹ With regard to the rather laconic image, *Les Balançoires*, Vieira remarked that content overreaches the simplistic language of its expression.¹¹⁰ A similar account follows Vieira's minimalist description of the past by way of a toy train in *Atelier Lisbonne* following her remark that the room itself is filled with pleasant past experiences: "tout ce que j'aimais". Vieira's visual expression of memory by way of perspective reveals the intrinsic nature of the subject matter as these personal histories are those which maintain in constant dialogue the past with the present. This framework coincides with Vieira's child-like stylistic expression in her 1930-1934 paintings and her mnemonic images. As discussed in Chapter I, Vieira's deliberate use of a naïve style generated a synthesis between form and substance, as the latter's inception was imbedded in the creative process of the artist's past - child art. In her perspectival rooms we observe a similar account between linear perspective and its contextual past within the art historical texture, "tous les conditions étaient reunites pour instituer ce dialogue avec la mémoire, propice à l'éclosion du passé dans le present".¹¹¹

The merger between object and subject within the spatial framework of linear perspective brings to mind Hal Foster's examination of Paul Klee's 1921 work entitled *Room with Inhabitants* as he declared, Klee "collapses figure and ground in a way that effectively merges subject and space".¹¹² The room drawn in perspective is almost schematically drawn

¹⁰⁸Vallier, *Chemins d'Approche*, 39.

¹⁰⁹See Chapter I.

¹¹⁰Vieira: "Je ne voulais pas de l'évidence mais je voulais qu'il y ait beaucoup de choses sur mon tableau et pourtant je voulais faire très simple". See Chapter I, section 1.3.1.

¹¹¹Vallier, *Chemins d'Appoche*, 39.

¹¹²Hal Foster, *Prosthetic Gods*, Cambridge 2004, 215.

and transparent in nature, for which the same “fate befalls the figures that are flattened in the floor and along the wall like schematic spectres”.¹¹³ In view of this latter, Foster drives at re-defining linear perspective within the art of the mentally ill, specifically that of schizophrenic anguish given its “horrific spatiality” as its vision consists of “a literal losing of self in space”.¹¹⁴ Although it is not the intent of this paper to ascribe Vieira’s box-spaced room to the same principles that Foster lends Klee’s perspectival rooms, it is significant to observe the manner in which this framework of analysis ties spatial and subjective definitions into common explanative grounds. Furthermore, in examining this projected space as an internal reflection rather than an extension of our external “reality”, Vieira’s use of empirical constructions acquires further significance. That is, the nature of this empirical construction of space, awkward yet systematic in its construction, manifests its inception on an abstraction (memory) rather than ‘reality’ (an event). Despite the fact that Vieira entitled the painting *Atelier* on the basis of a “real” space, that which she communicates is its creative locality rather than its physical existence. A theoretical precedent may be found in Paul Klee’s artistic ambitions as early as 1902 when he declared his project to entail the ‘physicalisation’ of the psyche.¹¹⁵ As early as 1912 Klee declared his admiration for the works of art of the mentally ill, alongside that of primitives and children, in view of their ability to see into a world beyond.¹¹⁶ Klee further explained this world as that of the “in-between”: “I call it that because I feel that it exists between the worlds our sense can perceive, and I absorb it inwardly to the extent that I can project it outwardly in symbolic correspondences”.¹¹⁷ It is in view of this introspective projection of internal symbols that Vieira like Klee, adjusts to a “highly self-conscious formal self” as space becomes fundamentally subsumed by the intimate and the personal.¹¹⁸ In Vieira’s case, the other worldly character of her structures is transmitted through their organic nature, the instability, mutability provoked by their state of formation. In Klee’s case, the “other

¹¹³Ibid., 219.

¹¹⁴Foster, *Gods*, 219.

¹¹⁵ “Spiritualization of landscape, mingling of its psyche with human sensibility” in *The Dairies of Paul Klee*, Felix Klee (ed.) (Berkeley 1964, 8). As cited in Hal Foster’s, *Prosthetic Gods*, Cambridge 2004, 413.

¹¹⁶Felix Klee, “The Wizard’s Kitchen” in *Paul Klee: his life and work in documents* (New York 1962) 180-185, as cited by James Smith Pierce, “Paul Klee and Baron Welz”, *Arts Magazine*, 1977, 18.

¹¹⁷Smith Pierce, “Paul Klee”, 19.

¹¹⁸Smith Pierce, Paul Klee, 18.

worldly” character is created through the unexpected, in correspondence with Ortega y Gasset’s notion of the “absolute” as an “abstraction” – a space filled with “phenomena”. This phenomenon occurs on the basis of the accuracy of his spatial rendition – highly mathematical – as it transmits the sense of security of the known and recognisable. However, intangible forms inhabit the walls and transparent furniture furnish the room, breaking down the viewer’s sense of “security” by way of the “unknown”.¹¹⁹

A similar phenomenon has been ascribed to Max Ernst’s 1920-1922 collages, as memory is represented within the illusionistic extension of space based on linear perspective. For example in *The Master’s Bedroom* (1921) [Pl.99], Ernst constructs a scene organised in perspective inhabited by the juxtaposition of disparate elements such as a bear, a whale a sheep and a snake alongside a table, a chest of drawers, etc. Rosalind Krauss examines Ernst’s projections in view of Freud’s writings, “A Note Upon the ‘Mystic Writing Pad’”, closely aligning Ernst’s collage and over-painting process with the operative function of the cognitive field: “Because what is projected here is a visual field that is not a latency, an ever renewed upsurge of the pure potentiality of the external, but instead a field that is already filled, already - to say the word - readymade”.¹²⁰ The notion of the *readymade* in Ernst’s work can be applied to Vieira’s perspectival room in view of her narrative source – memory work – as it is already formulated within her psyche, it is already present in *Atelier Lisbonne* yet not completely visible. For Ernst, the construction of collage utilises already existing objects in the same manner that memory and recollection work on pre-conceived forms. According to Krauss, the notion of the “ready-made” is that which draws the most conclusive distinctions between Ernst’s use of perspectival space from its traditional function where the illusion of space functions as a mnemonic container, a “reserve assumed from the outset but never filled in advance”.¹²¹ Krauss then analogises Freud’s mental operations of screen memories, particularly

¹¹⁹According to historian Will Grohmann, despite Klee’s geometrical illusion of space based on his pedagogic teachings of 1921 and 1922, are represents in such a manner that despite this representation of a geometrical linear representation these forms are transmuted into “opposite” effects, for the more accurate his representation of space becomes the more “unreal its effect” in Will Grohmann, *Paul Klee*, London 1954, 245.

¹²⁰Rosalind Krauss, “The Master’s Bedroom”, *Representations*, No.28, Special Issue; Essays in Memory of Joel Fineman, Autumn 1989, 65.

¹²¹Ibid.

with regard to Ernst's identification with Freud's "Wolf Man" referring to *Master Bedroom* as a retrojective vision in that, it is "projected after the fact (of father performing obscene motions) onto the fully saturated ground of the ready made".¹²² In this manner, an undeniable correspondence can be established between Ernst's work and Vieira's in view of their use of perspectival space in that they do not function as "empty" vessels but rather their inception is born from already existing substance - the *ousia* - memory work.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to examine the *constructive* nature inherent in Vieira's work in view of its relationship to already existing pictorial forms, such as that of *trecento* painting, Cubism and the works of her contemporaries Paul Klee and Max Ernst. It is only when Vieira's paintings are associated to that of her contemporaries that the updating effect is fully manifest, and prove that she was not an isolated phenomenon during these formative years but rather her work shows to be the result of an intricate play of historical circumstances, aesthetic movements, individual works and personal histories. These boxed spaces serve as a vessel, a locality that transcribes in its illusionistic function the intangible essence of the subject. In which case, form cannot be divorced from the subject as these are intimately and intricately connected with one another.

A key discovery in alienating Vieira's use of perspective from classical conventions of perspective into more primitive practices, such as the *trecento* model permits us to observe the qualitative differences that develop on the basis of an "empirical" construction of space vis-à-vis a programmatic mathematical formula. That is, Vieira's conscious choice in her perspectival formula favouring the systematic construction of space creates a highly formal structure to collaborate in the subjective underlying narrative, as space becomes a function of memory. Furthermore, in tracing Vieira's spatial frameworks to the Siennese model, the notion of an absolute space, static – characteristic of *classical* perspective – is overturned and once more responds to more modern conceptions of space as per Paul Klee's writings on space as an organic element, in constant formation.

¹²²Ibid., 69.

A similar “updating” process of this otherwise archaic structural form is established when compared to Picasso’s late Cubist works as we observe similar spatial tensions arising from the juxtaposition of planar figure forms within a more traditional three dimensional space. In comparing Vieira’s paintings to Max Ernst’s collages and Paul Klee’s drawings it is where we begin to discern the visual and narrative collaboration between form and subject, where form in its mnemonic state acquires the function of subject. In this manner, Vieira represents memory through specific pictorial structures for depicting space.

CHAPTER VI

Memory in Exile: 1939-1946¹

Je vous informe que nous travaillons malgré tout et pas trop, surtout Bicho [Vieira] qui était bien longtemps assez malade à consequence de l'angoisse de la guerre ... Maintenant elle transpose ses angoisses dans ses tableaux superbes. *Letter from Arpad to Julian Trevelyan, ca. 1943.*²

Introduction

Vieira's contribution to the body of artwork made by people in exile has been largely overlooked by the literature examining these phenomena. A possible explanation for this omission can be located in the exclusion of lesser known artists from the exhibition entitled *Exiles + Emigrés: the Flight of European Artists from Hitler*. Curator Stephanie Barron justified the inclusion of twenty-three prominent European and Russian artists on the basis that their pre-war oeuvre was largely available to the public before they went to exile, allowing the exhibition to concentrate primarily on the impact of exile in their subsequent work. In this case, the exclusion of what Barron categorised as "lesser renowned artists whose lives and careers were nevertheless profoundly altered by emigration" was inevitable.³ Vieira and her work are included within this "anonymous" group of artists, and so her work has remained long unexamined, in relation to the specific issues pertaining to exile art which, according to Barron

¹An earlier version of this paper was published in the St Andrews School of Art History postgraduate journal *Inferno*, Vol.X, 2005.

²Unpublished letter from Arpad to his friend Julian Trevelyan, Rio de Janeiro ca. 1943, Julian Otto Trevelyan Archive, Wren Library, Trinity College, Cambridge.

³Barron, Stephanie, "European Artists in Exile: A Reading Between the Lines", exh. cat. *Exiles + Emigrés: The Flight of European Artists from Hitler*, Los Angeles 1997, 11. The artists included in this exhibition were the following: Max Beckmann, John Heartfield, Wassily Kandinsky, Kurt Schwitters, Oskar Kokoschka, Marc Chagall, Jacques Lipchitz, Yves Tanguy, Matta Echaurren, André Masson, Max Ernst, Salvador Dalí, Piet Mondrian, Fernand Léger, Andreas Feininger, André Kertész, Ludwig Mies Van der Rohe, Walter Gropius, Marcel Breuer, Josef Albers, László Moholy-Nagy, Georges Grosz and Lyonel Feininger.

include: “the relationship of art and politics: displacement, assimilation and cultural identity; and the exploration of memory and loss”.⁴

This chapter discusses four major cityscape paintings by Vieira and examines the representation of memory through specific pictorial strategies of depicting space. Vieira thematised her triple experience of displacement, initially as an émigré, as a stateless artist, and lastly as an artist in exile, in these four cityscape paintings: *Panorama de Lisbonne* (1939), *Lisbonne Bleue* (1942), *La Ville Antique* (1946) and *Bahia Imaginée* (1946). Three of these paintings were completed during the years 1940-1947 while in exile in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. In contrast to the scholarly attention paid to her Brazilian works, that have been noted for their anguished vision of war, such as *La Guerre* of 1942 [Pl.100] and *L’Incendie II* of 1944 [Pl.101], this chapter posits that a more subtle element of self-perception can be seen to have developed in Vieira’s cityscapes, that narrate another sort of struggle, and are concerned with coping with her state of exile. The subtlety of this expression develops out of Vieira’s choice of the theme of urban representation. However, Vieira’s means varied considerably for each city, allowing her experience of each place to be filtered either through memory work or the imagination, in order to create a unique vision. This undertaking develops out of Vieira’s first encounter with the theme of the city in Lisbon in 1939 through a work commissioned by the government. This commission occurred at the time her status as an émigré artist was compounded by also becoming an artist in exile. In this chapter, I will argue that Vieira’s cityscapes become urban readings, analogising this statutory transformation. These paintings should be described in terms appropriate to the shifts in Vieira’s status: from the “urban” vista in *Panorama de Lisbonne*, to “mnemonic screen” in *Lisbonne Bleue*, a “psychic locality” in *La Ville Antique* and eventually depicting a metaphorical site in *Bahia Imaginée*.

6.1 *Panorama de Lisbonne*, 1939

On January 30 1939, Vieira received an official letter of invitation from Antonio Ferro, Secretary of National Propaganda for Portugal, requesting her collaboration with “various artistic

⁴Barron, “European Artists”, 28.

manifestations” and asking when her next visit to Portugal would take place [Pl.102].⁵ Because of the declaration of war against Nazi Germany by the French and the British, Vieira and Arpad left Paris for Lisbon in September 1939. Under Portuguese Civil Law, Vieira had automatically resigned her Portuguese citizenship when she married Arpad, a Hungarian Jew, in France in 1930, and took on her husband’s citizenship. However, political changes in Hungary affected the couple’s status and they both lost their citizenship privileges, left to reside in France as resident aliens.⁶ In an attempt to regain her Portuguese citizenship as a married woman in November 1939, Arpad converted from Judaism to Catholicism and re-married Vieira in Lisbon under the precepts of the Catholic Church.⁷ However, their efforts were in vain, for their status as artists suggested leftist tendencies and was seen as posing a threat to the Salazarist dictatorship.⁸ In June 1940 they embarked for Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, with passports issued by the Society of Nations – a legitimate disclaimer of their stateless status.⁹

Nonetheless, while completing a one year residence in Lisbon, Vieira collaborated in various “state manifestations”: among them a painting commissioned to commemorate the Portuguese capital of Lisbon in the 1940 colonial exhibition entitled, “Mundo Português”. The exhibition’s aims were of a strictly nationalist order, with the intention of celebrating and re-affirming the potential of Portugal, in its services to civilisation.¹⁰ The nationalist ideology that characterised the Salazarist regime deemed the vast colonial regions under Portuguese sovereignty to be the main source of prominence and pride for the Portuguese; their colonial patrimony represented the remaining spoils of a previously extensive empire.¹¹ The painting entitled *Panorama de Lisbonne* [Pl.103], was consequently completed within the context of the celebration and historicization of Portuguese heritage within the colonial exhibition. This

⁵Unpublished Letter from Antonio Ferro to Vieira da Silva dated January 30, 1939 in the Fundação Arpad Szenes-Vieira da Silva, Lisbon.

⁶ Mario Cézaryny, *Vieira da Silva - Arpad Szenes o Castelo Surrealista*, Lisbon 1984, note 18.

⁷Ibid. Vieira was offered Portuguese citizenship as long as she declared her marital status as *single*.

⁸Diane Beran Daval, “Biographie”, in Weelen, Guy; Jaeger, Jean-François, Daval Béran, Diane (eds.), *Monographie*, Geneva 1994, 407.

⁹José Sommer Ribeiro, *Arpad Szenes - Vieira da Silva: período brasileiro*, exh. cat., Fundação Arpad Szenes-Vieira da Silva, Lisbon 2000, 6.

¹⁰Official note by the President of the Council, “Independência de Portugal”, *Revista dos Centenários*, No.1, January, 1939, 2.

¹¹In 1940 the Portuguese empire consisted of East Timor, Macau, Mozambique, Angola and Guinea Bissau.

painting depicts a vista centred on downtown Lisbon, with its long blocks of apartment buildings creating an architectural façade, whose only access point is through a set of ascending staircases. The simplicity of the visual language, the static spatial framework and the naivete with which Vieira renders her subject enabled her to succeed in disguising the complexity of the urban reading of the depicted subject. Although *Panorama de Lisbonne* was originally intended to depict the political stronghold responsible for Portuguese historical success, by means of stylistic execution and choice of vista, Vieira instead rendered the complexity of her situation as an émigré artist, forced to issue entreaties to the Portuguese State, in order to regain her own citizenship and acquire one for her husband. Vieira's solicitation failed and so did *Panorama de Lisbonne*.

Throughout the 1930s, despite Vieira's departure from Lisbon, she continued to establish links with the Portuguese art scene. In 1930 she participated in the *Salão dos Independentes*, where she exhibited three works. By 1935 Vieira had procured an exhibition space at the printing workshop of friend and colleague Antonio Pedro and held her first solo exhibition at Galleria UP. Works included were: Vieira's aforementioned simplistic linear construction of *Le Pont Transbordeur* (1931) [Pl.20], a highly abstract and geometrically incongruent image entitled *Le Cèdre* (1932) [Pl.104] and the view of an interior setting largely obstructed by a leaning ladder in *Interior* (1935) [Pl.105]. At the time, the critics commented that Vieira's one woman show was "a primeira exposição de pintura que se fez em Portugal desde o tempo de Amadeo Souza Cardosos" of the "modernismo" movement in the 1920s.¹² Vieira's and Arpad's cutting-edge artistic reputation within the local artistic milieu was further enhanced that year when they exhibited the prints of their colleagues, the renowned Surrealists Julian Trevelyan and William Hayter from the *Atelier 17* at the Galleria UP, as Surrealism's impact had not yet reached the artistic milieu of Portugal. One year later, Vieira, Arpad and Hayter participated in the *Exposição dos Artistas Modernos Independentes* [Exhibition of Modern Independent Artists] (1936), which was once more organised by Antonio Pedro. The constant reiteration of names involved in relation to the modern art effort,

¹² "the first exhibition of abstract painting in Portugal since Amadeo de Souza Cardoso" in Nogueira de Brito in *O Diabolo*, Lisbon 14/07/1935, as cited by José Augusto França, *A Arte em Portugal no Século XX (1911-1961)*, Lisbon 1964, 210. Translation my own.

particularly within the commercial domain, is symbolic of the small milieu and the limited 'support' system of galleries and critics in Portugal at the time.

Antonio Ferro, an avid supporter of modern art since the "modernismo" movement in Portugal and responsible for National Propaganda since 1933 was in charge of linking the "modernos" with the needs and functions of the State.¹³ Ferro's support for modern art and his position as a State functionary obliged him to work within certain parameters: maintaining the "equilibrio" [equilibrium] between "cosmopolitas" [cosmopolitanism] and "nacionalismo" [nationalism], and art that was "decorativo" [decorative] and "modesto" [modest].¹⁴ In this instance, a rather complex dynamic developed between artists' practices and their public roles, as they were not required to operate as fully-fledged state functionaries, yet they had to assume the role where they were effectively engaged in protecting and defending the State. In 1936 Vieira's participation was requested through the commission of two paintings which were to be included in the State exhibit *Ano X* in commemoration of the first ten years of the "revolução".¹⁵ These paintings were to convey the improvement of hospital services and the protection of minors.¹⁶ Vieira completed the first painting which she entitled *Hospitais*, as it depicts a nurse holding a patient's hand within a seemingly endless hospital ward with an apparently infinite number of beds [Pl.106]. Her second image entitled *Assistencia e Asilos* [Assistance and Asylum], shows a group of five smiling young girls forming a circle of friendship, while a mother-like figure in the background holding a child in her arms looks on [Pl.107]. In both instances, Vieira responded to the theme's social content in realist terms, corresponding to a certain extent to the "equilibrio" [required by the State, while also producing images that could be seen as "modesto", "decorativo" and "nacionalista", celebrating the achievements of the State. According to the historian Margarida Acciaiuoli, the realism that pervaded the *Ano X* exhibition was due to the fact that modern and traditional artists alike were painting the same variations on a theme under state pressure, without questioning the essence of reality through their representations. Acciaiuoli further argues that all the *Ano X* works were fundamentally

¹³Ferro was editor of the academic journal *Orpheu* and the art critic for the daily newspaper *Diario de Noticias*.

¹⁴Words used by Ferro in his article in *Diario de Noticias*, 16/10/38, cited in França, *Século XX*, 204.

¹⁵"A Exposição do Ano X da Revolução Nacional", *Diario da Manhã*, 28/1/1936.(Commemorative number)

¹⁶Ibid.

propagandist, forcing artists to abandon their personal styles as exhibited in their ateliers.¹⁷ Although Acciaiuoli exonerates Vieira by describing her works as enlightening and eloquent, both panels display a reduced play of the imagination, as Vieira's captures her subject in purely figurative and realist terms, without the inter-play of more fantastical elements and 'abstract' allusions that characterised her exhibited oeuvre at the Galleria UP one year earlier.¹⁸

The significance of the discovery of Vieira's participation in this earlier State exhibition relates to the fact that these canvases clearly set a stylistic precedent for *Panorama de Lisbonne*. For example, the extensive use of detailed forms in this latter painting, such as the depiction of balcony rails, the house number above each door frame and for the numerous window blinds, simply add to the material density of the objects depicted. Moreover, the heavily delineated horizon line renders the sky as a spatial frame, enhancing the strict viewpoint of the observer. The inflexible architectural layout, in terms of the rigidity of the objects depicted, the symmetry of the buildings, the lined rooftops and the heavily delineated staircase, convey a sense of timelessness to which even the organic elements in the forms of palm trees on the rooftops seem to be frozen in time. An explanation of this visual deviation within Vieira's body of work can be found in her efforts to re-integrate within the Portuguese artistic community by immediately responding to the stylistic parameters set by the Portuguese State, abandoning all of her previous efforts and the developments that she had achieved within her art's private domain.

Despite her evident stylistic assimilation, *Panorama de Lisbonne* was apparently deemed unsuitable for the commissioned occasion.¹⁹ The ideological preoccupation with tradition in the context of the 1940 colonial exhibition derived from what the psychologist Svetlana Boym describes as the "anxiety of a vanishing past".²⁰ Only four years earlier the Salazar government had organised the *Ano X* exhibition to commemorate ten years since the revolution. However, the growing threat of fascist forces in Germany, Italy and Spain forced the Salazar government to re-direct their nationalistic strategy away from governmental issues towards a more

¹⁷Margarida Acciaiuoli, *Exposições do Estado Novo 1934-1940*, Lisbon 1998, 27.

¹⁸Ibid., 25.

¹⁹Daval Béran, "Biographie", 405.

²⁰Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, New York 2001, xiii.

collective consciousness which would bring the government into collaboration with its people through a shared experience: that of Portugal's past. Thus, in the 1940 exhibition, Salazar's regime opted to utilise the nation's History as a propagandist tool to create a 'collective' historical sense of achievement and titled the exhibition "Mundo Português" [Portuguese World] accordingly. The end result was the historization of the Salazarist regime within Portugal's political timeline, thus validating and maintaining its position as the legitimate successor to Portugal's political and cultural heritage. The historian Benedict Anderson refers to the need for historical narrative to be of an equal nature for both the individual and the collective nation. As he remarks: "as with modern persons, so it is with nations. Awareness of being imbedded in secular, serial time, with all its implications of continuity ... engenders the need for a narrative of identity".²¹ In Salazar's case this need for an identity depended on the past being used as a device for legitimising his own government.

This prompts an examination of the imagery that Vieira chose to continue the immortal narrative of the city of Lisbon. The view of Lisbon that she chose to redeem history and the memory of the city is a common set of apartment blocks, undistinctive in their appearance and like any other set of buildings within Lisbon's designated old town. In many ways, this vista represents the painting's failure to depict a collective vision, commemorating a city known for its fortresses, palaces and courts. In other words, Vieira failed to establish the impartial representation required from state commission works where, according to Acciaiuoli, the putative objective outlook develops from the ideological lapse produced between the artist and their delegated subject, and whose sole intention should be to represent the traditional, time-honoured aspects of the capital city. Nevertheless, Vieira's choice of view corroborates the contents of a personalised form of memory; for Vieira's non-specific downtown neighbourhood façades rather than relate to the ceremonial operation of national memory through the depiction of well known public monuments, corresponds to an inventory of individual experiences as lived by the artist in the city: "La ville est d'ailleurs toute en collines et valons, ce

²¹Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London 1991, 205.

qui provoque toujours des découvertes et des surprises pour le regard”.²² Raised topographical settings played a key mnemonic role in Vieira’s vision of Lisbon, as hinted at in *Panorama de Lisbonne* by way of the centrally placed staircase leading to back-alleyways, between the tightly built blocks. Vieira described her experience of Lisbon’s geographical relief as follows: “Arpad et moi, nous aimions faire comme les autres habitants de Lisbon: descendre à pied, puis remonter en tramway”.²³ Although Vieira makes a personal statement regarding a personal favourite pass-time in Lisbon, she clearly states that this is not only particular to her, but to many of the citizens of Lisbon – “les autres habitants”. In this manner, we are able to observe Vieira as a member of a community, a social group held together by collective memory, and as citizens of the old quarters of Lisbon, “each of which evoked and produced a unique set of memories”: in this particular instance, down the stairs and up again with the tramway.²⁴ Vieira’s memory of Lisbon ceases to be a solely individual phenomenon and becomes part of a collective memory. However, this particular instance of collective memory, consisting of daily experiences of the city fails to conform to the requisites of the state commission where nationalism and pride rest upon ‘concrete’ objects, rather than on daily circumstance and entertainment.

Although Vieira does use architectural sites, these failed to impress her commissioners. The streets and architecture of Lisbon become constant features of her visualisation of the city, a sign of permanence against the continual transitoriness that defines human existence. For Vieira, the cobblestone roads and white buildings carried the mark of history. Vieira once remarked:

C’était une époque triste, au Portugal; Salazar n’avait pas encore pris pouvoir mais la liberté qui régnait était absolument anarchique. Continuellement, des révolutions éclataient, les unes de gauche, les autres provoquées par la droite. L’atmosphère était irrespirable. La ville était devenue très sale alors que sa luminosité, sa popreté, ses trottoirs de pierre blanche, calcaire, presque du marbre, font partie de sa beauté.²⁵

²²Pierre Leglise Costa, “Conversations avec Vieira” in Chandeigne, Michel (ed), *Lisbonne: La Nostalgie du Futur*, Paris 1988, 80.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Frances Pine, Deema Kaneff and Haldis Haukanes, “Memory, Politics and Religion: A Perspective on Europe”, in Frances Pine, Deema Kaneff and Haukanes, Haldis (eds.), *Memory, Politics and Religion: The Past Meets the Present in Europe*, London 2004, 10.

²⁵Anne Philip, *L’éclat de la lumière: entretiens avec Marie-Hélène Vieira da Silva*, Paris 1978, 67.

Vieira's memory of Lisbon was one torn between revolutions and white tiled façades. Therefore, by eliminating the human figure from her view of Lisbon in *Panorama de Lisbonne*, she reinforced those very elements which, for her, marked historical endurance. On a similar note, Hubert Damisch in his examination of *La Citta Ideale*, (possibly dated around the beginning of the sixteenth century) [Pl.108] made the claim that in works where everything speaks of man yet is devoid of the feature itself, the operation of art has been interrupted and "the painting thrown backward into an indeterminate time".²⁶ This interruption in Vieira's work and the resulting chronological indeterminacy represents the beginning of an invention of an urban tradition, where permanence is associated with architectural harmony in order to conform to a version of the past. On this aspect of historical preservation, the historian Nevanlinna Kervanto remarks:

Historically, the selection and sometimes invention of tradition, related to a romanticist nostalgia for a past idealised as harmonious, involved the preservation of old streets and construction of street façades to harmonise their contours, roof materials and colours.²⁷

Vieira's *Panorama de Lisbonne* is aligned within this framework of visual preservation through the harmonisation of contour lines and the patterning of forms, used to creating a uniform architectural façade. Furthermore, the elevated topography in this case is suggestive of the historical significance of the landscape, for the slopes of Lisbon host the old neighbourhoods of the city, as shown by this Spanish seventeenth century print of a bird's eye view of Lisbon, which was pinned to Vieira's paravan wall in her Saint Jacques Studio [Pl.109].²⁸

Vieira's intentions by depicting this vista of Lisbon can be interpreted as representative of her need as an expatriate to depict those qualities that are particular to her experience of the city. However, her experience as a citizen and its corresponding vista fails to relate with Lisbon's historical position as a colonial power in 1949. Therefore, this choice of view of the city

²⁶Hubert Damisch, *On the Origins of Perspective*, London 1995, 213. This work has been attributed on various occasions to Piero della Francesca and Francesco di Giorgio Martini.

²⁷Nevanlinna Kervanto, A., "Cities as texts: Urban Practices Represented or Forgotten in Art History", in Reinink, Wessel and Stumpel, Jeroen (eds.), *Memory and Oblivion*, Amsterdam 1996, 376.

²⁸Jean Raoul Duval, "Œuvre recentes de Vieira da Silva", *L'Œil*, No.63, March, 1960.

was probably a determining issue behind the elimination of *Panorama de Lisbonne* from the exhibition. A conflict of interest seems to have arisen between the aspirations of the Portuguese official attempt to create a historical memory of Lisbon and that of an individual's experience of the same city. The state's intentions by commissioning a painting inspired by Lisbon, can be seen as parallel to the objective of staging the exhibition itself: to commemorate Portugal's past and thus through its recollection generate a vision by which Lisbon would be appropriately remembered. However, Vieira's vision of the city fell short of this expectation of historical veneration, for her painting's commonplace setting consisting of a downtown façade inspires thoughts neither of wealth nor prosperity, but rather refers to her experience and personal memories, which for her symbolised stability and constancy.

6.2 *Lisbonne Bleue, 1942*

If we compare *Panorama de Lisbonne* to *Lisbonne Bleue* [Pl.110], a memory-based landscape completed in 1942, we can see that in the later canvas Vieira depicts a birds-eye view of Lisbon, creating a panoramic view of the city. A strong contrast is created between the open space of the city squares and the compressed arrangement of the residential areas, situated on the upper and lower section of the canvas. What appears to be an encroaching blue stain into the streets of Lisbon on the right hand side of the canvas may represent Lisbon's river, the Tejo. The objects depicted in this composition are not delineated by the darkened contour line apparent in *Panorama*, thereby creating a less rigid and formalised impression of this view of Lisbon. Furthermore, Vieira sets herself to the task of creating a detailed account of the tactile nature of the city's architectural surfaces, of tiled walls and cobblestone streets, achieving the regularity of patterns with the aid of a typing machine using different letter characters. The rendition of the strong textural sense of the surfaces combined with the physical distance from which Vieira renders these objects, means that the materiality of her forms dissolve under the overpowering effect of the surface work. Furthermore, the detailed depiction of the sky, densely clouded, renders the physical presence of both architecture and sky almost undistinguishable.

The qualitative link that persists between the memory of the object, the city of Lisbon, and loss through exile in this imagery can be translated into a visual manifestation of nostalgia. The literal definition of this term derives from the Greek word 'nostos' which means 'return home', and 'algia', which means longing. In her book *The Future of Nostalgia* Svetlana Bouym re-defines the literal definition of nostalgia as "a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it has also a romance with one's own fantasy".²⁹ A similar duality corresponds with Vieira's association with Lisbon in that her state of involuntary exile from Europe and the passports issued by the Society of Nations legitimately render her stateless, thus conforming to Bouym's notion of "loss and displacement". However, *Lisbonne Bleue* also renders visible her romantic sensibilities regarding the memory of Lisbon which never ceased to dwell in the past: "je me rappelle une Lisbonne avec des fermes en son beau milieu, des avenues parfois inachevées, des paysannes avec leurs baluchons de ligne lavé sur leur têtes, des ânes un peu partout".³⁰ Vieira's reference to "une Lisbonne" immediately identifies the singularity and uniqueness of her memory of her native city, one which stands in direct contrast to the changes that the city underwent during Salazar's rule: "très propre, très nette. Salazar faisait regner un ordre qui se transmettait aussie à l'aspect physique de la ville".³¹ The juxtaposition of these two distinct Lisbon experiences are clearly rendered in the painting entitled *Rua da Esperança* [Street of Hope] (1941) [Pl.111]. This image suggests the temporal struggle between the artist's conception of Lisbon, intermittently buried in her memories of the past, with donkeys and washing ladies in the streets on the right hand side of the surface plane, whilst the left hand side is dominated by dynamic lines of force rendering the new and dynamic Lisbon of the Salazarist state. The temporal contrast offered by *Rua da Esperança* clearly suggests the presence of a deliberate temporal inertia in *Lisbonne Bleue*, including the spatialising of time, giving the city a static, almost dormant quality further induced by Vieira's typeset characters imprinted on the image, as if stranding her image of Lisbon irrevocably in the past. Bouym

²⁹Bouym, *Nostalgia*, xiii.

³⁰Leglise Costa, "Conversations", 80.

³¹Ibid.

observes this phenomenon as an aspect of life for those in exile: “for those living abroad clocks stop at the hour of exile”.³²

The scope of the play of the imagination in terms of spatial strategies and frameworks become clearer when comparing *Lisbonne Bleue* to other local landscapes completed by Vieira in Rio de Janeiro, such as *Corcovado* (1940) [Pl.112] and *Corcovado* (1943) [Pl.113]. In both these paintings Vieira depicted the view as seen from her window in her studio in Santa Teresa [Pl.114]. In these works, as in *Panorama de Lisbonne*, the viewer need only to place themselves in the position from which the artist completed the work for the objective field to relate to that single vantage point. Vieira’s alternative spatial strategy in *Lisbonne Bleue* where memory works by moving, traversing and taking detours through a common topos, responds to the non-linear progression of memory according to Michel de Certeau: “memory is a sort of anti-museum”.³³ Vieira’s fragmented visual reconstruction of the city as offered by *Lisbonne Bleue* can be set alongside A.C. Inchbold’s description of Lisbon in his illustrated travel book *Lisbon and Cintra: with some account of other cities and historical sites in Portugal*.³⁴ Published the year of Vieira’s birth, the visions of Lisbon in Inchbold’s illustrated book coincide with the artist’s childhood memories of the city. Inchbold guides his reader through the squares, streets and monuments of downtown Lisbon, offering a detailed mapping of the streets and the objects encountered including their respective histories. Within an analogous visual framework, Vieira’s fragmentary urban world assumes the role of a mnemonic map, in which each cluster of objects acquires an identity and a narrative of its own.

Upon close examination, the general layout of squares in both of Inchbold’s illustrations, *Praça de Dom Pedro* [Pl.115] and *Praça de Comércio* [Pl.116], are consistent with Vieira’s own depiction of a square in *Lisbonne Bleue*. The most easily distinguishable attribute of all three works are their open areas of cobblestone pavement and the sense of vacant space, in contrast to the highly populated areas surrounding them. Moreover, the three works depict a general layout common to all Lisbon squares: a large monument standing before a government

³²Bouym, *Nostalgia*, 327.

³³Michel de Certeau and Luce Giard (eds.), "Ghosts in the City" in *The Practice of Everyday Life Vol. 2: Living and Cooking*, Minneapolis 1998, 106.

³⁴A.C. Inchbold, *Lisbon and Cintra: with some account of other cities and historical sites in Portugal*, London 1908.

building. Both *Praça de Dom Pedro* and *Lisbonne Bleue* depict these buildings to be clearly in neo-classical style. The staircases situated centre left on the canvas surface draw the viewer's gaze downwards, towards a vast block of apartment buildings. Inchbold makes the following claim of these massed houses, "whence the eye can feast on a variety of pictures which the colours of the massed houses blend into ... through graduating tones of rose to pale salmon, of buff to cream, or grey to lavender and dazzling white".³⁵ The colour scheme used by Vieira corresponds with Inchbold's reference to graduating tones of pale colours placed one beside another. A further illustration of Inchbold's described vistas may also be found in *Lisbonne Bleue*, "many interesting old mansions are to be seen in that northern quarter of the eastern heights, as well as substantially built modern ones with their respective gardens".³⁶ Arguably, the slightly larger houses in the upper section of *Lisbonne Bleue* parallel Inchbold's description of the old Lisbon mansions, an argument that gains weight by the fact that it is the only section of the canvas surface on which Vieira includes hints of the colour green.

De Certeau refers to a city's architecture as maintaining a position akin to "characters on the urban stage".³⁷ The fact that Vieira chose to place the water fountain documented in Inchbold's *Praça de Dom Pedro* in the lower right section of the canvas in *Lisbonne Bleue*, is indicative of the autonomous representational value of the object, in contrast to its actual location. Furthermore, fountains suggest a historical link relating to the presence of the Moors in this area. Moreover, the dark watermark dominating the upper right section of the canvas depicts the river Tejo, which was essential to the history and success of Portugal's empire. Like the re-positioning of the water fountain, Vieira manipulated the metaphorical value of the depicted object. Arguably, the invasive manner of the portrayal of the Tejo, where the boundary between land and water is almost non-existent, corresponds to Vieira's personal memories of her childhood life in Chiado, an old Lisbon neighbourhood situated on the banks of the river: "Lá a gente tem a impressão de que o Tejo entra pelas janelas".³⁸ In this manner,

³⁵ Ibid., 45.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Certeau, "Ghosts in the City", 145.

³⁸ "People there always had the impression that the Tejo would come in through the windows" in Anon., "Vieira da Silva", *Jornal Expresso*, Lisbon 17/03/1979. My own translation.

Lisbonne Bleue corresponds to a mnemonic map constructed according to anecdotal detail rather than actual topographical locations.

This unique vision of Lisbon constructed under the functions of memory work created a qualitatively different image to Vieira's initial Lisbon painting completed three years earlier under state patronage. A possible conceptual framework that is aligned with this visual phenomenon may be found in Walter Benjamin's principle of the 'aura' manifested in the work of art as, "the unique phenomenon of a distance".³⁹ This may be interpreted as a change resulting from the different contexts surrounding each image. Due to its politicised inception *Panorama de Lisbonne* was supposed to bring the glory and history of Lisbon to a mass public audience. *Lisbonne Bleue*, on the other hand, is representative of a vision as conceived by the artist herself for her own amusement, drawing upon her own childhood memories of the city from a long lost past, while she endured years of exile in Brazil. This intrinsic difference between the conception of both images generates a distance between their respective 'auras' for although they are both works of art there are attributes in *Panorama de Lisbonne*, which may be aligned with Benjamin's notion of 'permanent recordings', as are inherent in mechanically reproduced images intended for the masses. In other words, this image as a work commissioned by the state, functions within a similar public domain to Benjamin's designation of an illustrated magazine photograph, in that both should be signposted and clear in its message. In *Lisbonne Bleue* the image is not designed for anyone else but the artist, and is built upon personal recollections and experiences, making the image unique and specifically related to Vieira's authentic experience of Lisbon. It is with regard to this dichotomy of an individual versus a public destination of vision that *Panorama* is prevented from generating a unique perception of the city, as a state commission it is intended for mass consumption although the vista remained particular to the artist's experience as a resident of the 'old city'.⁴⁰

In addition, Vieira's depiction of *Lisbonne Bleue* can be attributed to the historical circumstances surrounding its completion. In 1942 the war did not show any signs of subsiding,

³⁹Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in Arendt, Hannah (ed.) H. Zohn (transl.), New York 1969, 222. For a different examination of how Vieira's art may be aligned with Walter Benjamin's work please refer to my article published in *Inferno*, Vol.X, 2005.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 223.

whilst Paris remained under German occupation, making the prospect of Vieira's return to Europe an overall difficult affair. In which instance, the impossible enterprise of re-patriating to Europe caused a more pronounced distancing between Vieira and her source, rendering *Lisbonne Bleue* her most nostalgic painting completed in Brazil.

6.3 *La Ville Antique*, 1946

In 1946 Vieira re-visited the Lisbon vista and completed *La Ville Antique* [Pl.117] where, stylistic affinities can be drawn with *Lisbonne Bleue* despite *La Ville Antique's* compressed and tightly knit architectural forms. Once more, Vieira illustrated the busy surfaces of the architectural forms with the aid of a typewriter. Each cluster of forms is therefore recognisable via individual patterns and colour, rather than through the use of a contour line. Furthermore, despite the densely populated apartment building sites, Vieira includes in the centre of her image an open cobble-stoned area, a *praça* [park] in the form of an extended balcony with staircases leading to lower grounds, suggestive of an elevated topography.

By titling the painting *La Ville Antique*, Vieira directly indicates the remote presence of the painting's subject matter, both in a geographical and chronological sense. This sentiment is manifested in the ephemeral, intangible quality of the vista, which is enhanced by the presence of a dense nebulous cloud which enfolds the composition from all four corners. Although this style of brushwork is in *Lisbonne Bleue* used to render the sky, in this later painting, it ceases to be used for a pre-determined role, instead serving to enhance the remoteness of the subject as a vision of a memory long past. *La Ville Antique* is half the size of *Lisbonne Bleue* yet the panoramic view dissolves as Vieira draws the plazas and the buildings from a closer proximity once more using the aid of a typewriter, although the detail of the image becomes almost unintelligible and the specificity of the locality is lost. Vieira referred to this screening effect as a mental construct: "Quand vous voyez de loin, vous voyez des choses pas très expliquées. C'est cela que je peins de près".⁴¹ In this particular context, "de loin" [afar] is determined by the chronological distance as well as a geographical distance between the subject of Lisbon and the author, where the material presence of the subject in *Panorama de Lisbonne* is overtaken by

⁴¹ Pierre Schneider, *Les Dialogues du Louvre*, Paris 1991, 245.

mnemonic references in *Lisbonne Bleue* and eventually overpowered by an almost oneiric quality in *La Ville Antique*.

In many ways, this succession of images pertaining to a common cityscape succeeds in creating a mnemonic screening paradigm, which allows each of these images to represent a distinct “psychical locality” with relation to Freud’s designation of the “mental apparatus”.⁴² That is not to say that Vieira’s work is intended in any way to directly illustrate Freud’s writings on the regressive character of memory work through the transformation of thoughts into visual images. Rather, in this case, the notion of the layered depth conception becomes a handy visual analogy for the distancing effect manifest in Vieira’s Lisbon paintings created between 1939 and 1946. Freud explains the construction of dreams as a regressive movement where “the excitation moves in a backward direction. Instead of being transmitted in towards the motor end of the apparatus it moves towards the sensory end and finally reaches the perceptual system”.⁴³ It is this notion of an inverse mechanism at work, a receding excitation and increased perceptual intensity, that augments the remoteness of the subject – Lisbon – over a seven year period, between Vieira’s initial painting *Panorama de Lisbonne* and her last work completed in Brazil, *La Ville Antique*. This regressive movement into the inner-most sections of the mind, or at “varying distances from consciousness”⁴⁴ coincides with Vieira’s revisiting of her Lisbon landscapes. However, the further that these scenes are buried in her memory, the closer Vieira tries to render them on the canvas, thus drawing her subject into an almost unrecognisable proximity whose detail has been lost with time, “C’est cela que je peins de près”.

6.4 Bahia Imaginée, 1946

By analogising Vieira’s Lisbon cityscapes to a successive series of regressive screen narratives arriving at a purely sensorial and oneiric illusion with *La Ville Antique*, Vieira employs the full

⁴²Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, James Strachey (transl.), Harmondsworth 1976, 684. This examination uses Haim Finkelstein’s analysis of Max Ernst’s collage works in his book *The Screen in Surrealist Art and Thought* (2007). “Chapter 4: Max Ernst - conceptualisation of mental Space”, 129-158.

⁴³Freud, *Dreams*, 770.

⁴⁴Finkelstein, “The Screen”, 140.

force of the imagination when she completed *Bahia Imaginée* in 1946 [118]. In this painting, Vieira depicts a colourful bird's-eye view of the city of Bahia do Salvador. The entire composition is unified by an ascending road that connects the foreground area to the background. Apartment blocks assembled throughout the composition are placed awkwardly one on top of the other, responding to the elevated topography. Against the sky, in the background, Vieira depicts depth by force of reduction by simply rendering the reflection of light on the objects depicted, creating a mirage 'extension' of the city. The colours that Vieira uses are bright, although the houses that are similar to those in her *Bleue Lisbonne* painting are mainly rendered in white and blue, creating a contrast with the sienna coloured surroundings.

The title indicates the purely imaginative nature of this vision, as Vieira never visited the city of Bahia. Located in the north-eastern province of Bahia, the city is an emblem of the spoils enjoyed by the Portuguese due to their presence in Brazil. Founded in 1549, Bahia flourished with the development of sugar plantations and soon became the centre of colonial Brazil. Despite its early early accumulation of riches, Bahia was slow to industrialise and remained dependent on the production of primary goods, lagging behind the cities of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, after the country declared its independence from Portugal in 1822. Bahia as an anachronistic city site, untouched by modernity, engendered in Vieira the need to create a parallel imagery to her own Lisbon memories; the presence of tiled white and blue façades tightly knitted together, parks in the form of large unbuilt areas whilst the contours of the city resemble topographical mountainous area. In many ways, Vieira's vision coincides with a traveler's account of Bahia, describing city in the 1930s as: "marked by a curvilinear trajectory moulded according to the oscillations of the terrain and moreover, by the particular character of Portuguese American colonial experience ..." ⁴⁵ Bahia's Portuguese inheritance may be further discerned by Vieira's inclusion of those very figures, the donkey pulling carts and washing ladies, which constituted part of her personal memory of "une Lisbonne". However, in this painting Vieira does not engage in attempting to imprint the sensation of a textured surface

⁴⁵Sergio Buarque de Holand, *Raizes Do Brazil* (Rio de Janeiro 1936) as cited in Paulo César Garces, "A Cidade Colonial na America Portuguesa: morfologia urbana, atores sociais, presença do Estado (Salvador século XVI a XVII) in de Carvalho, Margarida Maria; Lopes, Maria Aparecida and Silveira Lemos França, Susani (eds.), *Cidades no Tempo*, São Paulo 2005, 229.

through the use of typewriter's blocks, but rather intimates their presence by way of a light brush stroke. This marked difference in technique conveys the notion of the intangibility and the remoteness of the subject matter in relation to her Lisbon canvases; a vision that is aided by tactile memory, as opposed to Bahia's sole play of the imagination.

However, this characterisation of both Lisbon and Bahia as urban visions suspended in the past reflects the artist's own reservations towards the agent responsible in both instances: Portugal's political heritage. A certain criticism may be inferred by the remoteness of these visions as they both remain suspended in the past. This qualitative link between the past and the remoteness of its language recalls Vieira's remark about the escapism implicit in the works of the Old Masters: "Ces choses ne sont plus pour nous. Elles nous donnent le plaisir de l'évasion".⁴⁶ In 1946, when Vieira completed *Bahia Imaginée*, she also completed a smaller study which has remained uncommented on by the literature to date and was left untitled by the artist [Pl.119]. This painting, in terms of composition, colour and architectural style, seems to have been inspired by the Old Masters' Italian urban models, particularly Ambrogio Lorenzetti's fresco, *Effects of Good Government* (1338-9) [Pl.79], a reproduction of which Vieira hung in her studio wall in Paris in 1938. The change in the overall emphasis of the architecture, from Vieira's Lisbon detailed patterned surfaces on walls and floors to the general rhythmic apparition of openings in windows and doors, indicates a different source of inspiration. Furthermore, the extensive use of archways and colonnades, as well as the decorative use of crenulations throughout the composition in this untitled work are suggestive of a different architectural model to that for the aforementioned Spanish print of Lisbon, with its rather plain architecture and lack of decorative motifs [Pl.109]. There is an inherent difference in the colour scheme of this untitled work, as Vieira opts to move away from the light blues and pastel colourings that dominate her Lisbon paintings for deeper, denser hues of red, brown and blue. This choice of colour once more brings Vieira's work closer to the colours that dominate Lorenzetti's work; the colours of the city of Siena. Moreover, the spatial continuity depicted within this untitled work recalls Lorenzetti's planar continuity between the foreground figures and background landscape that he indicated by way of two figures on horseback, located in the

⁴⁶Schneider, *Dialogues*, 245.

centre of the panel. Vieira articulated a similar notion of spatial narrative, as a figure can be discerned walking up the main road that unites her foreground with her background space. A close-up of this particular scene recalls Vieira's undated work entitled *Enterrement à Sienne* [Pl.120], the only time that Vieira ever made direct reference to her Italian experience, as we observe the tunneling effect of the road, with the encroaching forms of its architecture, upon the figures which help to articulate a forced progression of space from the bottom of the canvas toward the top.

The association between Portugal and Vieira's concept of escapism, is of a rather indirect nature. This smaller painting serves as intermediary link, providing Vieira with the compositional schema with which she was to go on to use in order to complete *Bahia Imaginée*. On both occasions, the foreground and the background are connected by way of a road, but there seems to be a sort of hesitation between the boundaries of elevation and perspective, as in both paintings the objects in the background seem to lose their material presence. Similar architectural structures can also be discerned in both paintings as Vieira transfers architectural devices from the Italian model, and integrates them into her vision of *Bahia Imaginée*.

In *La Ville Antique* Vieira sought to reconstruct her memory of Lisbon in the past and titled it accordingly. In her painting *Bahia Imaginée*, Vieira's reference to a time-bound past is made manifest by the visual language, which is possibly borrowed from the work of the Old Masters; a language so foreign to her own existence that Vieira described it as 'escapist' within a contemporaneous art historical context. This time bound expression when incorporated into her representation of Portuguese presence in Brazil, becomes a form of critique for Portugal's continual yearning for times long lost. Furthermore, Brazil's presence in the 1940 exhibition, *Mundo Português*, was representative of Portugal's escapist tendencies with relations to examinations of the past, as it was the only colony to be invited to exhibit, yet it had ceased to belong to Portugal's colonial rule after its independence in 1822. In this case, Vieira's *Bahia Imaginée* exemplifies Portuguese nostalgic tendencies by arresting time, as she draws the city within an indeterminate time frame and renders it as a retrospective mirage. This artificial, yet almost idyllic urban re-construction represents Vieira's discomfort over Portugal's continual evasive practices of dwelling over the spoils of the past. It is thereby in this last urban

representation, of a city Vieira had never been to, that she was able to successfully transfer the emotional charge of nostalgia to an entity other than her own, representative of a final stage in her struggle with exile. In this manner, *Bahia Imaginée* becomes a metaphor for Portuguese nostalgia.

One could argue that *Bahia Imaginée's* inherent element of closure is indicated by the presence of visual characteristics and features that occur in her earlier Lisbon landscapes, summarised within a single visual image. For example, Vieira adopted urban spaces as a reflection of political and cultural practices from *Panorama de Lisbonne*, while she developed the ability to represent cityscapes as subject to memory and screens of nostalgia in *Lisbonne Bleue*. Lastly, in *La Ville Antique*, Vieira was able to submit the image to the qualitative effect of time, rendering the image almost inapproachable. The manifestation of this distance in *Bahia Imaginée* is represented by the very nature of its 'plasticity', for the material existence of the objects depicted is as compelling as the title of the painting itself.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined and explored the initial context within which Vieira completed her first Lisbon painting *Panorama de Lisbonne*. This dictated the underlining contextual narrative from which Vieira's subsequent urban landscapes, particularly her Lisbon vistas, would develop. *Panorama de Lisbonne's* initial failure to encompass the historicisation of the city of Lisbon induced Vieira to continue exploring the elements of memory and loss, leading to the completion of *Lisbonne Bleue* in 1942 and *La Ville Antique* and *Bahia Imaginée* four years later. The time-frame between these two sets of paintings are significant; in the choice of title and visual referents – remote in both form and expression – Vieira disengages herself from the need to belong to Portugal. The liberation of Paris in August 1944 and the Brazilian State's offer of citizenship to both her and Arpad, (an offer they did not accept) gave Vieira the hope of a prompt return to her city of choice – Paris. In this case, Lisbon ceased to represent an unattainable vision, as depicted in *Lisbonne Bleue*, but remained in her memory as the present face of the past as illustrated by *La Ville Antique*.

Conclusion

Soon after her return to Paris in 1949, Vieira completed what today is considered one of her most renowned and symbolic post-war paintings, *La Bibliothèque* [Pl.121]. In this work Vieira presents the viewer with a labyrinthine network of endless interlaced bookshelves, corridors and staircases that force the viewer's gaze to spread across the entire surface of the canvas. In Vieira's post-war work, the theme of the library is used to inspire a symbolic narrative that parallels and extends the stories embraced by her earlier cityscapes, where buildings are transformed into the characters on the journey of time. As I described in Chapter VI, through urban spatial reconstructions Vieira was able to materialise her memories and experiences of loss in pictorial form. A similar account of her pictorialisation of memory work winds its way through the boundless corridors and staircases of *La Bibliothèque*. Each book is unique in form, shelved in endless rows with journals, magazines and pamphlets, each making a contribution to the recording of History. The notion of a book as a self-contained object, lined up side by side with numerous others on a library shelf, recalls Vieira's own analogy regarding the system of memory storage as: "une commode avec une multitude de tiroirs. Il suffit d'en ouvrir un ..."¹

The image of Vieira's layering effect of memory in the human psyche brings to mind a compact themes that Vieira visited in the post-war period such as cities, undergrounds and airports, continued to represent the organised yet chaotic structures mankind has built. It is through these concrete and recognisable forms that Vieira finds an expression through which to externalise and project the models sustaining mankind's internal being. However the more concrete her subjects became in the post-war period, the more elusive was her pictorial language. This abstraction is what displayed their imaginary signification. Adversely, in her pre-war paintings her use of figuration expounded on less concrete subjects, compensating the intangible nature of her subject with the use of more recognisable and identifiable forms of expression. This qualitative effect is that which lend her paintings the aura of the fantastic, the "paraxial area" (Chapter III). It is in effect through this liminal threshold between the expression of the real and the subject of the imaginary that Vieira's pictorial mediation project between

¹ See Chapter I, Introduction.

the internal and external model unfolds throughout the 1930s. The putative simplicity of her pictorial language and composition has dissuaded many historians from further attending to these works and identifying, as this thesis has done, the complex network of underlining forces which led Vieira to begin her visual trajectory into *l'art moderne*.

By bringing the theme and the subject of the painting to the forefront of her analytical œuvre, this thesis has determined the significance of the multiple and complex alliances established between Vieira's work and the artistic and cultural scene of the time. Although on a narrative level the early paintings correspond to a highly personal imagery filled with memories, such as in *Les Balançoires* (1931) and *Autoportrait* (1932), on a pictorial as well as a thematic level they have been found to be consistent with the contextual framework accompanying the artistic scene of *l'art vivant*, as demonstrated by the various contemporaneous sources behind the completion of the *A Nous la Liberté* series. In this fashion, a subject-based framework not only provides a common denominator to Vieira's highly diverse pictorial expression, but also helps determine the relevance of the artistic panorama of *l'art vivant* in 1930s Paris, where the origins of her expression: "mêler un regard extérieur à un regard intérieur" in fact lie.² In view of this effect, the subject-based framework supporting the visual analysis of Vieira's work lends much significance to internal and biographical variables, as well as external factors, creating a dynamic interface between the public domain – determined by historical events and the artistic panorama – and the private space of Vieira's artistic visions.

These two distinct frameworks, the private vis-à-vis the public, soon prove to be mutually inclusive and in constant dialogue with one another, as the internal narrative responded to a psychical "model" and the artist's perceptions were shaped by external events and phenomena. In Chapter I of this thesis, I examined Vieira's child-like and naïve paintings and highlighted the use of memory work. The presence of a young child in these paintings, a *petite fille* in a blue or red dress, rendered visible Vieira's recollections of her childhood experience as she described them to Georges Charbonnier in 1957. However, the importance of these paintings lies not only in the deciphering of their personal symbolic meaning, but in that through this identification we recognise that they are representative of an attitude, a frame of mind rather than the memory

² See Introduction.

of the event per se. In this case, the fantastical element of their expression becomes a visual manifestation of their psychical conception; intangible and imaginary. In Chapter II Vieira's imagery in *A Nous la Liberté* was aligned with Hayter's conception of the Apocalypse in 1931. Biographical notes show that Vieira was introduced to these texts as a child in order to provide an adequate script concerning mankind's internal chaos; in other words, the inevitability of violence and war. In the *A Nous la Liberté* series, one can observe Vieira's persistence in linking narrative to a personal experience, yet the private nature of these images is diffused by her choice of theme and subject, identified by the title and iconography, lends the vision more public access for interpretation. Furthermore, in examining the nature of the title through its original source, René Clair's film, a contemporaneous contextual reading was assigned to Vieira's choice of imagery in the Apocalypse. In this manner, since Vieira's earliest paintings this thesis developed on the basis of the following contrary concerns: objective vis-à-vis subjective, representation vis-à-vis perception, past versus present, expression vis-à-vis content, private vis-à-vis public domain.

The significance in identifying the underlining nature of these paintings lies in that they fundamentally become pictorial blueprints to the examination of Vieira's subsequent work. Although expression and styles continuously evolved from then onwards, as she abandoned the child-like expression for linear perspective and the mirror-reflections for hybrid identities, her intentions remained unchanged: the first person singular narrative continued to express, what for her, remained constant. However as observed in the visual trajectory between the autobiographical works discussed in Chapters I and II, despite similar use of colour and compositional layout, her *A Nous la Liberté* series conveys a deliberate effort on behalf of the artist to disband the hermetism of her highly psycho-biographical paintings, such as *Balançoires* and *Autoportrait*.

Vieira's state of anxiety – *agonia* – regarding human nature is made evident through the narrative behind her *Kô et Kô* illustrations as discussed in Chapter III. In view of its literary nature, this section examined the implications of the use of the mode of the fantastic as an expression of protest, and through the use of the marvellous and the imaginary, deemed escapist in quality. These elements inherent in her expression were reiterated within the

storytelling as *Kô et Kô* searched for a superior alternative, eventually escaping their earthly existence for the sun and the stars. The sentiment of unfulfillment implied in the theme of ascension within Vieira's pictorial oeuvre, specifically in *Autoportrait*, is reiterated in clear narrative form in *Kô et Kô*. This chapter, in validating the negative consciousness underpinning the artist's work through two different sources, pictorial and literary, subsequently explored Vieira's role as an artist within society. Vieira believed the artist held the power of expression, of drawing that which for the rest of society remained inexpressible. In many ways, this social awareness and concern inherent in Vieira's imagery may have been further instigated given her participation in social groups such as *Amis du Monde*, where artists believed that through their work they could bring about any form of social transformation. It is in this instance that Vieira's inherent negativity within her pictorial and literary narrative recalls Surrealism's use of the marvellous as a catalyst of critique within the contemporaneous artistic milieu of Paris.

Chapter IV extended the analysis of Vieira's work as reflective of its own cultural field in view of her marginalised position as woman and an artist through an examination of her self-portrait paintings and subsequent self-representations. The argument is based upon a detailed visual analysis of Vieira's self-portraits completed during the 1930-1932 period. Despite their parallel production in terms of her use of a mirror based reflection, the four first images *Autoportrait* I-IV narrated a distinct story, as she addressed the issues central to her position as author of the painting. With *Autoportrait* in 1932, Vieira crossed the boundaries of traditional portrait painting as her vision runs beyond any external manifestation of the self as defined by mirror-reflections. The presence of *Autoportrait* in this visual trajectory provides further evidence of Vieira's struggle to break away from mimesis and tradition in her work. Furthermore, by grouping these designated self-portraits images together and examining each image individually as well as in sequence, this chapter visually identified Vieira's pictorial struggle to simultaneously assert her position as author and subject of the painting. However, a conflict arises between her "spectral image" and her full knowledge of the subject. Jacques Lacan's "mirror stage" theory provides psychoanalytic support to this dilemma relating to the estrangement that occurs between one's external identification of the self through mirror reflections and one's internal definition of self, as wrought by one's internal "phantoms"

defined by the subject's life experiences and memories. On Vieira's canvas this distancing is manifested through the objectification of her figure by way of a mirror reflection through self-portraits I through IV. But, in *Autoportrait* III and *Autportrait* IV Vieira hinted, through her rendition of the presence of this alternate territory through the image of her blank gaze or the symbolism of a closed door, yet its contents remain unknown to the viewer. I observed that these self-reflection images represent the liminal stage between an internal and external expression of the subject. By 1932, in *Autoportrait*, Vieira depicted those territories which would have otherwise remained unknown to the viewer had she continued to represent herself through mirror reflections. This transference from a real world image – her mirror reflection – to an entirely imaginative vision heavily embedded with personal symbolism finds a legitimate theoretical backdrop in Breton's concept of a "modèle intérieur" as published in *Surrealism and Painting* in 1929.

Vieira's need to identify and resolve this internal-external dialectic by using her body as sole signifier draws points of comparison with the works of contemporary women Surrealists. It is in view of this effect that this thesis incorporated Vieira's self-portrait paintings into an already existing corpus of works brought together by the literature on inter-war female artists. By including Vieira in this discourse, are we able to identify the legacies of Surrealism for those artists whose presence remained largely unknown to the main nucleus, and assess the significance that the gender variable played in her reception of Surrealist tenets and the subsequent development of her art. Her work pre-dated that of many of her female contemporaries, so this thesis did not engage in a visual comparison, but rather strove to identify the narrative of self-imaging that developed in common. These self-images became the battleground for women artist's assertion of their presence within in the cultural field of representation, as they struggled to break loose from their traditional, passive roles of objects of observation, and supply a glimpse of an otherwise relatively unknown subject, that of *woman*. Although Vieira alienated her self-representation from her own mirror reflections in 1936, her choice of mermaid as alter-ego and then the highly feminine harlequin form in 1939, testify to the artist's awareness of her particular position as female.

Whilst clearly identified with the artist's gender, the presence of these hybrid creatures within Vieira's late 1930s oeuvre are equally indicative of her continued struggle to coherently express the ongoing internal/external dialectic that underpins the narrative of her earlier work. In Chapter V it is through Vieira's formal language of linear perspective that a similar discourse may be observed in view of her spatial formulations based on her medieval predecessors. This identification further enhanced the subjective quality of Vieira's work, as the depiction of space was formulated by experience, such as memory in *Atelier Lisbonne*, rather than by a mathematical formulation. Thereby in its imperfect form, skewed and slanted, space acquired an almost organic elasticity, becoming mutable and adjustable, enhancing the intangible nature and conception of Vieira's narrative, as observed in *L'Atelier* (1940). A theoretical support to this "updating" effect of pictorial forms can be found in Erwin Panofsky's theory of "reversals" where new artistic problems can be addressed "out of the rubble of the old".³ This phenomenon of the fusion of new and old, as two artistic polarities, corresponded with Vieira's intricate understanding and eclectic appropriation of elements from *l'art moderne*. Although Surrealism played a crucial role in her expression through the use of the fantastic and thematic development, she was simultaneously drawn to the relative conservatism of Cubism, as it drew distinct pictorial links with the art of the past. Furthermore, Vieira's choice of an alter-ego in the form of the harlequin tied in with Cubism's revival of the French tradition of painting.

The notion of a constructive art historical lineage coincided with Vieira's *non-antagonistic* view towards artistic traditions as she made the critical claim, "Détruire, c'est plus facile". In fact this statement is indicative of Vieira's conceptual break with the avant-garde stance of engendering a cultural schism between the art of the present and the past. Moreover, despite the historical consciousness and awareness informing her artistic production and lending much negativity to the content of her work, these effects did not instil an antagonistic standpoint against society either. Conversely, Vieira used the expression of the imagination as a means of communicating that which was concrete and thus inevitable: the unalterable fate of mankind. In this manner, this thesis describes and analyses Vieira's self-identified role as an artist to be

³ Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, London (1921) 1960, 47.

that of a forerunner and a messenger; a symbol inherent in her choice of mermaid as an alter ego – a foreteller of doom and death.

In the final chapter of this thesis I examined Vieira's Lisbon landscapes with regard to the representation of memory through specific strategies for depicting space. Isolating and individually examining each of her Lisbon cityscapes separately revealed a unique narrative specific to each painting, as Vieira thematised her triple experience of displacement. In this manner, despite the inclusion of a new theme in her oeuvre and the complete abandonment of a self-referential narrative through self-imaging, Vieira continued to articulate through her paintings the underlining single person narrative of the "I". The identification of the contextual import of these paintings was made on the basis of the historical and cultural circumstances surrounding Vieira's first Lisbon painting, *Panorama de Lisbonne* in 1939. This chapter argued that the apparent failure of this work can be attributed to its inability to represent a historical collective memory of an empire's capital, lending a clear contextual force to Vieira's subsequent representations of Lisbon in Brazil. Although at the same time Vieira completed another set of paintings that corresponded directly to the ongoing events in Europe, it is through these urban landscapes that Vieira transcribed the issues which were central to her position as a stateless, émigré artist in exile. It is therefore through these early representations of the city of Lisbon that I observed Vieira's earliest expression of "mêler un regard extérieur à un regard intérieur" through the use of concrete and recognisable objects, as she abandoned altogether the marvellous world of mythical and theatrical creatures from within her narrative. This transference in expression articulates the extent to which Vieira's 1930s paintings were in fact responsive to an epoch, revealing through both content and expression a historical consciousness. Moreover, it is in view of this awareness of the inadequacy of expression that Vieira found to be the unfulfilling quality in previous artistic movements, such as Fauvism: "the mystery ... could not be reconciled".⁴ As early as 1930 Vieira became aware of the disparate expression between painting "la vie" as opposed to "le spectacle autour de moi", determining her understanding and eventual involvement in expression and subjects addressed by *l'art*

⁴ See Introduction for full quote.

vivant.⁵ It was her expression of the child-like and the naïve that communicated in 1930 her earliest pictorial explorations into *l'art moderne*.

Vieira returned to Paris in 1947 where she diligently continued to complete cityscapes. However, as her memory distanced itself from Portugal and Brazil, her urban language yielded to more abstract terms in order to articulate the image of an accelerated modern city during the years of the reconstruction of Europe. In Brazil the city became a mnemonic screen of the past, whereas upon her return to Europe the city became an expression of the future. However, this re-construction did not only apply to purely physical concerns, such as the erection of new streets, monuments, buildings, but it was also manifest of a more intrinsic narrative which linked this external projection to an internal psychological model.

The manner in which French art has often been drawn and schematised into diagrammatic movements such as Fauvism, Cubism and Surrealism, has allowed too much room for the works of artists like Vieira, who refused to subscribe to any of these labels, to fall into obscurity. In opposition to the limits imposed by a movement-oriented history of art, this thesis examined the paintings of Maria Helena Vieira da Silva through specific themes, subjects and forms of expression. In freeing Vieira's work from this aesthetic isolation, by dismantling a purely formalist examination of her work, this thesis has re-drawn Vieira's position within the cultural and artistic field.

Moreover, in opening up Vieira's work to the major social, cultural and artistic discourses and streams of thought this thesis also identified the manner in which a simplified modelling of aesthetic movements masks a complex and rich history. This thesis undertakes a similar stance to Vieira's own isolationist and explorative model for interpreting *l'art moderne* in inter-war Paris. A series of inter-related groups and artists (*Atelier 17*, *Amis du Monde*) emerged from this examination, whose contribution proved crucial to the development and progress of modernism, yet their own marginal position also obscured their presence from the recordings art history. In addition, in identifying the eclectic nature of Vieira's work, we observe the cross-roads of creativity that *l'art vivant* inspired, disclosing the richness and plurality of sources involved in the production of painting, including literature, print-making and film.

⁵ See Chapter I, Introduction.

Therefore, as historians examining the interactions of young artists such as Vieira, with their narratives within modernism, we are informed of the inexhaustible potential for re-evaluating the discourses made available through Western European twentieth century art.

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