

**A Realist Indigenism:
The Embattled Political Aesthetics of José Carlos Mariátegui and *Amauta***

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THESIS

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SUMMARY

This thesis focuses on José Carlos Mariátegui (1894-1930), a Peruvian critic and Marxist political activist who founded the Peruvian Socialist Party. Mariátegui also edited the journal *Amauta*, which featured literature, visual art, and theoretical and political texts from 1926 to 1930. This project aims to contribute an original understanding of the thought and editorial practice of this historically significant figure by recuperating his endorsement of realist aesthetics, considering this in relation to theories of realism by Hungarian Marxist Georg Lukács, and using realism as a lens to comprehend Mariátegui's pro-Indian stance, or indigenism.

Mariátegui's keen interest in the status and role of indigenous people in Peruvian society generated suspicions of classless and romantic populism among some commentators on the left. However, Mariátegui's aesthetic writings explicitly condemn populism in favor of a realism that would empower people to make change in dialectical relation with concrete historical and material conditions. This thesis recognizes the broad currents of indigenism as the site of a border between populism and realism. But, it advocates for interpreting Mariátegui's particular brand of indigenism as predominantly realist, due to his understanding of the oppression of Peru's indigenous population as an economic issue based on neo-feudal land ownership practices.

The thesis that follows provides an in-depth investigation of Mariátegui's realist indigenism. Section one provides a brief overview of Mariátegui's historical significance and the ways his political and aesthetic thought has been evaluated by later political thinkers, scholars, and critics. In doing so, it introduces the ongoing intellectual debate about the extent to which Mariátegui should be understood as a romantic revolutionary or a Marxist. This section also

observes that Mariátegui has often been compared with other Marxist aesthetic thinkers of his time, including Lukács, and examines some of their similarities and differences. In particular, I delve into the resonances between Mariátegui's and Lukács' theorizations of realism, drawing mostly on Mariátegui's little-studied essay "*Cement and Proletarian Realism*" (1929).

Section two opens with a discussion of Mariátegui's endorsement of realism beyond his aesthetic writings, i.e. his realist approach to political life. In so doing, it examines Mariátegui's conception of "reality" as laid out in his canonical book, *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality*, as well as other texts. This discussion is complemented by further examination of Mariátegui's aesthetic writings on realism, as observed in his 1930 essay "Literary Populism and Capitalist Stabilization." This essay raises the question of populism and its relationship to realism; thus, the remainder of the section considers concepts of populism and indigenism broadly, their historical appearances in Peru, and the complexities entailed by each of these concepts and their intersections. I offer a reading of Georg Lukács' 1938 essay "Realism in the Balance" which suggests that realism and populism may not always be opposed, even within Marxist theory.

Section three situates Mariátegui's realist indigenism within a broader world-historical context. Specifically, it addresses Mariátegui's relationships with, and changing interpretations of his thought by, international communists over time. I focus the first part of the section on his relations with the Third International by way of its South American (and, later, Latin American) Bureau. This flows into the latter part of the section, which addresses the Khrushchev-era reevaluation of Mariátegui's thought and legacy by two Soviet historians.

Finally, section four investigates the extent to which Mariátegui deployed his realist political aesthetics in his editing of *Amauta*. It asks: How can his decisions about the visual

material published be understood to address, demystify, and enable transformative action with respect to the key concrete issues that constituted reality? I consider portrait paintings of rural indigenous subjects by José Sabogal, and Mariátegui's likely interpretation of these through the anti-capitalism of what he called "*muzhikist*" art, or art representing Russian peasants. I also use Lukács' concept of realism as popular art to provide a different take on Mariátegui's inclusion of these paintings in the journal. Beyond Sabogal's paintings, I consider the international scope of *Amauta*'s art features, which demonstrated Peru's inextricability from the totality of the world; these features contrasted with those of another prominent indigenist journal, *La Sierra*, which published Peruvian art nearly exclusively. Finally, I explore the respective treatments of photography by *La Sierra* and *Amauta*, leaning on anthropologist Deborah Poole's assertion that, in order for early twentieth century Peruvian photography to be considered art, the medium's "undesirable realism" had to be "sentimentalized and improved."¹ I conclude that *La Sierra* embraced photography as art because it valued the medium as a tool for creating romantic identitarian imagery. Meanwhile, Mariátegui and *Amauta* rejected photography as art, and instead exploited its indexical connection to the real in an attempt to help readers understand contemporary political economic realities and possibilities for action.

Overall, this thesis shows that José Carlos Mariátegui has been criticized by contemporaries both for being too Europeanist and for being too indigenist, as well as for being too Marxist and for being too populist. In reality, he sought to use modern Marxist thought of European origin to set in motion a communist revolution in Peru which would liberate all of the working class, including (largely white and mestizo) urban industrial workers and the masses of rural indigenous peasants. Toward this end, his political and aesthetic writings and his selection

¹ Deborah Poole, "Figueroa Aznar and the Cusco Indigenistas: Photography and Modernism in Early Twentieth-Century Peru," *Representations*, no. 38 (1992): 46.

of visual material for *Amauta* relied, to varying degrees, on realism. The benefit of Mariátegui's realist indigenism is that it acknowledges the need to address racial oppression in the Peruvian context, but provides an analysis of such oppression that reveals actionable paths of solidarity that cross racial lines to foster a shared classless society. This study thus suggests that Mariátegui's political aesthetics have something valuable to teach us today, even outside of Latin America, as many scholars, artists, and political thinkers struggle to imagine ways of tackling economic inequality and taking racial oppression seriously while avoiding the demobilizing and fracturing side effects of identity politics.

INTRODUCTION

“Amauta represents the movement of indigenism’s extroversion towards the reality and restlessness of the world...”²

Carlos Dancourt

One hundred years ago, in 1919, a security official of Peru’s federal government departed the country with a twenty-five year old journalist in his custody. The young journalist was being exiled by the newly installed president, Augusto B. Leguía; his contributions to public discourse were deemed too dangerous to permit. He and his colleagues at the newspaper *La Razón*³ had strongly supported the general strikes of the same year, which won the eight hour workday but caused great unease among elite property owners and government officials. With the strikes freshly settled and Leguía’s rule secured, the government offered this young man a journalist’s grant, provided that he leave Peru. Thus, the young journalist set out on October 8. The government agent accompanied him all the way to Panama before allowing him to finish his trans-Atlantic journey, solo. The young journalist arrived in La Rochelle, France, on November 10, and did not return to Peru until 1923, by which time he had become a married man and a committed Marxist.⁴

This young journalist was José Carlos Mariátegui, the subject of the present thesis and a major figure in the history of 1920s Peru. That decade was a period of significant social and economic change for the country. Although the vast majority of Peru’s population was comprised of rural, agrarian indigenous peasants, incipient but increasing industrialization and

² Carlos Dancourt, “La ideología regionalista en la revista peruana *La Sierra* (1927–1930),” *América: Cahiers du CRICCAL* 4, no. 1 (1990): 285. *Indigenismo*, or indigenism, is a heterogeneous set of discursive and aesthetic trends arising in Latin America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries centered on diverse perceived defenses of indigenous people and culture, past or present. A detailed discussion of *indigenismo* can be found in the second section of this thesis. Note: All quotations in this thesis rendered in English from Spanish-language sources are translations by the author.

³ *La Razón* translates to English as *Reason*.

⁴ Jesús Chavarría, *José Carlos Mariátegui and the Rise of Modern Peru, 1890–1930* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1979), 63–70.

rapid rural-to-urban migration led to rising anxieties about the role and politics of the urban, industrial working class. Labor politics was taking hold and beginning to win policy victories, as demonstrated by the 1919 general strikes. In addition, scattered but important indigenous uprisings occurred, such as the 1923 rebellion in the town of Huancané, which was part of an ongoing conflict centered around control of the wool economy by a small, predominantly white landowning elite, and which saw the deaths of approximately 2,000 indigenous peasants over the course of its repression.⁵ Such uprisings demonstrated the untenability of *gamonalismo*, the racialized, neo-feudal economic structure of the countryside in which land was concentrated in large holdings by landlords of largely European descent (*gamonales*) who allowed indigenous people to work it on various terms of tribute or indenture. With events like these, questions of race and class became national preoccupations, as can be seen in the official rhetoric and policy of the federal government during this period. President Leguía's *oncenio*, or eleven year rule from 1919–1930, saw the establishment of institutions specifically aimed at addressing these anxieties, such as the Labor Section of the Ministry of Development and the Office for Indigenous Affairs, both established in 1920.⁶ With an increasing public awareness that race and class were inescapable factors shaping the fate of the country, these subjects became matters of intense debate.

As it happened, these subjects were of great interest to Mariátegui, who spent his European tenure in France, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and, predominantly, Italy. In Europe, he encountered various interwar avant-garde movements in visual art and theater, and met major literary figures including Maxim Gorky and Romain Rolland. He also attended the

⁵ Peter Flindell Klarén, *Peru: Society and Nationhood in the Andes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000): 249.

⁶ Paulo Drinot, *The Allure of Labor* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 5; and Klarén, *Peru*, 247.

historic Livorno Congress of the Italian Socialist Party, where Amadeo Bordiga and Antonio Gramsci announced the founding of the Communist Party of Italy. By the time he returned to Peru, he had a clear intention to found a socialist party, and to publish a journal of arts and politics as an entry point to the political future he hoped to foment.⁷

Mariátegui's politics and aesthetics were both informed by what he called "realism." In both his aesthetic and political writings, key aspects of this "realism" included portraying the inextricability of the particular from the totality of interacting world-historical and economic forces, meanwhile using dialectical materialism to demystify social and economic relationships and empower people to make change. In this way, his views on realism overlapped with those expressed in later writings by Georg Lukács, a contemporary Marxist critic whose "long shadow" often dominates aesthetic discussions of realism today.⁸

For Mariátegui, part of "realism" in Peru would have to involve addressing the situation of the country's indigenous people, and specifically its indigenous peasants, who, according to him, comprised approximately four-fifths of the population.⁹ His strong interest in the status and role of indigenous people in Peruvian society and his observations of the close ties between race and class in Latin America led some communist observers, including at least one prominent Soviet official under Stalin, to suspect him of romantic populism.¹⁰ Yet, it was precisely

⁷ Víctor Mazzi Huaycucho, "Impacto de Amauta en la prensa minera de Morococha (1926–1930)," *Utopía y Praxis Latinoamericana* 22, no. 77 (April–June 2017): 89–99.

⁸ David Craven, "Realism Revisited and Re-Theorized in Pan-American Terms," *Third Text* 21, no. 3 (May 2007): 310.

⁹ Accurate national demographics and other statistics were often lacking in Mariátegui's time, a fact he bemoaned in his writings. Jorge Coronado has suggested that the indigenous population during Mariátegui's life may have been somewhat smaller than Mariátegui's estimate, though probably higher than the numbers suggested by Peru's national census of 1940. See Jorge Coronado, *The Andes Imagined: Indigenismo, Society, and Modernity* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009), 10.

¹⁰ V. M. Miroshkevsky, "El 'populismo' en el Perú: papel de Mariátegui en la historia del pensamiento social latinoamericano," in *Mariátegui y los orígenes del marxismo latinoamericano*, 2nd ed., ed. José Aricó (Mexico City: Ediciones Pasado y Presente, 1980): 55–70.

Mariátegui's realism that largely prevented him from going down a romantic or exceptionalist path in his treatment of indigenous people, and allowed him to assert, for example, that indigenous peasants and white industrial workers were "class brothers" due to their shared exploitation by owners of the means of production.¹¹ Unlike many of his contemporaries in Peru (e.g. those affiliated with the magazine *La Sierra* who criticized him for being too Europeanist, or even Grupo Resurgimiento¹² members like Luis E. Valcárcel) and other parts of Latin America (e.g. José Vasconcelos), Mariátegui did not see indigenous people as playing a magical role in a special national or regional historical mission. Rather, he took the material and cultural realities of the indigenous peasant population into account in formulating his recommendations for Peru's path toward a socialist or communist future. Therefore, in his historical and geographical context—from which it would be a mistake to extract him—his ideology was solidly Marxist, rather than populist.

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¹¹ José Carlos Mariátegui, "The Problem of Race in Latin America," in *José Carlos Mariátegui: An Anthology*, ed. Harry E. Vanden and Marc Becker (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2011): 315.

¹² Grupo Resurgimiento, which can be translated as "Resurgence Group" or "Revival Group," was a group of intellectuals based in Cusco that predicted a resurgence of indigenous culture. For an account of this group, see: José Carlos Mariátegui, "La nueva cruzada pro-indígena," *Amauta*, Boletín de defensa indígena no. 5 (January 1927), Marxists Internet Archive, https://www.marxists.org/espanol/mariateg/oc/ideologia_y_politica/paginas/la%20nueva%20cruzada.htm.

delve into the resonances between Mariátegui's and Lukács' theorizations of realism, drawing mostly on Mariátegui's little-studied essay "*Cement and Proletarian Realism*" (1929).

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indigenous subjects by José Sabogal, and Mariátegui's likely interpretation of these through the anti-capitalism of what he called "*muzhikist*" art, or art representing Russian peasants. I also use Lukács' concept of realism as popular art to provide a different take on Mariátegui's inclusion of these paintings in the journal. Beyond Sabogal's paintings, I consider the international scope of *Amauta*'s art features, which demonstrated Peru's inextricability from the totality of the world; these features contrasted with those of another prominent indigenist journal, *La Sierra*, which published Peruvian art nearly exclusively. Finally, I explore the respective treatments of photography by *La Sierra* and *Amauta*, leaning on anthropologist Deborah Poole's assertion that, in order for early twentieth century Peruvian photography to be considered art, the medium's "undesirable realism" had to be "sentimentalized and improved."¹³ I conclude that *La Sierra* embraced photography as art because it valued the medium as a tool for creating romantic identitarian imagery. Meanwhile, Mariátegui and *Amauta* rejected photography as art, and instead exploited its indexical connection to the real in an attempt to help readers understand contemporary political economic realities and possibilities for action.

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¹³ Deborah Poole, "Figuerola," 46.

context, but provides an analysis of such oppression that shows why workers of all races should struggle in class-conscious solidarity.

With this thesis, I hope to achieve several goals. The first is to raise Mariátegui's relevance to anglophone Marxist scholars. Although Mariátegui is essential to studies of Marxism in Latin American contexts, most anglophone Marxist scholars remain unfamiliar with him. In contrast, these same scholars generally consider Lukács a canonical figure. By comparing and contrasting Mariátegui's theories of realism and populism with those of Lukács, and even showing that Mariátegui articulated some key ideas about realism earlier than Lukács, I aim to demonstrate that if Lukács is worthy of study, so too is Mariátegui.

The second goal I hope to achieve is relatively simple: I wish to reclaim the realism in Mariátegui's aesthetics, because this has sometimes been denied. Often, writings about Mariátegui focus on his interest in avant-garde modernist movements, and scholarship has occasionally gone so far as to suggest that Mariátegui was against realism. However, such suggestions are misreadings that fall into the European left dichotomy of modernism versus realism, while Mariátegui saw no such dichotomy.

The final goal of this thesis is to validate Mariátegui's insight that there are ways to raise the issue of race without condemning oneself to a mire of mystification. Presently, it is common to come across intellectual debates that pit Marxism and 'identity politics' against one another. However, following Mariátegui, I hope to show that it is possible to account for racial oppression with class-based analysis, with the benefit of such analysis being that it reveals actionable paths of solidarity that cross racial lines to foster a shared classless society.

Assuming that I achieve all of these goals, this thesis will not only help to invigorate the study of Mariátegui during the centenary of his formative years in Europe—years historian Jesús

Chavarría refers to as Mariátegui's "European apprenticeship."¹⁴ This study will also clarify Mariátegui's ideological and aesthetic positions, and perhaps help today's readers clarify their own.

¹⁴ Chavarría, *José Carlos Mariátegui*, 66.

BEYOND THE “SECTARIAN DIVIDE”: MARIÁTEGUI’S EXPANSIVE REALISM

José Carlos Mariátegui (1894–1930) was a Marxist thinker and political activist who shaped leftist discourse and politics in his home country of Peru, and in the rest of Latin America, during his short life. Although largely absent from U.S. academic canons of Marxist thought, he is considered indispensable in the history of Latin American left politics. A journalist and publisher by trade, he influenced his contemporary discourse by publishing his writings widely, both in his own books and periodicals and in periodicals managed by others. Furthermore, he cemented his role in Peru’s national history by founding the *Partido Socialista Peruano* (Peruvian Socialist Party)—which later became the *Partido Comunista Peruano* (Peruvian Communist Party)—in 1928.¹⁵

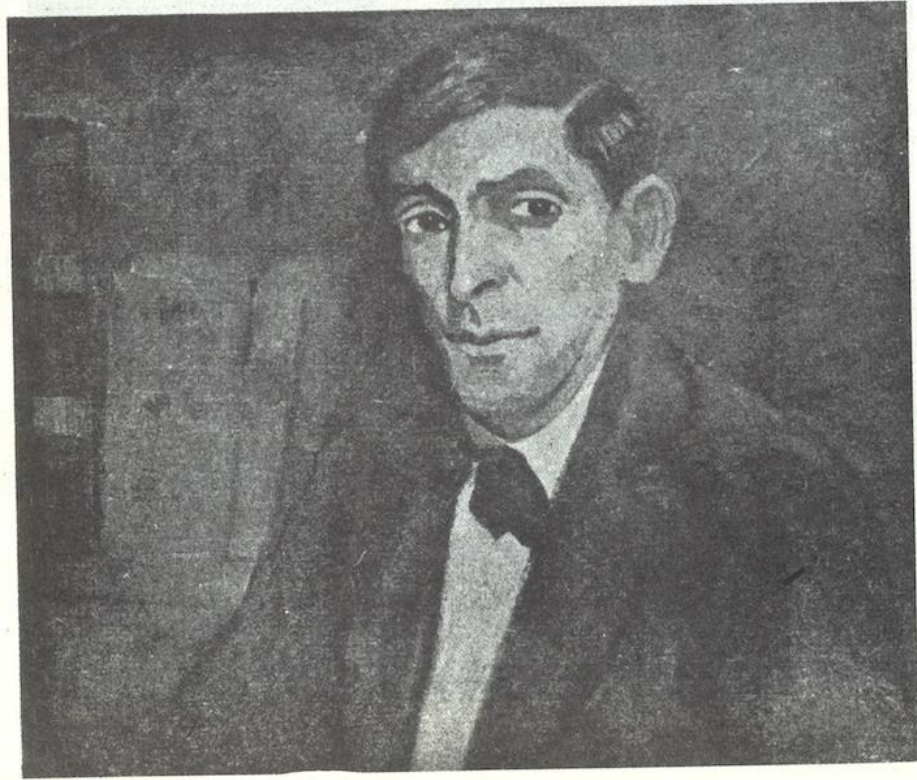
Because he was a political agitator and revolutionary, much of Mariátegui’s writing was dedicated to political and social issues. However, he also wrote extensively on artistic and aesthetic topics ranging from cinema to literature to avant-garde movements. In fact, it was his political writing—his “vociferous support for the 1919 general strike in support of the eight-hour workday”—that ultimately led to much of his aesthetic writing, because it drew the repressive attentions of Peru’s national government, which exiled Mariátegui to Europe.¹⁶ In Paris, Berlin, Venice, and Rome, Mariátegui encountered interwar political and aesthetic avant-garde movements, and it was in Europe that he became a committed Marxist.¹⁷ When Mariátegui returned to Peru, he “undertook a serious analysis of the European avant-gardes.”¹⁸

¹⁵ Harper Montgomery, *The Mobility of Modernism: Art and Criticism in 1920s Latin America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017), 14.

¹⁶ Mark Bevir, ed., *Encyclopedia of Political Theory*, Vol. 1, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2010), 775; Vicky Unruh, “Mariátegui’s Aesthetic Thought: A Critical Reading of the Avant-Gardes,” *Latin American Research Review* 24, no. 3 (1989): 47.

¹⁷ Unruh, “Mariátegui’s Aesthetic Thought,” 48.

¹⁸ Unruh, “Mariátegui’s Aesthetic Thought,” 49.



Oleo de Julia Codesido.

Figure 1: The 1926 oil painting *José Carlos Mariátegui* by Peruvian artist Julia Codesido, as reproduced in a 1930 issue of *Amauta* commemorating Mariátegui's recent death. The painting casts Mariátegui as an intellectual, showing him before a shelf of books. Original scan from facsimile *Amauta* page.

As a result of this output, Mariátegui has been called “one of Latin America’s first practicing literary critics.”¹⁹ His aesthetic interests were apparent not only in his own writings, but also in the overall goals and structure of the journal *Amauta* (Quechua for “wise man” or “teacher”), which he edited and published between 1926 and 1930. The header of *Amauta* issues contained the phrase, “Doctrina, Arte, Literatura, Polémica” (Doctrine, Art, Literature, Polemic), which neatly summed up the subject matter it covered.

¹⁹ Unruh, “Mariátegui’s Aesthetic Thought,” 45.

Aesthetically and theoretically, *Amauta* played an important role in Peru. The journal placed an “unquestionable emphasis on the dialectic relationship of the local and foreign,” publishing art, poetry, and essays by emerging Peruvian modernists, Marxists, and indigenists, while bringing broader Latin American and global currents to a Peruvian audience.²⁰ For instance, *Amauta*’s first issue exposed readers to Freudian psychoanalysis by featuring one of the earliest translations of Freud ever published in Latin America, accompanied by a drawing of Sigmund Freud by Peruvian artist and critic Carlos Raygada.²¹ The journal also prominently featured work by renowned international modernist artists such as Mexican painter Diego Rivera (who was aware of *Amauta*)²² and German artist George Grosz.²³

When it comes to his own thought, interpretations and valuations of Mariátegui vary. Within a Latin American context, Mariátegui’s Marxist writings are generally viewed as highly important and germinal for the hemisphere. This is primarily because he was one of the first to adapt Marxist theory to the intersections of race, class, and urban/rural population and labor distribution found in postcolonial Latin America—a task that the earlier socialist parties of Argentina and Chile had failed to adequately take up.²⁴

²⁰ Montgomery, *Mobility*, 21.

²¹ Juan E. De Castro, *Mestizo Nations: Culture, Race, and Conformity in Latin American Literature* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2002), 139.

²² Rivera sent the journal an autographed photograph that he addressed, “Para Amauta,” in 1926. See figure 15.

²³ Angela Dimitrakaki, “Marxism, Art and the Histories of Latin America: An Interview with David Craven,” *Historical Materialism* 20, no. 3 (2012): 118; Barbara McCloskey, “The Face of Socialism,” *Third Text* 22, no. 4 (2008); David Craven, “Postcolonial Modernism in the Work of Diego Rivera and José Carlos Mariátegui or New Light on a Neglected Relationship,” *Third Text* 15, no. 54 (2001): 14-16.

²⁴ Dimitrakaki, “Marxism,” 120-1.

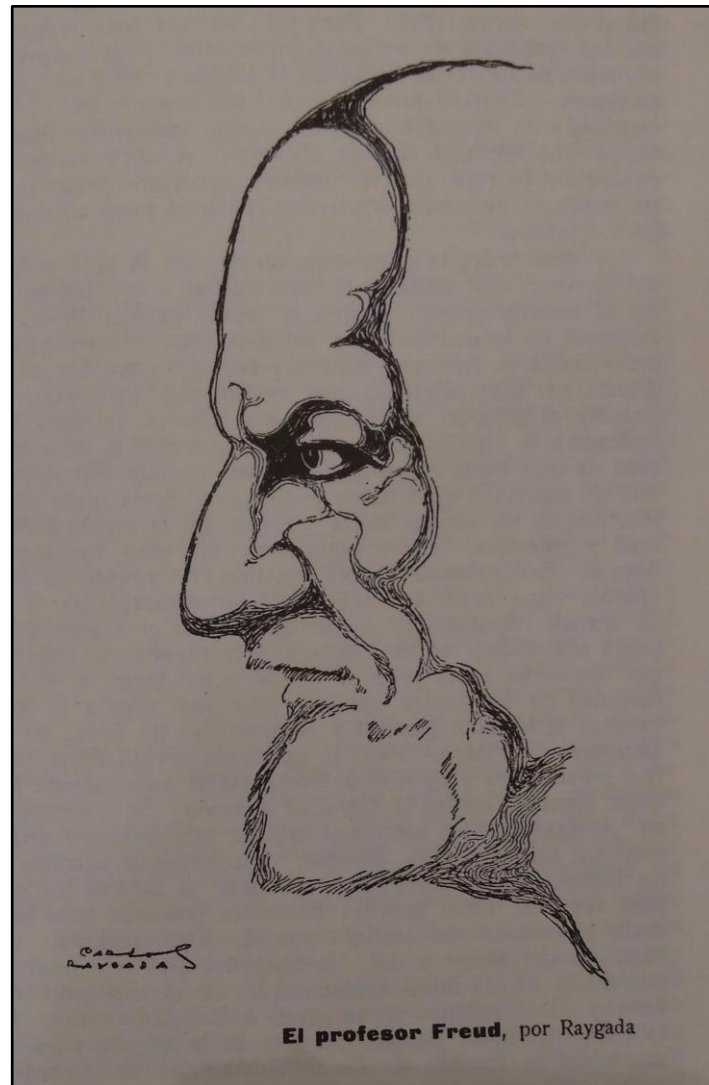


Figure 2: An illustration of Sigmund Freud in profile by Peruvian artist and critic Carlos Raygada. The caption translates to, “Professor Freud, by Raygada.” This illustration appeared alongside the translated Freud text in first issue of *Amauta*, published in 1926. Original photograph of facsimile *Amauta* page.

Marxist art historian David Craven noted in 2010 that Latin American communists and socialists ranging from the Nicaraguan Sandinistas to members of the Communist Party of Cuba have considered Mariátegui “nothing less than a *sine qua non* figure on the Left.”²⁵ Those with positive views of Mariátegui’s particular brand of leftism tend to embrace his adaptations of (and

²⁵ Dimitrakaki, “Marxism,” 118.

departures from) mainstream trends in Marxism, describing his thought with adjectives like “inventive” and “original.”²⁶

However, it is precisely these “inventive” and “original” qualities that cause Mariátegui to often be considered “heretical” and “divergent” with respect to Marxist theory.²⁷ This is especially the case when his thought is framed in the context of the prevailing Stalinist Soviet orthodoxy of his time. Mariátegui saw no need to treat Marx as infallible; he wrote that “it is necessary to desist in consulting the fecund volumes of criticism and theory in which he espouses his method of interpretation as if these were the memoirs of a fortune-teller.”²⁸ He defended the idea of creatively adding to Marxism with new currents in aesthetic, scientific, and philosophical thought, creating a “true revision of Marxism, in the sense of the renovation and continuation of the work of Marx.”²⁹ For Mariátegui, Marxism should be subject to historical change just like everything else; thus, he insisted that “Marxism is the only means of following and surpassing Marx.”³⁰

It is with this thinking that Mariátegui stubbornly embraced Georges Sorel and Friedrich Nietzsche’s antirationalist emphases on myth, emotion, and will as political tools, even as these philosophers were increasingly being taken up by fascists in Europe and abandoned by their early leftist supporters.³¹ In his view, such theoretical approaches to communist revolution were historically appropriate, because he characterized his own epoch as “shaken by the strong

²⁶ Michael Löwy, “Marxism and Romanticism in the Work of José Carlos Mariátegui,” trans. Penelope Duggan, *Latin American Perspectives* 25, no. 4 (July 1, 1998): 76.

²⁷ Löwy, 85; Unruh “Mariátegui’s Aesthetic Thought,” 46.

²⁸ José Carlos Mariátegui, “The Liberal Economy and the Socialist Economy,” in *José Carlos Mariátegui: An Anthology*, ed. Harry E. Vanden and Marc Becker (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2011): 215.

²⁹ José Carlos Mariátegui, “Henri de Man and the Crisis of Marxism,” in *José Carlos Mariátegui: An Anthology*, ed. Harry E. Vanden and Marc Becker (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2011): 189.

³⁰ José Carlos Mariátegui, “The Process of Contemporary French Literature,” in *José Carlos Mariátegui: An Anthology*, ed. Harry E. Vanden and Marc Becker (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2011): 180.

³¹ Ofelia Schutte, “Nietzsche, Mariátegui, and Socialism: a Case of “Nietzschean Marxism” in Peru?,” *Social Theory and Practice* 14, no. 1 (Spring 1988): 71-3.

currents of the irrational and the unconscious.”³² Philosopher Ofelia Schutte has argued that Mariátegui saw “in Nietzsche a spokesman for the creative process, for a cultural revolution, for a belief in the human power to transform reality beyond the tenets of both determinism and fatalism.”³³ This appears to be consistent with Mariátegui’s aspirational description of a future “socialism in America” as “a heroic creation.”³⁴ Schutte adds that “This comes down to a belief that humanity has the sacred calling to create its own destiny and should not be the passive observer or bearer of laws that regulate its conduct outside of its own volition and will... For the Nietzschean Marxist [such as Mariátegui], the revolutionary spirit of Marxism is based on an unconscious release of creative energy, which is then expressed in a conscious commitment to the ideal of a social revolution.”³⁵ These Nietzschean views complemented Mariátegui’s adoption of Sorelian ideas about revolution. Sociologist and philosopher Michael Löwy has commented that Mariátegui incorporated Sorel’s thought into his own because he needed “a merciless critic of the illusion of progress and an advocate of the heroic and voluntarist interpretation of the revolutionary myth—to combat the determinist and positivist reduction of historical materialism.”³⁶ In combining Sorel and Nietzsche, Mariátegui declared that “The strength of revolutionaries... is in their faith, in their passion, in their will.”³⁷

It was also in a line of “inventive” or “divergent” Marxist thinking that Mariátegui insisted that a fully developed bourgeois-democratic phase of government would not be an essential liberatory step for Peru, and that rural Indian peasants would be crucial to the revolution

³² Quoted in Unruh, “Mariátegui’s Aesthetic Thought,” 52.

³³ Schutte, “Nietzsche,” 77.

³⁴ Quoted in Löwy, “Marxism,” 86.

³⁵ Schutte, “Nietzsche,” 77.

³⁶ Löwy, “Marxism,” 81.

³⁷ José Carlos Mariátegui, “Man and Myth,” in *José Carlos Mariátegui: An Anthology*, ed. Harry E. Vanden and Marc Becker (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2011): 387.

there. Taking into account Peru's position relative to neoimperialist international conditions, as well as its "vestiges of colonial feudalism" and attendant "absence of a strong bourgeois class," Mariátegui believed that the masses of rural Indian peasants (who retained "habits of cooperation and socialism" from precolonial times) would form a solid base for the revolution and the resulting communist society.³⁸ These aspects of his brand of Marxism led to conflict with formal international communist bodies. Schutte has described his conflicts with such bodies, indicating that "during the last year of his life he engaged in an intensive polemic with the leadership of the Third International."³⁹ And in 1941, several years after his death, V. M. Miroshevsky—the adviser of the Latin American Bureau of the Third International—penned an article condemning Mariátegui as a populist revisionist and a romantic, and therefore not a real Marxist.⁴⁰

In spite of these controversies, Mariátegui does have a place in the scholarship on twentieth-century Marxism. In fact, scholars frequently compare and contrast him with other Marxist aesthetic thinkers of his era, including Hungarian Marxist literary theorist Georg Lukács.⁴¹ In part, this is simply due to their being of the same generation of Marxist critics (Lukács was only nine years Mariátegui's senior). However, their similarities run deeper. Sociologist and philosopher Michael Löwy has indicated that Lukács and others (such as Walter Benjamin) struggled with "the suffocating straitjacket of the Second International's Marxist positivism."⁴² Art historian Harper Montgomery adds that, along with Mariátegui, these same critics also struggled with the Third International.⁴³ Lukács' struggles with party-line aesthetics

³⁸ José Carlos Mariátegui, "Programmatic Principles of the Socialist Party," in *José Carlos Mariátegui: An Anthology*, ed. Harry E. Vanden and Marc Becker (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2011): 238-9.

³⁹ Schutte, "Nietzsche," 76–7.

⁴⁰ Löwy, "Marxism," 76.

⁴¹ Löwy, 80; McCloskey "Face of Socialism," 462; Harry E. Vanden and Marc Becker, eds., *José Carlos Mariátegui: An Anthology* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2011): 408; Montgomery, *Mobility*, 36.

⁴² Löwy, "Marxism," 80.

⁴³ Montgomery, *Mobility*, 36.

are evident in writings such as “Art and Objective Truth,” wherein he decries what he calls “direct propaganda”—art that reflects the “subjective” politics and views of the artist in place of revealing “objective” realities about historical forces and social processes.⁴⁴ Although in that essay he does not specifically refer to the socialist realist style enforced by the Third International, the style’s single-minded zeal results in many of its examples being “direct propaganda.”

Another similarity Lukács shows to Mariátegui is that he, too, was influenced by Georges Sorel’s philosophy. Literary critic Michael North has pointed out that Lukács began reading Sorel in his early years, under the instruction of the anarcho-syndicalist librarian and social theorist Ervin Szabó.⁴⁵ North states that “Lukács listed Sorel as one of the major sources of his own philosophy, ‘the greatest influence on my intellectual evolution,’” and that in this early stage of his career “Lukács read Sorel as a revolutionary.”⁴⁶ Lukács also admits in the 1962 preface to his book *The Theory of the Novel* that when he wrote the book (starting in 1914) his “conception of social reality was at that time strongly influenced by Sorel.”⁴⁷ It should be noted, however, that Lukács later distanced himself from Sorel’s thought, while Mariátegui did not.⁴⁸ North describes the process of Lukács’ denunciation of Sorel as “part of the complex, almost destructive self-criticism he carried on during the Stalin years.”⁴⁹ Meanwhile, Mariátegui defended Sorel during the early Stalin years, stating in 1928 that “in Sorel we acknowledge an

⁴⁴ Georg Lukács, “Art and Objective Truth,” in *Writer and Critic: And Other Essays* (New York: The Merlin Press Ltd., 1971): 44.

⁴⁵ Michael North, “Eliot, Lukács, and the Politics of Modernism,” in *T. S. Eliot: The Modernist in History*, ed. Ronald Bush (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991): 171; Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986): 99.

⁴⁶ North, “Eliot,” 171.

⁴⁷ Georg Lukács, “Preface to *The Theory of the Novel*,” 1962, Marxists Internet Archive, accessed November 20, 2017, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lukacs/works/theory-novel/preface.htm>.

⁴⁸ Löwy, “Marxism,” 80–1.

⁴⁹ North, “Eliot,” 183.

intellectual who, outside of party discipline but true to a superior discipline of class and method, serves the revolutionary ideal.”⁵⁰ Furthermore, Mariátegui argued that Sorel’s writings “separate and distinguish what is essential and substantive in Marx from that which is formal and contingent.”⁵¹

As mentioned above, Mariátegui is also often contrasted with Lukács, if not explicitly, then implicitly. This is principally due to two factors: Mariátegui’s exceptionally broad embrace of avant-garde modernisms (which Lukács rejected), and Mariátegui’s perceived “anti-realism.” The first factor has been discussed by various art historians, including Barbara McCloskey, David Craven, and Harper Montgomery. Craven notes that Mariátegui “welcomed the avant-gardes of Europe and Latin America in the broadest sense, from critically saluting Constructivism and Expressionism, on the one hand, to engaging positively with Surrealism and Mexican muralism, on the other.”⁵² Montgomery points out that Mariátegui was attracted to various modernist styles regardless of whether they were “ideologically pure”; she provides Italian futurism as an example.⁵³ Likewise, McCloskey points out the “openness of Mariátegui’s... aesthetic position” with respect to modernism.⁵⁴

Mariátegui himself wrote that avant-garde movements including cubism, dada, expressionism, and futurism were valuable mainly because they carried out the “atomization” and “dissolution” of capitalist art, fragmenting it with “centrifugal forces.”⁵⁵ They thus served to destroy what he considered to be a formerly-unifying “bourgeois absolute.”⁵⁶ In his view, once

⁵⁰ Mariátegui, “Process,” 180.

⁵¹ Mariátegui, “Henri de Man,” 189.

⁵² Dimitrakaki, “Marxism,” 119.

⁵³ Montgomery, *Mobility*, 31.

⁵⁴ McCloskey, “Face of Socialism,” 459.

⁵⁵ José Carlos Mariátegui, “Art, Revolution, and Decadence,” in *José Carlos Mariátegui: An Anthology*, ed. Harry E. Vanden and Marc Becker (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2011): 424.

⁵⁶ Mariátegui, “Art,” 424.

this “absolute” regime was dissolved or disrupted, there was space for a different (non-bourgeois) motivating principle to move in and foment art. He stated, “Consciously or not, art is always nourished by the absolute of an epoch... The literature of decadence is a literature without an absolute.”⁵⁷ In this light, it should be noted that Mariátegui did not conceive of these “atomizing” and “centrifugal” modernisms as entirely incoherent or unrelated. In fact, in spite of the differences and contradictions among these avant-garde movements, he stated that “the process of modern art is a coherent, logical, organic process, under a disordered and anarchical appearance.”⁵⁸ He saw avant-garde movements as each providing an “element” of what would become a new art under the new absolute.⁵⁹

Lukács, on the other hand, condemned modernism in its various formulations as disempowering, antisocial, and ahistorical, and therefore anti-revolutionary. In his essay “The Ideology of Modernism,” he argues that modernism portrays human beings as essentially “solitary, asocial, unable to enter into relationships” and disempowers people from making change in the world by promoting “abstract subjectivity” and an “assumption that the objective world is inherently inexplicable.”⁶⁰ It does this by removing meaning from the instances of life it portrays; it reduces a person to “a sequence of unrelated experiential fragments; [a person] is as inexplicable to others as to himself [sic].”⁶¹ Modernism for Lukács, therefore, mystifies the social problems of the modern world by obscuring their historical trajectories and mechanics. Rather than the historical development of social issues and the development of characters in dialectical relations with the world in which they are embroiled, readers of modernist literature

⁵⁷ Mariátegui, “Art,” 424.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Unruh, “Mariátegui’s Aesthetic Thought,” 50.

⁵⁹ Mariátegui, “Art,” 424.

⁶⁰ Georg Lukács, “The Ideology of Modernism,” in *Realism in Our Time: Literature and the Class Struggle* (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1964): 20, 25.

⁶¹ Lukács, “Ideology,” 26.

encounter static “incomprehensible terrors” before which characters experience “total impotence.”⁶² The result, for Lukács, is that modernism denies the humanistic idea of the possibility for people to act intentionally, to select and realize a “concrete potentiality,” and thus to make change.⁶³

The second factor used to contrast Mariátegui with Lukács is his perceived “anti-realism.”⁶⁴ This perception has been articulated particularly explicitly by Montgomery, who has argued that Mariátegui “saw realism as a symptom of art’s subjugation to existing structures of belief” and that “His point was that art should never reflect society’s norms, which realism invariably does.”⁶⁵ She also describes Mariátegui as “railing against the realist novel.”⁶⁶ However, some scholars, such as McCloskey and Chilean literary critic Yerko Moretic, have taken a more nuanced approach to this issue. Moretic published a book in 1970 that deals, in large part, with the complexities of Mariátegui’s views on realism, and acknowledges that Mariátegui distinguished between types of realism with different values, such as “bourgeois realism” and “proletarian realism.”⁶⁷ Meanwhile, McCloskey describes Mariátegui as “Bypassing altogether European left debates on realism, modernism and revolution.”⁶⁸ She states that his writings “go beyond what would later, in the European context, become a sectarian

⁶² Lukács, “Ideology,” 36.

⁶³ Lukács, “Ideology,” 24.

⁶⁴ Montgomery, *Mobility*, 230.

⁶⁵ Montgomery, *Mobility*, 35.

⁶⁶ Montgomery, *Mobility*, 35.

⁶⁷ Yerko Moretic, *José Carlos Mariátegui: su vida e ideario, su concepción del realismo* (Santiago de Chile: Ediciones de la Universidad Técnica del Estado, 1970). Moretic argues that Mariátegui “confirmed that Marxist philosophy, Marxist politics, Marxist aesthetics were *naturally* realist,” yet “The conceptions about realism that Mariátegui managed to express are not sufficient, in quantity or in content, to configure an aesthetic criterion that responds systematically and satisfactorily to the essential questions linked to the interpretation and valuation of non-socialist art in its most diverse currents, or of socialist art in its development and contradictions. They don’t even suffice as a full and thorough expression of the viewpoints of Mariátegui himself.” See pages 257 and 233, respectively.

⁶⁸ McCloskey, “Face of Socialism,” 464.

divide in the area of revolutionary aesthetics between advocates of modernism, on the one hand, and of realism, on the other.”⁶⁹

If Mariátegui were, in fact, anti-realist, this would put him very much at odds with Lukács, who was one of realism’s most committed advocates. In his now-classic 1936 essay “Narrate or Describe?” Lukács lays out an argument for realism as the literature of sociality, objective truth, empowerment, and social change. He argues that realism highlights relationships and the dialectical unity of the individual with the social whole. For Lukács, rather than describing an abundance of incidental details, realism uses selective and economical description, and a focus on narration of events, to reveal general principles of how the world changes and develops historically and how people struggle to effect change. According to Lukács, this demystification of the principles of historical change encourages people to experience and participate in the struggles of their day, rather than merely being observers or aloof critics of the world.⁷⁰

Because realism is so central to Lukács’ thought, Mariátegui’s position on realism has much to do with the degree to which he can or cannot be justifiably compared to the Hungarian critic. In the interest of helping to clarify this question, I focus the remainder of this section on the issue of Mariátegui’s purported anti-realism. While I do not contend that Mariátegui’s thought on realism is equivalent to that of Lukács, I do strive to recuperate what I perceive as some strong affinities and resonances in the treatments of literary realism by the two authors. These are particularly visible in Mariátegui’s short essay, “*Cement and Proletarian Realism*” (1929), which has received scant attention from scholars. The affinities I observe between this

⁶⁹ McCloskey, “Face of Socialism,” 464, 459.

⁷⁰ Georg Lukács, “Narrate or Describe?,” in *Writer and Critic: And Other Essays* (New York: The Merlin Press Ltd., 1971): 118–9.

essay and Lukács' work are fascinating because they reveal that Mariátegui articulated in 1929 some of the key points about realism that Lukács laid out seven years later in "Narrate or Describe?".

Mariátegui's short essay treats the novel *Cement* by Russian author Fedor Gladkov, which was first published in the Soviet Union in 1925. The novel portrays life during and shortly after the Russian Revolution for a married pair of revolutionaries, Gleb and Dasha. *Cement* appeared seven years before the term "socialist realism" was first used, and seven years before that style was prescribed as the only acceptable one by the Soviet Writers' Union.⁷¹ Nonetheless, it is considered an early example or prototype of socialist realist literature. Literary scholar Katerina Clark has pointed out that each Writers' Congress in the Soviet Union opened with a formal address that included a "short list of exemplars that [were] to guide the writers in their future work."⁷² Gladkov's *Cement* was one of the few novels that was consistently praised as an exemplar over the years, and therefore constitutes an important part of the Soviet socialist realist canon.

Furthermore, Clark notes that a genre of socialist realism she calls the "production novel" originated with *Cement*.⁷³ She defines the production novel as "the novel about how the [Five-Year] plan was fulfilled or the project was constructed."⁷⁴ She notes that *Cement* was written prior to the initiation of the Five-Year plans for the development of the national economy of the Soviet Union, but that its portrayal of a worker-hero's response to "the Party directive to step up post-Civil War reconstruction" follows the same plot and character development patterns as the

⁷¹ Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981): 3–4.

⁷² Clark, *Soviet Novel*, 4.

⁷³ Clark, *Soviet Novel*, 256.

⁷⁴ Clark, *Soviet Novel*, 256.

later novels about Five-Year plans proper.⁷⁵ According to Clark, the production novel became the “most common type of Stalinist novel *by far*” (emphasis original); therefore, *Cement* can be said to have had a decisive role in the development of socialist realist literature in the decades following its publication.⁷⁶

Given that Mariátegui’s essay on *Cement* appeared in 1929, it is likely that he encountered this important novel through its Spanish translation, which was first published in 1928 by the then-nascent Madrid-based leftist publishing house, Editorial Cénit (Zenith Publishing).⁷⁷ Editorial Cénit was founded in 1928 and has been described as having a “militant calling, pursuing the goal of instrumentalizing the book to raise the consciousness of the working classes.”⁷⁸ Although the publisher was based in Spain, its books were distributed until 1931 by another company, Compañía Ibero-Americana de Publicaciones (Ibero-American Publications Company), or CIAP for short.⁷⁹ CIAP, too, was based in Spain, but had a moment of dramatic expansion in 1928, during which time it opened branches in four capital cities of Latin America: Quito, Mexico City, Buenos Aires, and Montevideo.⁸⁰ Thus, by the year of publication of *El Cemento* (*Cement*’s Spanish translation), there was a trans-Atlantic commercial network through which Editorial Cénit’s books could reach Latin American readers like Mariátegui.

⁷⁵ Clark, *Soviet Novel*, 257.

⁷⁶ Clark, *Soviet Novel*, 256.

⁷⁷ Mario Bueno Aguado, “Semblanza de Editorial Cenit (1928–1936),” Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes – Portal Editores y Editoriales Iberoamericanos (siglos XIX-XXI) – EDI-RED, 2016, 1, <http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obra/editorial-cenit-1928-1939-semblanza/>.

⁷⁸ Bueno Aguado, “Semblanza,” 1.

⁷⁹ Bueno Aguado, “Semblanza,” 2; Francisco Fuster, “Semblanza de la Compañía Iberoamericana de Publicaciones (1924–1931),” Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes - Portal Editores y Editoriales Iberoamericanos (siglos XIX-XXI) - EDI-RED, 2015, 2; Gonzalo Santonja, “Breve Perfil de la Editorial Cenit,” 1616 : *Anuario de la Sociedad Española de Literatura General y Comparada* V (1983–4): 133. <http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obra/breve-perfil-de-la-editorial-cenit-madrid-19281936-0/>.

⁸⁰ Fuster, “Semblanza,” 1–2.

Mariátegui opens “*Cement* and Proletarian Realism” by stating that he has heard his peers arguing that *Cement* is “not edifying or encouraging for those outside the revolutionary ranks.”⁸¹ This is allegedly because the novel does not shy away from portraying the specific “spiritual” and “moral” conflicts that became part of life in post-revolutionary Russia. According to these critics, Mariátegui writes, Gladkov’s novel is “not apt to feed the illusions of the hesitant and wondrous souls who dream of a rosewater revolution.”⁸² Mariátegui wryly counters that expecting a revolution that immediately delivers an ideal world displays an indefensible and overly-religious naiveté, and a lack of understanding of social and historical processes. According to him, “The residue of an ecclesiastical family education based on the ineffable beatitudes and myths of the kingdom of heaven and the promised land reverberates a lot more in their subconscious than these comrades can imagine.”⁸³

He then continues by noting that “*Cement* is not a work of propaganda. It is a realist novel in which Gladkov has absolutely not proposed the seduction of those, near or far from Russia, who hope the revolution would show its smiling face so that they could decide to follow it.”⁸⁴ His comment about the “smiling face” of the revolution, and the easy decision to follow it, is a barb aimed at orthodox Marxist determinists who believe the revolution will inevitably come on its own, and that one must simply wait, observe, then jump into action at the right moment. According to Mariátegui, such a belief was “incompatible with the heroic, voluntaristic conception of life to which the modern world has been inclined since the [first world] war.”⁸⁵

⁸¹ José Carlos Mariátegui, “*Cement* and Proletarian Realism,” in *José Carlos Mariátegui: An Anthology*, ed. Harry E. Vanden and Marc Becker (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2011): 427.

⁸² Mariátegui, “*Cement*,” 427.

⁸³ Mariátegui, “*Cement*,” 427.

⁸⁴ Mariátegui, “*Cement*,” 427.

⁸⁵ José Carlos Mariátegui, “Marxist Determinism,” in *José Carlos Mariátegui: An Anthology*, ed. Harry E. Vanden and Marc Becker (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2011): 207.

Mariátegui's conceptions of revolution were entirely antithetical to such determinism; he believed that "Marxism, where it has shown itself to be revolutionary—that is, where it has been Marxist—has never obeyed a passive and rigid determinism."⁸⁶

On these matters, Mariátegui's positions correspond fairly well to those of Lukács, who did not appreciate the brand of Marxism in which everything happens, deterministically, for a reason.⁸⁷ Furthermore, as has already been discussed, Lukács vehemently believed in the idea of struggling intentionally and in dialectical relation to the world, and thereby materializing social change. Mariátegui, too, acknowledged the importance of this kind of dialectics in revolutionary agitation. In his text *Defense of Marxism*, he quotes the Italian philosopher Adriano Tilgher as follows: "Marxist tactics are... as dynamic and dialectical as Marxist theory itself. Socialists do not agitate in a vacuum, do not disregard the preexisting situation, do not delude themselves that they can change things with calls to humanity's better emotions, but adhere solidly to historical reality, without resigning themselves passively to it."⁸⁸

In addition, the opening passages of Mariátegui's essay on *Cement* are telling in their distinction between "propaganda" and the "realist novel." This distinction corresponds roughly to Lukács' distinction between "direct propaganda" and "objective propaganda."⁸⁹ In Mariátegui's formulation, propaganda aims at "seduction" by using dishonest, idealized, and

⁸⁶ Mariátegui, "Marxist Determinism," 208.

⁸⁷ Georg Lukács, "Realism in the Balance," trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: Verso Editions, 1977): 45. In this essay, Lukács states that true Marxism does not see "any fatalistic necessity in the development from capitalism to socialism." Indeed, he claims that, "Marx repeatedly protested against the way in which people fatalistically insisted that the only possible development for the Russia of his day was from primitive accumulation to capitalism. Today, in view of the fact that socialism has been established in the Soviet Union, the idea that undeveloped countries can only achieve socialism via the route of primitive accumulation and capitalism, is a recipe for counter-revolution." In short, Lukács contends that Marxists cannot adopt simplistic and deterministic historical formulas; rather, understanding historical processes is "unquestionably a more complex business."

⁸⁸ Mariátegui, "Marxist Determinism," 209–10.

⁸⁹ Lukács, "Art," 44.

unrealistic representations. The “realist novel,” of course, offers the opposite: honesty and an accurate representation of reality. Meanwhile, for Lukács, “direct propaganda” is unrealistic, because its message is a foregone conclusion springing merely from the political proclivities of the author, rather than from the “logic of the subject matter.”⁹⁰ On the other hand, “objective propaganda” has nothing to do with personal political beliefs; rather, it galvanizes political understanding by merely providing “a correct, objective artistic reflection of life.”⁹¹ Therefore, it is not dishonestly seductive; rather, it is realistic. The successful realist novel is one form of what Lukács would call “objective propaganda.”

Following these opening lines, Mariátegui contrasts *Cement* with what he calls “bourgeois pseudo-realism”; he invokes French novelist Émile Zola as a prime example of the latter. He argues that literature in the vein of Zola “has accustomed readers to a certain idealization of characters representing goodness and virtue.”⁹² This corresponds well with Lukács’ account of Zola in “Narrate or Describe?”. For Lukács, Zola is an author in the descriptive mode *par excellence*; his naturalistic work is dialectically opposed to realism. However, Lukács points out that “the reader or writer educated in the ‘modern school’” might argue that Zola’s naturalism is not so different from realism.⁹³ He imagines such an interlocutor asking, “does not Zola’s comprehensive, monographic, effective description provide an accurate picture of a social phenomenon?”⁹⁴ It is evident, then, that Lukács acknowledges the possibility that Zola’s fiction could be interpreted as a kind of realism, and he goes on to argue the errors of such an interpretation. Thus, in Lukács, Zola could be said to produce a “pseudo-realism” like in

⁹⁰ Lukács, “Art,” 44.

⁹¹ Lukács, “Art,” 43.

⁹² Mariátegui, “*Cement*,” 427.

⁹³ Lukács, “Narrate or Describe?,” 112.

⁹⁴ Lukács, “Narrate or Describe?,” 112.

Mariátegui's essay. Furthermore, Lukács clearly states that "the shallow prejudices of bourgeois sociology had a decisive impact" on Zola's literature.⁹⁵ Thus, Zola's novels can be thought of as "bourgeois pseudo-realism" from both Lukács' and Mariátegui's perspective.

The "idealization" Mariátegui observes in Zola's work was also noted by Lukács. According to Lukács, naturalism in Zola's mode was marked by a kind of idealist abstraction that can only ascribe meaning and order to the accidental aspects of individual lived experience by appealing to abstracts and ideal forms outside the material world.⁹⁶ In other words, the things, people, and events described in a Zola novel are robbed of their immanent meaning; instead, these things only take on meaning by becoming idealized or symbolic, and therefore standing for other things. Lukács states that in Zola's literature, such idealization "is supposed to imbue episodes otherwise meaningless, with great social significance."⁹⁷

Mariátegui's essay on *Cement* continues with an elaboration on the issue of idealization. He indicates that idealism and idealization are hallmarks of bourgeois literature and cultural production. He states, "The bourgeoisie in history, philosophy, politics that has refused to be realistic clings to its habit and its principle of idealizing or disguising its motives and cannot be realistic in literature... [the bourgeoisie] does not allow its literature the consciousness to free itself from the tendency to idealize characters, conflicts, and outcomes."⁹⁸ This can be understood in the context of Mariátegui's short text "Freudianism and Marxism," which is part of his larger work *Defense of Marxism*. In "Freudianism and Marxism," Mariátegui agrees with American author Max Eastman in observing that there are "affinities between the essential discoveries of Marx and the discoveries of Freud, and similarly in the reactions provoked in

⁹⁵ Lukács, "Narrate or Describe?," 122.

⁹⁶ Lukács, "Narrate or Describe?," 115–6.

⁹⁷ Lukács, "Narrate or Describe?," 115.

⁹⁸ Mariátegui, "Cement," 428.

official science by one and the other.”⁹⁹ He asserts, “Marx shows that the classes idealized and masked their motives and that behind their ideologies... their interests and economic necessities were operating.”¹⁰⁰ In other words, Mariátegui observes economics and sexual drives functioning similarly as repressed determinants of or motivators for action in Marx and Freud respectively; the revelation of either’s operations provokes resistance. While Lukács would certainly agree that idealization and idealism are hallmarks of bourgeois literature, Mariátegui’s psychologized interpretation of the reasons for this idealism is alien to Lukácsian thought; this marks a true point of distinction between the two authors.

Another point of distinction between Lukács and Mariátegui is mixed into this section of the essay on *Cement*. Here, Mariátegui contrasts “bourgeois pseudo-realism” with what he calls “true realism.” He argues that “True realism comes with the proletarian revolution when, in the language of literary criticism, the term ‘realism’ and the artistic category it connotes are so discredited that there is an urgent need to counter with terms like ‘surrealism,’ ‘infrealists,’ etc.”¹⁰¹ Thus, he asserts a compatibility between avant-garde modernisms and communist revolution, and considers these avant-gardes to produce “true realism.” Vicky Unruh has commented on Mariátegui’s stance with regard to the relationship between art and reality, noting that he considered modernism’s release from the requirements of naturalistic mimesis to have “facilitated knowledge of reality and energized man’s [sic] relationship to the world.”¹⁰² Clearly, Lukács would not have agreed with this stance, given his opposition to modernism discussed earlier in this section. Nonetheless, Mariátegui’s valuation of avant-garde movements like

⁹⁹ José Carlos Mariátegui, “Freudianism and Marxism,” in *José Carlos Mariátegui: An Anthology*, ed. Harry E. Vanden and Marc Becker (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2011): 219.

¹⁰⁰ Mariátegui, “Freudianism and Marxism,” 219.

¹⁰¹ Mariátegui, “*Cement*,” 428.

¹⁰² Unruh, “Mariátegui’s Aesthetic Thought,” 52.

surrealism as forms of “true realism” does not exclude Lukácsian realism from his definition of “true realism.” In fact, shortly following this, Mariátegui asserts that “Proletarian literature tends naturally to realism... *Cement* belongs to this new literature, which in Russia has precursors in Tolstoy and Gorky.”¹⁰³

These remarks re-anchor Mariátegui’s conception of realism to a point where Lukács’ thought can meet it, at least in part. Indeed, just as Mariátegui and Lukács both selected Zola as a representative of bourgeois pseudo-realism, the two authors both selected Tolstoy as a representative of actual realism. Lukács’ “Narrate or Describe?” discusses Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* in some detail, and indeed, directly counterposes Zola and Tolstoy.¹⁰⁴ Thus, we can observe that Mariátegui’s conception of realism is not antithetical to that of Lukács; rather, it is more expansive. For Mariátegui, true realism can include good-quality socialist realism (like Gladkov’s *Cement*), realism in Lukács’ sense (which includes non-socialist novels like *Anna Karenina*), and avant-garde “-realisms” that seek a keener connection with reality, or access to other sectors of reality, than that provided by rational, everyday experience. Moretic discusses Mariátegui’s expansive sense of true realism in terms of his expansive and creative Marxist thought: “In the same way that he saw in Marxism a scientific attitude that never missed out on any conquest of thought and science after Marx, any element that enriched the conception of the world of dialectical materialism, so too he saw, even in the vanguard schools, conquests and values that it was necessary to integrate into the new realism.”¹⁰⁵

Mariátegui asserts that “The truth and the power of [*Cement*]*—*artistic, aesthetic, and human truth*—*lie precisely in its stringent effort to forge a revolutionary heroic expression...

¹⁰³ Mariátegui, “*Cement*,” 428.

¹⁰⁴ Lukács, “Narrate or Describe?,” 110–2.

¹⁰⁵ Moretic, “José,” 204–5.

without omitting any of the failures, disappointments, or spiritual tears through which this heroism prevails.”¹⁰⁶ In this account, truth is closely linked to the exposure, rather than effacement, of difficulties, pain, and obstacles that come with historical change, and to the portrayal of heroic action responding to (or persevering through) these adverse conditions. Mariátegui’s account of the “truth” in *Cement* closely resembles the account of truth that Lukács gives in “Narrate or Describe?”. In his article, Lukács states that “truth is revealed only in practice, in deeds and actions... Character, too, can be revealed concretely only through action. Who is brave? Who is good? Such questions can be answered solely in action.”¹⁰⁷ This question of revealing bravery and goodness through action echoes Mariátegui’s concern with the “prevailing” of “heroism.” And Lukács also stresses the necessity for realist literature to reveal action *specifically* relating to conflict, struggle, and difficulty; he notes that in literature, characters retain interest because of “how they stand up to danger, overcome obstacles.”¹⁰⁸

Crucially, Mariátegui also highlights the dynamics of drama versus epic that are so central to Lukács’ “Narrate or Describe?”. In Lukács’ essay, descriptive naturalism, and the bourgeois literary tradition it informs, reaches its fullest realization in drama.¹⁰⁹ In this, the specificity of description can render individual human experiences intensely present and even universal as abstractions. This presentness, however, comes at the expense of larger historical meaning in—or the ability to concretize—social processes and dynamics. Realism, conversely, finds its mode in the form of epic narrative. This is able to represent change in the world and the ongoing struggles of people to continue to bring about change. The realism of epic narrative is able to pare down its descriptive function to focus on the details of individual experience that

¹⁰⁶ Mariátegui, “*Cement*,” 428.

¹⁰⁷ Lukács, “Narrate or Describe?,” 123.

¹⁰⁸ Lukács, “Narrate or Describe?,” 124.

¹⁰⁹ Lukács, “Narrate or Describe?,” 127–8.

manifest operations of social processes, reinforcing the unity of the individual with the social and historical whole.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, Lukács associates description and drama with mere observation of events, while he associates narrative and epic with experience and participation. In “*Cement and Proletarian Realism*,” Mariátegui writes, “Gladkov’s novel is better than those that have preceded it in translation, in that it reveals like no other the revolution itself... You could say that in the greater part of these [preceding] works one finds the drama of those who suffer from the revolution, not of those who make it. In *Cement* the characters, the scenery, the feeling, are those of revolution, felt and written from within... [*Cement*] brings together so naturally and beautifully concentrated the primary elements of individual drama and the massive epic of Bolshevism.”¹¹¹

The conclusion of “*Cement and Proletarian Realism*” similarly emphasizes the epic quality of Gladkov’s realist vision and the way his novel reveals the unity and interaction of all individuals and things within the development of society and history. In the penultimate paragraph, Mariátegui provides a synopsis of the plot of the novel, paying special attention to the marital dynamics of Gleb and Dasha. He highlights the fact that, over the course of the revolution, “inexorable fate” led Dasha to have sex with other revolutionary men while Gleb was away fighting; by the time Gleb returns to the village she is a “hard, energetic, intelligent militant” and is “no longer a thing [Gleb] owned nor will she be again.”¹¹² Mariátegui notes that Gleb is tormented by jealousy and struggles to cope with his wife’s new identity and experiences. These interpersonal dynamics directly derive from larger historical changes and processes that are taking shape through the revolution. Thus, Mariátegui writes, “In the novel,

¹¹⁰ Lukács, “Narrate or Describe?,” 128.

¹¹¹ Mariátegui, “*Cement*,” 430.

¹¹² Mariátegui, “*Cement*,” 431.

the conflict between [Dasha and Gleb] is intertwined... with a multitude of other beings, in horrible tension, in furious agony. [Gleb's] drama is but a fragment of the drama of revolutionary Russia. All the passions, all the impulses, all the pains of the revolution are in this novel. All types of destinies—the most opposed, the most intimate, the most diverse—are justified.”¹¹³ This passage—including Mariátegui's emphasis on *Cement*'s portrayal of a historical totality and his looser use of the word “drama”—echoes one from “Narrate or Describe?” in which Lukács praises the realism of French novelist Honoré de Balzac. Lukács states, “The drama of [Balzac's] protagonists is simultaneously the drama of the institution in which they work, of the things with which they live, of the setting in which they fight their battles, of the objects through which they express themselves and through which their interrelationships are determined.”¹¹⁴

In summary, Lukács' and Mariátegui's conceptions of realism resonate with each other in many significant ways, though they differ in two principal respects. The first difference is in their approaches to modernist “-realisms” such as surrealism; Mariátegui embraces these under the umbrella of “realism,” while Lukács rejects them. The second difference is in the two authors' conceptions of what Mariátegui calls “bourgeois pseudo-realism” and its relationship to idealization. Mariátegui argues that bourgeois literature is incapable of true realism because the economic realities that motivate action are repressed and idealized into ideology by the bourgeoisie, in a manner similar to the repression or sublimation of sexual drives in Freudian theory. Lukács acknowledges this idealizing trend in bourgeois literature, but avoids explaining it with psychologizing models.

The similarities in Lukács' and Mariátegui's conceptions of realism are numerous and important. Both theorists hold up Émile Zola as an author of false realism and Lev Tolstoy as an

¹¹³ Mariátegui, “*Cement*,” 432.

¹¹⁴ Lukács, “Narrate or Describe?,” 114.

author of true realism. They both appreciate realism for its unique ability to portray the inextricability of individual and interpersonal conflicts from broader social and historical processes of change. They both emphasize realism's reflection of the unity of the individual and the social and historical whole, and the dialectics inherent in that relationship. They both distinguish between tendentious, directly propagandistic forms of purported realism and a true realism that galvanizes political involvement simply with an accurate, objective portrayal of reality. And they both associate drama with subjectivism, individualism, disempowerment and a passive observer positionality, meanwhile associating the epic with broader historical understanding, realism, objectivism, engagement, and empowerment.

There is certainly enough common ground here to warrant comparisons between Lukács and Mariátegui. However, prudent scholars will also note the unique aspects of Mariátegui's thought on realism—particularly his “bypassing” of European realism/modernism debates—which distinguish him from Lukács and other continental Marxist aesthetic theorists of his era. The present section of this thesis has detailed Mariátegui's praise of one of the earliest and most canonical Soviet socialist realist novels: Fedor Gladkov's *Cement*. In doing so, it has demonstrated that Mariátegui's supposed “anti-realism” is, in fact, not real.

TOWARD A REALIST INDIGENISM:

PARSING MARXISM, INDIGENISM, AND POPULISM

*“The leavening agent of the new indigenist vindications is the socialist idea, not as we have instinctively inherited it from the defunct Inca period, but rather as we have learned it from Western civilization...”*¹¹⁵

*“Proletarian literature tends naturally to realism, such as is the case with socialist politics, historiography, and philosophy.”*¹¹⁶

José Carlos Mariátegui

Mariátegui’s positive valuation of a historically demystifying, dialectical realism that encourages active participation in social change can also be observed in his non-aesthetic writings. A prime example of this can be found in his 1922 review of the book *Indology: An Interpretation of Ibero-American Culture* by Mexican socio-racial thinker and politician José Vasconcelos.¹¹⁷ Mariátegui stated that, far from offering an “interpretation” of Latin American society based on observation and analysis (as its subtitle would suggest), the volume constructed a vision of “a utopia in the purest sense of the word.”¹¹⁸ This utopia lay in Vasconcelos’ idea that through racial mixing, Latin America would become the center of a future universal culture and create a “cosmic race.”¹¹⁹ Furthermore, Vasconcelos laid out a theory on the stages of development of society that, according to Mariátegui, disregarded the fact that aspects of Vasconcelos’ stages could “progress in parallel”¹²⁰ rather than in sequence, and ignored

¹¹⁵ Mariátegui, “La nueva cruzada.”

¹¹⁶ Mariátegui, “Cement,” 428.

¹¹⁷ Vasconcelos was the Minister of Education in revolutionary Mexico from 1921–1924. In that position, he provided state-based patronage to Diego Rivera, commissioning him to paint a monumental series of murals in the headquarters of the Secretariat of Public Education and other public buildings. See José Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race: A Bilingual Edition*, trans. Didier T. Jaén, Johns Hopkins Paperbacks Edition (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997): xxii–xxiii.

¹¹⁸ José Carlos Mariátegui, “‘Indología’ por José Vasconcelos,” *Variedades* (October 22, 1922), Marxists Internet Archive, https://www.marxists.org/espanol/mariateg/oc/temas_de_nuestra_america/paginas/indologia.htm.

¹¹⁹ Mariátegui, “Indología.”

¹²⁰ Mariátegui, “Indología.”

important recent developments toward economic justice and rationalization in the newly formed Soviet Union. Mariátegui wrote that Vasconcelos' failure to account for real contemporary social changes, including those brought about by communism, betrayed "a lack of justice and lucidity that is worrying for a mind like his."¹²¹ In addition, for Mariátegui this failure revealed Vasconcelos' excessive investment in an idealized racial-cultural future, at the cost of mystification of the present and of actionable steps for improving society on an economic basis.

Mariátegui agreed, of course, that the future could be better than the present. However, in his words,

The age demands a more practical idealism, a more belligerent attitude. Vasconcelos joins us [young communists] easily and generously in condemning the present, but not in understanding or utilizing it. Our destiny lies in fighting more than in contemplation... Vasconcelos locates his utopia too far from us. By force of his probing into the future, he loses the habit of looking at the present. We know and admire his formula: 'Pessimism of reality; optimism of ideal.' But observing the position to which it carries one who professes it too absolutely, we prefer to substitute it for this other one: 'Pessimism of reality; optimism of action.' It is not enough for us to condemn reality, we want to transform it. Perhaps this obliges us to reduce our ideal; but it will teach us, in any case, the only way to realize it. Marxism satisfies us for this: because it is not a rigid program, but rather a dialectical method.¹²²

In this passage, Mariátegui indicates what he sees as the shortcomings of utopianism: The idealized potential future it proposes is "too far from us," and its single-minded focus on this future sacrifices a rigorous interpretation of and active intervention in the real present. Rather than merely "condemn reality" while holding up an idealized future, Mariátegui judged it necessary to "understand," "utilize," and "transform" reality through "action." This formulation grounds Mariátegui's argument in materialist dialectics, and again bears similarity to the aesthetic writings of Lukács.

¹²¹ Mariátegui, "Indología."

¹²² Mariátegui, "Indología."

In his essay, “The Ideology of Modernism,” Lukács distinguishes between what he calls “abstract potentiality” and “concrete potentiality.” Of *abstract* potentiality, he writes: “Innumerable possibilities for man’s [sic] development are imaginable, only a small percentage of which will be realized.”¹²³ The realization of a potentiality, through decision and action of a person or a group of persons, is what transforms it from abstract to *concrete*. In Lukács’ words, “Abstract potentiality belongs wholly to the realm of subjectivity; whereas concrete potentiality is concerned with the dialectic between the individual’s subjectivity and objective reality.”¹²⁴ A possibility can only be removed from the “‘bad infinity’ of purely abstract potentialities”¹²⁵ if it is realized, which, of course, requires that it be *realizable* in given historical and material conditions in the first place. And one can only determine whether a possibility is realizable through the dynamic dialectical relationship between human thought and perceptible reality. Lukács quotes V. I. Lenin on this subject in another essay, “Art and Objective Truth.” Lenin states: “From active observation to abstract thought and from there to practical activity—such is the dialectical path of apprehending truth and objective reality.”¹²⁶ Thus, Mariátegui’s formulation might be said to consign (racialized) utopianism to the realm of abstract potentiality, meanwhile advocating a dialectics that enables the apprehension of reality and the realization of concrete potentialities. In other words, Mariátegui here advocated a realist approach to political life.

If Mariátegui’s political aesthetics valued realism and a dialectical apprehension *of* and intervention *in* objective reality, it is essential to understand what he considered this reality to consist of. Fortunately, he published a book precisely on this subject in 1928, titled *Seven*

¹²³ Lukács, “Ideology,” 22.

¹²⁴ Lukács, “Ideology,” 23–4.

¹²⁵ Lukács, “Ideology,” 24.

¹²⁶ Lukács, “Art,” 27.

Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality. In that book, Mariátegui discusses Peru's contemporary and historical conditions, including its relations with the rest of the world. Over the course of the book, it becomes evident that he considered the greatest issues of "Peruvian reality" in his time to be twofold: 1) the persistence of the neo-feudal latifundium system of land ownership and use; and 2) the oppressed condition of Peru's Indian population, which he believed could only be resolved through the abolition of the latifundium system and dramatic socialist land reform.

Mariátegui describes the persistent neo-feudal latifundium system as having various manifestations, but generally being characterized by the monopolization of land in large holdings by landowners/landlords known as *gamonales*, who allowed Indians to work their land on various terms of tribute or indenture. According to Mariátegui, these landowners continued to exercise disproportionate control over everything in the country, including the government. This neo-feudalism was, for Mariátegui, closely related to the issue of oppression of indigenous people, which he termed "the problem of the Indian."¹²⁷ On the subject of this "problem,"

Mariátegui writes:

*The socialist critic exposes and defines the problem because he [sic] looks for its causes in the country's economy and not in its administrative, legal, or ecclesiastic machinery, its racial dualism, or pluralism, or its cultural or moral conditions. The problem of the Indian is rooted in the land tenure system of our economy. Any attempt to solve it with administrative or police measures, through education or by a road building program, is superficial and secondary as long as the feudalism of the gamonales continues to exist.*¹²⁸

¹²⁷ José Carlos Mariátegui, *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971): 22–30

¹²⁸ Mariátegui, *Seven*, 22.

JOSE SABOGAL



"LOS PONGOS"

Figure 3: The 1925 painting *El Gamonal* by Peruvian artist José Sabogal, as published in the July 1928 issue of *Amauta*. Here, the painting is reproduced with the caption, "Los Pongos." The term "*pongo*" refers to a type of servant or laborer who was essentially a serf, counted as part of the property of the land they came from and included in the sales of estates. *Pongos* did the bidding of landowners in a variety of tasks, and were often uncompensated. The practice of *pongaje* remained extant in early twentieth century Peru, and was a topic of contention. Original scan of facsimile *Amauta* page.

Similarly, he states, “By identifying it as primarily a socio-economic problem, [socialists] are taking the least romantic and literary position possible. We are not satisfied to assert the Indian’s right to education, culture, progress, love, and heaven. We begin by categorically asserting his [sic] right to land.”¹²⁹ In Mariátegui’s view, this “right to land” could and should have started to manifest earlier under a liberal bourgeois government with the breaking up of latifundia into small land holdings that Indians could own. However, this did not happen following independence from Spain (1821), nor did it happen in the 1880s as a national bourgeoisie gained some strength following the economic boom in fertilizer products (seabird guano and nitrates). Mariátegui believed, therefore, that “the moment for attempting the liberal, individualist method in Peru has already passed.”¹³⁰ Instead, collective control of land should be granted to indigenous communities.

One final aspect of Mariátegui’s conception of reality is worth noting, and he clearly lays it out in his 1924 essay, “The National and the Exotic.” This essay critiques the trend of nationalism that Mariátegui observed among Peru’s intellectuals. In the piece, Mariátegui writes that some intellectuals rejected ideas originating outside of Peru, claiming that they would be “inadequate for the national reality.”¹³¹ However, Mariátegui counters this position by noting that, “National reality is less disconnected, is less independent from Europe than what our nationalists suppose... Mystified national reality is nothing but a segment, a small part of the vast reality of the world.”¹³² Later in the essay, he adds, “We have the duty to not ignore national reality; but we also have the duty to not ignore world reality. Peru is a fragment of a world that

¹²⁹ Mariátegui, *Seven*, 31.

¹³⁰ Mariátegui, *Seven*, 33.

¹³¹ José Carlos Mariátegui, “Lo nacional y lo exótico,” *Mundial*, December 9, 1924, Marxists Internet Archive, https://www.marxists.org/espanol/mariateg/oc/peruanicemos_al_peru/paginas/nacional.htm.

¹³² Mariátegui, “Lo nacional.”

follows a trajectory of solidarity.”¹³³ Thus, he acknowledges that Peru does face particular conditions that other countries do not; however, in realist fashion, he insists on the inextricability of Peru from the totality of the world, pointing out that these conditions must be considered in relation with developments everywhere. Another text by Mariátegui, titled “The Face and Soul of *Tawantinsuyu*,”¹³⁴ insists on the historical reality of Peru’s integration into global economic and power systems. In that essay, Mariátegui critiques romantic nostalgia for the era of the Incas, writing, “The Conquest, bad and all, has been a historical fact. The Republic, such as it exists, is another historical fact. Abstract speculations of the intellect and pure conceptions of the spirit can do little or nothing against historical fact. The history of Peru is nothing but a part of human history. In four centuries a new reality has been formed.”¹³⁵ Thus, for Mariátegui, Peru’s inextricability from broader world-historical and economic forces and systems is an essential aspect of reality that any realism would need to apprehend.

Returning to his aesthetic writings, we can take our probing of Mariátegui’s realism a step further by consulting his short essay, “Literary Populism and Capitalist Stabilization.” This text was published in *Amauta* in 1930, and in it, Mariátegui sets up an opposition between literary realism and what he calls literary populism. The language he uses in developing this opposition again presents striking similarities to the language of Lukács.

Harper Montgomery recently cited this text as an instance of Mariátegui “railing against the realist novel.”¹³⁶ But such a reading does not capture the truth of the matter.¹³⁷ In reality,

¹³³ Mariátegui, “Lo nacional.”

¹³⁴ *Tawantinsuyu*, also spelled *Tawantinsuyo*, is the Quechua name for the Inca Empire.

¹³⁵ José Carlos Mariátegui, “El rostro y el alma del Tawantinsuyu,” *Mundial*, September 11, 1925, Marxists Internet Archive, https://www.marxists.org/espanol/mariateg/oc/peruanicemos_al_peru/paginas/rostro.htm.

¹³⁶ Montgomery, *Mobility*, 35.

¹³⁷ It is true that, in this essay, Mariátegui praises modernist literature by writers such as James Joyce; however, as the previous section of this thesis showed, Mariátegui’s praise of modernism did not imply a denigration of realism by any means. Furthermore, the essay contrasts the value of Joyce and his ilk with

Mariátegui disparages literary populism, while *opposing* it to the “objectivity” offered by “realism” in, for example, “the novels of the Russian revolution.”¹³⁸ In contrast to this realist objectivity, Mariátegui observes that literary populism aims at seduction of its audiences; it “adapts to their tastes and sympathetically investigates their sentiments.”¹³⁹ As we saw in the previous section, this kind of seduction is antithetical to realism, and limits the political value of literature. As such, according to Mariátegui, populist literature does not achieve the political galvanization that realism does; rather, it “proclaims its agnosticism, its political neutrality.”¹⁴⁰ It appeals to readers while maintaining its political agnosticism by employing “Naturalist description of the shopkeeper, the custodian, the small employee, the artisan, the worker himself, observed in hurried visits to the suburbs during the most torrential hours of the metro.”¹⁴¹ Missing in this naturalist description of petty bourgeois and proletarian subjects, of course, is the historical narrativity required to understand why the world exists as it is described, and how it could come to exist otherwise—the epic narrativity so crucial in realism. In short, Mariátegui characterizes literary populism as adhering to “The lazy formula: paint the people.”¹⁴²

Questions of realism, populism, and the “lazy formula” of “painting the people” can be fruitfully brought to bear when examining Mariátegui’s own thought and aesthetic editorial practice. For, as we have seen, although he wrote against populism and in favor of realism, his keen interest in the status and role of indigenous people in Peruvian society—as reflected in his

the lack of value offered by “any neo-Zola.” As we saw in the previous section, Mariátegui considered Zola to be an author of “bourgeois pseudo-realism,” rather than a true realist.

¹³⁸ José Carlos Mariátegui, “Populismo literario y estabilización capitalista,” *Amauta* 28 (January 1930), Marxists Internet Archive, https://www.marxists.org/espanol/mariateg/oc/el_artista_y_la_epoca/paginas/populismo%20literario.htm. Presumably by this he means novels such as *Cement*, which provide an epic look at the revolution from within.

¹³⁹ Mariátegui, “Populismo.”

¹⁴⁰ Mariátegui, “Populismo.”

¹⁴¹ Mariátegui, “Populismo.”

¹⁴² Mariátegui, “Populismo.”

writings and in the predominance of indigenist artwork selected for publication in *Amauta* (the very title of which signals an affinity for indigenismo)—generated suspicions of populism among some commentators on the left. Yet Mariátegui’s *indigenismo*, or pro-Indian stance, was just one example of diverse strains of early twentieth-century *indigenismo* that ran through Peru and Latin America more broadly, and these diverse *indigenismos* displayed varying degrees of populism. As David Craven points out in his 2007 article, “Realism Revisited and Re-theorised in ‘Pan-American’ Terms,” populism need not characterize all *indigenismo*. Indeed, “multiple types of *indigenismo*” are closely related to the “issue of ‘social realism’” in the arts.¹⁴³

In light of this, Mariátegui’s *indigenismo*, qua *indigenismo*, is not enough to condemn his theories and visual editorial choices as populist rather than realist. The question must be centered on the specific nature of his *indigenismo*. It appears, then, that *indigenismo* itself is the ground on which a border between realism and populism lies.

At this point, it is germane to provide a working conception of populism before delving further into the issue of indigenism. Populism is a somewhat nebulous concept; unlike communism, for example, it does not have a defining manifesto or prototypical case.¹⁴⁴ However, a recent overview of the subject by political scientists Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser succinctly defines populism as “a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite,’ and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.”¹⁴⁵ When they describe populism as a “thin-centered” ideology, Mudde and Kaltwasser indicate that populism on its own does not provide a

¹⁴³ Craven, “Realism,” 310.

¹⁴⁴ Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 2.

¹⁴⁵ Mudde and Kaltwasser, *Populism*, 6.

full picture of how society is and what it should look like; rather, it needs to attach itself to another ideology in order to delineate who is included in “the people,” who in “the elite,” what the nature of their antagonism is, and how it should be dealt with (examples of host ideologies that they provide include fascism, liberalism, and socialism).

The thin-centeredness of populism results in its being extremely politically ambiguous, as it can be deployed by actors across the political spectrum. Furthermore, its dependence on conceptions of a “pure people” and a “corrupt elite” imply that its criticisms are primarily moral, as opposed to structural.¹⁴⁶ And Mudde and Kaltwasser note that populism’s construction of a “pure people,” in combination with its notion of “general will,” often falls in line with authoritarian tendencies.¹⁴⁷

In spite of populism’s political ambiguity, Mariátegui is not alone among Marxist critics in probing the boundary between populism and realism through his production. In fact, Lukács—widely regarded as a Marxist theorist of realism *par excellence*, and typically not associated with populism—treads this boundary in his 1938 essay “Realism in the Balance.” In the latter portion of that essay, Lukács goes so far as to frame realism as the true form of “popular art” and “popular culture.”¹⁴⁸ Realism, here, verges on becoming a kind of populism.

¹⁴⁶ This raises problems for populism’s compatibility with strict Marxism-Leninism, though left-leaning populisms that define ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’ in terms of contrasting levels of economic power have existed in the past and continue to exist today.

¹⁴⁷ The two authors note the similarities between the concepts of the political frequently proposed by populist actors and those developed by Nazi political philosopher Carl Schmitt: “According to Schmitt, the existence of a homogeneous people is essential for the foundation of a democratic order. In this sense, the general will is based on the unity of the people and on a clear demarcation of those who do not belong to the demos and, consequently, are not treated as equals. In short, because populism implies that the general will is not only transparent but also absolute, it can legitimize authoritarianism and illiberal attacks on anyone who (allegedly) threatens the homogeneity of the people.” Mudde and Kaltwasser, *Populism*, 18.

¹⁴⁸ Lukács, “Realism,” 52–58.

According to Lukács, popular art is something artists should strive to create, because it demonstrates “A vital relationship to the life of the people, a progressive development of the masses’ own experiences.”¹⁴⁹ Yet “the people” here is an ambiguous term. Lukács liberally deploys language pertaining to “the masses” and “the people” in this essay, as well as concepts of the nation. As a result, it is not always clear to what extent his use of the term “the people” is primarily, or has shades of, a class designation, a national designation, a linguistic designation (since he is addressing the concept of “the people” as an audience for literature), or something else. In spite of the risks of invoking national or culturalist conceptions of “the people” in the context of writing about European (primarily German) literature in 1938, this is what Lukács does. Rather than frame “the people” in strictly class-based terms, Lukács at times opts for a nationally bounded definition. He suggests that in order to correctly make use of cultural heritage or folk art forms in the course of producing “popular art,” an author or artist must be “a son of the people, borne along by the current of the people’s development.”¹⁵⁰ He employs this filial language in specifically national terms when describing the authors he identifies among the great realists of his day: “... Maxim Gorky is a son of the Russian people, Romain Rolland a son of the French and Thomas Mann a son of the German people.”¹⁵¹ Furthermore, he states that, “the tone and content of their writings grow out of the life and history of their people, they are an organic product of the development of their nation.”¹⁵² This parallel deployment of the terms “their people” and “their nation” reinforces the fact that the people as referent for popular art is not a

¹⁴⁹ Lukács, “Realism,” 57. The notion of progressiveness is central here. Lukács claims on page 53 that “the vital instincts of the people... remain progressive against all obstacles,” yet “the cultural aspirations, the taste and moral judgement of the people” can sometimes become confused under capitalism. Therefore, for the realist artist, “everything depends on recognizing clearly where to look for what is truly of value” (55).

¹⁵⁰ Lukács, “Realism,” 54.

¹⁵¹ Lukács, “Realism,” 54.

¹⁵² Lukács, “Realism,” 54.

straightforward class idea.¹⁵³ In addition, one will note the organicism of Lukács' language; words pertaining to life, vitality, growth, creation, instinct, and the organic are used to describe realism itself, realist authors, and the people, suggesting a certain natural connection between realist artists and the people from whom they sprout and to whom they address their work.

It is this connection that forms the basis of popular art, for Lukács. He describes this connection as "a manifold relationship to every aspect of the life of one's own people as it has developed in its own individual way in the course of history."¹⁵⁴ For him, popular art is not merely a matter of being trendy or achieving wide circulation,¹⁵⁵ nor is it necessarily about drawing on folk art forms or cultural heritage, though this can be part of it. He sees an important difference between deploying the modernist "montage value" of cultural heritage/folk forms — i.e. subjectively choosing and using elements that seem interesting by extracting them from their context—and preserving, transcending, and further developing "the active creative forces of popular tradition," as a logical development of the totality of history.¹⁵⁶ Lukács believes that the latter is what realism does; it therefore achieves a desirable accessibility and comprehensibility for "a broad cross-section of the people."¹⁵⁷ In keeping with his other writings on realism, Lukács emphasizes here that the ultimate aim of realism is to enable people to make historical

¹⁵³ In this vein, V. I. Lenin notes in his article "On Narodism" that phraseology of the "popular" is "meaningless" and serves "to evade the question of *which* class or social stratum is fighting for socialism." See V. I. Lenin, "On Narodism," *Pravda* 16 and 17 (January 20 and 22, 1913), Marxists Internet Archive, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1913/jan/22.htm>. However, other authors such as Roberto Schwarz have noted the class connotations of the "popular" in certain Latin American contexts; according to him, the term connotes "illiteracy and social exclusion" (90) associated with poverty, with "populism" sometimes designating "the special role reserved for the working people in the hopes and conceptions of the left: bearing the brunt of social injustice, and therefore the subject and necessary ally of a politics of liberation" (102). See Roberto Schwarz, "Political Iridescence: The Changing Hues of Caetano Veloso," trans. Nicholas Caistor, *New Left Review* 75 (May/June 2012).

¹⁵⁴ Lukács, "Realism," 57.

¹⁵⁵ Lukács, "Realism," 53.

¹⁵⁶ Lukács, "Realism," 53–6.

¹⁵⁷ Lukács, "Realism," 56.

change in dialectical relation with their surroundings: Realism is about “finding the guidelines and slogans which can emerge out of this life of the people and rouse progressive forces to new, politically effective activity.”¹⁵⁸

So it is evident that for Lukács, realism and populism are not opposed; rather, realism is the epitome of a true and progressive populism.¹⁵⁹ He acknowledges the political utility of taking cultural and historical specificity into account, without divorcing it from the rest of the world. In light of this, it is worth dwelling a bit further on the concept of populism to explore how it has appeared and developed specifically in Latin America, and particularly in relation with other concepts and movements relevant to Mariátegui, such as Marxism and *indigenismo*.

Mudde and Kaltwasser describe the historical trajectory of populism in Latin America as having three phases, the first of which began during Mariátegui’s life (they date this phase from the 1920s to the 1960s). According to them, this period saw various countries in the region experiencing struggles between socialism and communism on one hand and populism on the other, as they tried to address social crises associated with industrialization and internal migration of rural people to urban centers. Political actors in this first wave of Latin American populism “tried to position [themselves] beyond the left-right divide.”¹⁶⁰ To do this, they developed “a political language centered on ‘the people’ rather than on the ‘working class.’ At the same time, they relied on the ideology of *Americanismo*, which claims that all Latin

¹⁵⁸ Lukács, “Realism,” 57.

¹⁵⁹ Lukács does contrast realism as popular art with what he calls “retrograde traditionalisms” (53) and art which allows “an uncritical attitude towards one’s own history” (57). These latter elements might be said to manifest a non-progressive populism, or to be false popular art. True popular art originates in a deep *understanding* of social conditions within their specific cultural and historical context (as a part of the totality), not from uncritical aestheticization or glorification of “the people” and their history.

¹⁶⁰ Mudde and Kaltwasser, *Populism*, 31.

American inhabitants have a common identity and denounces the interference of imperial powers.”¹⁶¹

Mexican anthropologist Héctor Díaz-Polanco has provided a useful overview of the differences and interactions between Marxism, populism, and indigenism in an article translated into English in 1982.¹⁶² In this article, Díaz-Polanco considers all three ideological outlooks with respect to their views on indigenous people. However, Díaz-Polanco’s use of the term *indigenismo* is generally narrow, restricted to solutions to the “indigenous problem” proposed by the bourgeoisie which have entailed the increasing integration of indigenous people into the capitalist system and full national citizenship. This *indigenismo* aims at “maintaining certain superstructural features [of indigenous cultures] so long as these do not contradict the ‘strategic aspects’ of the national culture. This has permitted the indigenistas to sustain importunately that the integration of the Indians does not fatally imply the extermination of their singular qualities.”¹⁶³

Díaz-Polanco contrasts this bourgeois position both with populism and with Marxism. He characterizes populism as a petty bourgeois position, and relies largely on Lenin’s critical writings on Russian populism (“Narodism”) for a definition. According to his account of Lenin, populism has three main characteristics: 1) it regards capitalism as a deterioration or retrogression, rather than as a progressive historical force, 2) it professes the “exceptional character” of local socio-economic systems, the peasantry, communal village structures, etc. and considers it unnecessary or inappropriate to analyze these systems with “concepts elaborated by modern science concerning the different social classes and their conflicts,” and 3) it fails to

¹⁶¹ Mudde and Kaltwasser, *Populism*, 29.

¹⁶² Héctor Díaz-Polanco, “Indigenismo, Populism, and Marxism,” trans. Stephen M. Gorman, *Latin American Perspectives* 9, no. 2 (1982): 42–61.

¹⁶³ Díaz-Polanco, “Indigenismo,” 48.

provide class-based materialist explanations of political realities. By this definition, populism is essentially a conservative force that attempts to return to (or preserve) an idealized pre-capitalist order, not realizing that it desires “to defend... a system that capitalism has already begun to effect [sic] profoundly.”¹⁶⁴

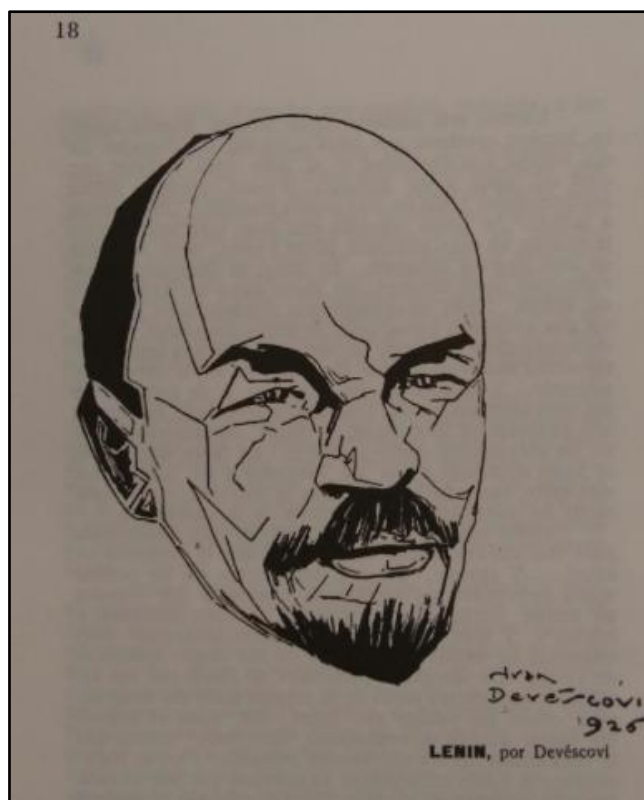


Figure 4: A portrait of V. I. Lenin by Peruvian artist Juan Devéscovi, as published in *Amauta* in 1926. Original photograph of facsimile *Amauta* page.

Díaz-Polanco associates populism with certain newer strains of *indigenismo*, particularly in the academic community.¹⁶⁵ In spite of the Marxist criticism of populism, however, Díaz-Polanco is careful to note that there have been “determinate phases” during which Marxism has considered populism to be progressive. This is because populism sometimes “assumes a critical attitude toward capitalism and singles out problems that bourgeois thought is incapable of

¹⁶⁴ Díaz-Polanco, “Indigenismo,” 44, 50.

¹⁶⁵ He specifically calls out “the anthropological literature” of his moment for having a “populist” outlook with respect to indigenous people. Díaz-Polanco, “Indigenismo,” 50.

identifying.”¹⁶⁶ However, the utility of populism’s anti-capitalism is limited in the view of Marxism, because it lacks appropriate methods of analysis and therefore arrives at incorrect solutions. It is therefore a “romantic” form of anti-capitalism,¹⁶⁷ which is only “progressive” when capitalism is weak and not fully developed, i.e., when it is “the first to pose the problem of capitalism.”¹⁶⁸

Finally, Díaz-Polanco addresses the Marxist position regarding indigenous people, which he characterizes as the proletarian perspective. According to Marxists, “the solution to the problems of the *campesinos*¹⁶⁹ and indigenous groups can only come about through a complete restructuring of the entire society, that is to say, the campesinos and indigenous groups can only be freed from exploitation, discrimination, poverty, etc., by destroying the force which in the end is responsible for that situation: capital.”¹⁷⁰ This formulation of the issue is very closely related to the one we have already seen from Mariátegui. Indeed, Díaz-Polanco specifically associates Mariátegui with this Marxist position, stating that “Mariátegui... noted the strategic and privileged character of the economic question in the analytical process in connection with his study of the Peruvian indigenous problem.”¹⁷¹ He emphasizes the Marxist view of the inextricability of indigenous groups from the global historical-economic forces of capitalism, noting:

... the fact that cultural particularities are noted in these [indigenous] groups does not justify considering them in actual circumstances as the bearers of an originality that would permit them to accede to their own course, to realize their own schemes of development, outside the general laws of development of social formation in which they are already inserted. This is, of course, a grave point of disagreement between populists

¹⁶⁶ Díaz-Polanco, “Indigenismo,” 44.

¹⁶⁷ Díaz-Polanco, “Indigenismo,” 44.

¹⁶⁸ Díaz-Polanco, “Indigenismo,” 45.

¹⁶⁹ *Campesino* is a Spanish word that translates roughly as “rural peasant.”

¹⁷⁰ Díaz-Polanco, “Indigenismo,” 43

¹⁷¹ Díaz-Polanco, “Indigenismo,” 52

*and Marxists, given that the former group not only conceives this course as a realizable possibility, but also as desirable.*¹⁷²

Now that some background on populism has been established, the concept of *indigenismo* warrants additional discussion. According to historian Peter Flindell Klarén, *indigenismo* in Peru dates to as early as the 1840s, at which time it manifested as “an urban-based, liberal literary and cultural movement that called for the moral and material uplifting of the Indian.”¹⁷³ Later, in the 1880s, *indigenismo* took on new meanings, as Peru’s indigenous population “came to be viewed as objects of political and social reform.”¹⁷⁴ By the turn of the twentieth century, a full-fledged “rediscovery of the Indians” by the non-indigenous population was taking place, particularly in the heavily Europeanized capital city of Lima.¹⁷⁵ Cuzco was also a center of *indigenismo* during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially following the 1911 “rediscovery” of the Inca city of Machu Picchu by U.S. archaeologist Hiram Bingham.¹⁷⁶ Eventually, *indigenismo* came to encompass “diverse and heterogeneous content that ranged from a defense of Indian culture and society—both past and present—to integration of the Indians into the nation to the underlying causes of the exploitation and discrimination of Indians.”¹⁷⁷

As mentioned above, Díaz-Polanco’s use of the term *indigenismo* is generally narrow, and primarily describes official/governmental or top-down indigenism. A 1983 article by David Wise titled “Indigenismo of the Left and Right: Two Approaches of the 1920s” provides a

¹⁷² Díaz-Polanco, “Indigenismo,” 52

¹⁷³ Klarén, *Peru*, 200.

¹⁷⁴ Klarén, *Peru*, 245.

¹⁷⁵ Klarén, *Peru*, 245.

¹⁷⁶ Klarén, *Peru*, 246.

¹⁷⁷ Klarén, *Peru*, 256.

broader view of divergent *indigenista* perspectives. That article is especially pertinent to this thesis, as it focuses on the ideas of *indigenista* intellectuals of 1920s Peru.¹⁷⁸

Wise's article focuses on *indigenismo* as expressed through Peruvian magazines and journals of the era. His discussion is largely centered on *Amauta* and *La Sierra*, two of the most widely-circulated and influential *indigenista* journals of the 1920s, both published in Lima; however, he also addresses some lesser known leftist provincial journals.¹⁷⁹ Unsurprisingly, he characterizes *Amauta* as a "left-wing" *indigenista* journal; *La Sierra*, on the other hand, is assigned a "right-wing" position. Wise notes the "consciously *indigenista* artistic style" employed by *Amauta*, which he attributes "principally to the active participation of [artist] José Sabogal," and mentions that the journal was both "one of the principal *indigenista* forums of the radicalized intelligentsia" of the period and "the first Marxist socialist journal in Peru."¹⁸⁰ This was because of the way that *indigenismo* was formulated in the journal; Wise notes that "The contributions of Mariátegui and several of his collaborators on the national and indigenous problems represent the first attempt to bring the 'problem of the Indian' into focus with the approach of scientific socialism."¹⁸¹ Wise is careful to note, however, that *Amauta* displayed "the well known editorial eclecticism" of Mariátegui, both in its art selections and in some of the *indigenista* writings it published. While Mariátegui's way of approaching the "problem of the Indian" in his own writings was Marxist, a "rhapsodic and telluric indigenist current" ran through some of the other writings that he chose to publish in the journal.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ David Wise, "Indigenismo de izquierda y de derecha: dos planteamientos de los años 1920," in *Revista Iberoamericana* 49, no. 122 (March 14, 1983): 159–69.

¹⁷⁹ Titles of some of the lesser-known journals include *Kosko*, *Attusparia*, *Kúntur*, *Chirapu*, *Inti*, and *Puna*.

¹⁸⁰ Wise, "Indigenismo," 164. It is worth noting here that it was Sabogal who suggested the Quechua title *Amauta* for the journal; Mariátegui had initially planned to name it *Vanguardia*.

¹⁸¹ Wise, "Indigenismo," 164–5.

¹⁸² Wise, "Indigenismo," 165.

In contrast, *La Sierra* by and large did not take up a Marxist analysis of the situation of indigenous people in Peru. Writings in *La Sierra* frequently imagined indigenous peoples' problems as racial and moral more than economic. They claimed that *indios* occupied a present state of backwardness and degeneracy due to racial predispositions to slavishness and apathy, or moral faults such as alcoholism and poor hygiene, but projected a messianic rebirth of Inca glory that would become the foundation of a new Peruvian nationality stemming from the Andean highlands.¹⁸³ When economic solutions were proposed for the poverty and poor living conditions of indigenous people, they often centered on liberal measures such as the expansion of infrastructure to facilitate domestic movement of commodities, expansion of small private property regimes, and ratification of more international trade deals.¹⁸⁴ In Wise's words, *La Sierra* "attacked... the 'retrograde' *gamonalismo* of the sierra, proposing the solution to the agrarian problem in terms of capitalist modernization."¹⁸⁵

In addition, *La Sierra* accepted collaboration from Rafael Larco Herrera, the owner of a major sugar-producing estate. The journal explicitly and emphatically rejected socialism as an "alien" doctrine, expressed hostility towards Lima (in spite of its being published there) due to the city's Spanish colonial heritage, glorified the former Inca capital of Cuzco,¹⁸⁶ advocated

¹⁸³ See Luis E. Valcárcel, "Ideario: de los Andes irradiará la cultura," *La Sierra* 1, no. 1 (January 1927): 4; Luis E. Valcárcel "Costa y sierra," *La Sierra* 1, no. 1 (January 1927): 5–6; Víctor J. Guevara, "La reforma del indio," *La Sierra* 1, no. 1 (January 1927): 6–10.

¹⁸⁴ See, for example, Víctor J. Guevara, "El problema indígena," *La Sierra* 1, no. 2 (February 1927): 8–11.

¹⁸⁵ Wise, "Indigenismo," 166.

¹⁸⁶ One of the most prominent intellectuals associated with the Cuzco school of indigenistas responsible for publishing *La Sierra* was Luis E. Valcárcel (with whom Mariátegui also engaged). Valcárcel's classic book *Tempestad en los Andes* (1927), published through the press run by Mariátegui and his brother Julio César, is a prototypical statement of Peruvian Andean regionalism, and sets up a complex of opposing associations for Lima and Cuzco, resulting in racial, national, and gendered coding for the two centers. For Valcárcel, Lima is associated with femininity, the coast, luxury, decadence, laziness, receptiveness to foreign (especially European) influence and attack, and diplomacy (which is coded as a manifestation of feminine wiles). Meanwhile, Cuzco is associated with masculinity, the Andes, indigeneity, austerity, sobriety, bellicosity and fearsomeness, work ethic, and inaccessibility. See Luis E. Valcárcel, *Tempestad en los Andes* (Lima: Editorial Minerva, 1927).

small property for Indians, and emphasized education as “an adequate measure to fix the marginality of the Indian and ‘humanize him [sic]’.”¹⁸⁷ Furthermore, Wise notes that *La Sierra* looked up to Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre, the founder of the populist and anti-imperialist political party Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (American Popular Revolutionary Alliance, or APRA) as what he calls a “culture hero.”¹⁸⁸ In short, *La Sierra* took up a nationalist, and more specifically, Andean regionalist, indigenist posture that hybridized certain elements of what Díaz-Polanco would call “*indigenismo*” and “populism.”

From the analyses above, Mariátegui emerges consistently as a Marxist indigenist, rather than a populist indigenist (though Wise acknowledges that *Amauta* sometimes included heterogeneous *indigenista* material). If *indigenismo* is the locus of a politico-aesthetic border between realism and populism, as suggested earlier, then these findings imply Mariátegui’s association with the “realist” side of *indigenismo*. In spite of this, as mentioned previously, Mariátegui faced conflict with certain formal international communist bodies, as well as posthumous condemnation by the Soviet official V. M. Miroshchinsky as a romantic and a populist in 1941. In an effort to understand the place of Mariátegui’s realist *indigenismo* within a broader world-historical context, the next section of this thesis will examine these controversies in detail, exploring Mariátegui’s contentious relationship with the South American Bureau of the Third International, as well as Miroshchinsky’s allegations and a later Soviet defense of Mariátegui’s thought and legacy.

¹⁸⁷ Wise, “Indigenismo,” 167–8.

¹⁸⁸ Wise, “Indigenismo,” 168. APRA displayed characteristics consistent with Mudde and Kaltwasser’s description of the “first wave” of Latin American populism.

“THE PROBLEM OF RACE IN LATIN AMERICA”:
MARIÁTEGUI AND INTERNATIONAL COMMUNISTS

The previous section provided a deeper examination of Mariátegui’s concepts of realism, both in politics and in aesthetics. Mariátegui opposed realism to populism, though Georg Lukács did rather the opposite, equating realism with “popular art.” Although Mariátegui drew a sharp delineation between realism and populism, Lukács’ formulation suggests that the border between these two modes can be thin and precarious. The previous section also delved into *indigenismo*, which has been a focus of disputes over populism versus Marxism and realism. It illustrated that *indigenismo* is very diverse, harboring both right-wing and left-wing, populist and Marxist currents. In late 1920s Peru, populist *indigenismo* could be observed in the journal *La Sierra*, while Mariátegui’s journal *Amauta* generally staked out the position of Marxist-realist *indigenismo*. In an effort to grasp the place of Mariátegui’s realist *indigenismo* within a broader world-historical context, I will here undertake a discussion of Mariátegui’s relationships with—and vacillating interpretations of his thought by—international communists over time. In particular, I will focus on his relations with the Third International and related persons and organizations, as well as an interpretation by Soviet historians.

In 1925, Mariátegui published a book entitled *The Contemporary Scene*, which contained, among other things, a section on “Facts and Ideas from the Russian Revolution.” One of its subsections was titled, “Zinoviev and the Third International.” This subsection praised Grigory Zinoviev, an important Bolshevik revolutionary and close colleague of V. I. Lenin who served as Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Third International from 1919 to 1926. Lenin had died the year before the publication of *The Contemporary Scene*, and Mariátegui portrays Zinoviev as the inheritor of his legacy. He writes, “Zinoviev is, above all, a keeper of

Lenin's doctrine, a continuer of his work."¹⁸⁹ But beyond Zinoviev's connection to Lenin, Mariátegui expresses admiration for his work in its own right: "For many years now, Zinoviev has taken on nothing but preaching the revolution. At times he takes responsibility for something even more audacious: organizing it. Zinoviev's profession consists, precisely, in this... His dialectics are agile, aggressive, warm, restless."¹⁹⁰

It appears that the admiration was mutual. In spite of the fact that Lenin scarcely turned his attention to Latin America, Zinoviev was aware of Mariátegui, and according to historian Jesús Chavarría, held him in high regard. Reportedly, Zinoviev commented, "Mariátegui has a brilliant mind; he is a true creator. He does not seem like a Latin American; he does not plagiarize, he does not copy, he does not parrot what the Europeans say. What he creates is his own."¹⁹¹ In 1926, Joseph Stalin removed Zinoviev from his post at the top of the Third International. Up until that year, South America had had no place in that organization.

However, in 1926, an Italian-born migrant to Argentina, Victorio Codovilla, founded the South American Bureau of the Comintern in Buenos Aires. This move enhanced the flow of information in both directions between the Soviet Union and South America, and brought South American workers' movements into the organizational orbit of influence of the Third International for the first time.¹⁹² During the late 1920s, the Third International was deeply interested in anti-colonial struggles and questions of national self-determination, and was

¹⁸⁹ José Carlos Mariátegui, "Zinoviev y la tercera internacional," in *La escena contemporánea* (Lima: Editorial Minerva, 1925), Marxists Internet Archive, https://www.marxists.org/espanol/mariateg/oc/la_escena_contemporanea/paginas/zinoviev.htm.

¹⁹⁰ Mariátegui, "Zinoviev."

¹⁹¹ Chavarría, *José Carlos Mariátegui*, 162.

¹⁹² Prior to this, South American communist parties had largely been "small and insignificant groups, maintaining only tenuous relations with Moscow." Edward Hallett Carr, *A History of Soviet Russia*, Vol. 3, part 3: "Foundations of a Planned Economy, 1926–1929" (New York: Macmillan, 1978): 966, quoted in Marc Becker, "Mariátegui, the Comintern, and the Indigenous Question in Latin America," *Science & Society* 70, no. 4 (October 2006): 455.

advocating the establishment of secessionist “independent native republics” for black populations in South Africa and the United States.¹⁹³ These issues began to be brought up by black membership in local communist parties around 1924, and had become major topics of discussion by the time of the Comintern’s Sixth Congress in Moscow in 1928.¹⁹⁴ Thus, questions of the role of race and nationality in oppression and, conversely, in the world revolution came to the fore during this period. Building on both Lenin and Stalin’s interpretations of national minorities’ rights to self-determination, the Comintern addressed questions of race pertaining to South America as well, going so far as to propose to “carve an Indian Republic out of the Quechua and Aymara peoples in the mountainous Andean Region of South America where Tawantinsuyu, the old Inka empire, flourished before the arrival of the Spanish.”¹⁹⁵ In the eyes of the Third International, “the Indian problem, like all race problems, was actually a ‘national question’ that could only be resolved through a separatist movement of self-determination.”¹⁹⁶

As founder and leader of the South American Bureau of the Comintern, Codovilla organized two historic meetings to take place in 1929. The first, in May, was the Constituent Congress of the Confederation of Latin American Labor Unions, which saw unions from fifteen countries gathering in Montevideo, Uruguay. Then, in June, the First Latin American Communist Conference was held in Buenos Aires; this was the first (and, as it turned out, last) international meeting of Latin American communist parties.¹⁹⁷ Due to ill health, Mariátegui was unable to personally attend either of these meetings, but he sent his associates (and core members of the

¹⁹³ Becker, “Mariátegui,” 451.

¹⁹⁴ Becker, “Mariátegui,” 458.

¹⁹⁵ Becker, “Mariátegui,” 451.

¹⁹⁶ Chavarría, *José Carlos Mariátegui*, 161.

¹⁹⁷ The proceedings of the conference were not published in Moscow, and historian E. H. Carr states that “Once the conference was over, the interest of the Comintern in this remote and baffling outpost of communism quickly evaporated.” Carr, *History*, 989, quoted in Becker, “Mariátegui,” 475.

Peruvian Socialist Party) Julio Portocarrero and Dr. Hugo Pesce in his stead, armed with position papers he had written on issues to be covered in the conference agenda.

One of these position papers was Mariátegui's "The Problem of Race in Latin America," which was presented by Pesce at the Buenos Aires meeting. Unlike the Third International, which under Stalin had come to view the "Indian problem" as essentially a national question in need of a separatist solution, Mariátegui's position paper argued that, "The problem is not racial but rather social and economic. But race has a role in it and the methods of confronting it."¹⁹⁸ This paper, written late in Mariátegui's life, is one of his most sophisticated and developed statements on the entanglements of race and class in Latin America, and on how communist revolutionaries could effectively navigate these dynamics.

In the paper, Mariátegui explores the way that centuries of colonialism resulted in entrenched racial prejudices, which remained strong enough in his day to continue mystifying class relations. According to him, largely white feudal and bourgeois property owners disdained indigenous and black people, and "that feeling extends to much of the middle class, who imitate the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie in their disdain for the plebeian of color, even when it is quite obvious that they come from a mixed background."¹⁹⁹ In other words, race was such a strong mystifying factor that the quest for (often unattainable) whiteness caused many middle class workers and petty bourgeoisie to identify with their class oppressors, rather than establishing solidarity with indigenous and black workers. Conversely, he notes that rural indigenous peasants mistrust whites and mestizos²⁰⁰ due to centuries of colonial antagonism, and argues that this reality (as well as the language barrier between Quechua- and Aymara-speaking peasants

¹⁹⁸ Mariátegui, "The Problem," 325.

¹⁹⁹ Mariátegui, "The Problem," 310.

²⁰⁰ This term is used to denote people of mixed racial background. Most commonly, it refers to people of mixed indigenous and European descent.

and Spanish-speaking white and mestizo workers) must be taken into account when considering how best to disseminate Marxist revolutionary ideas among this population.²⁰¹

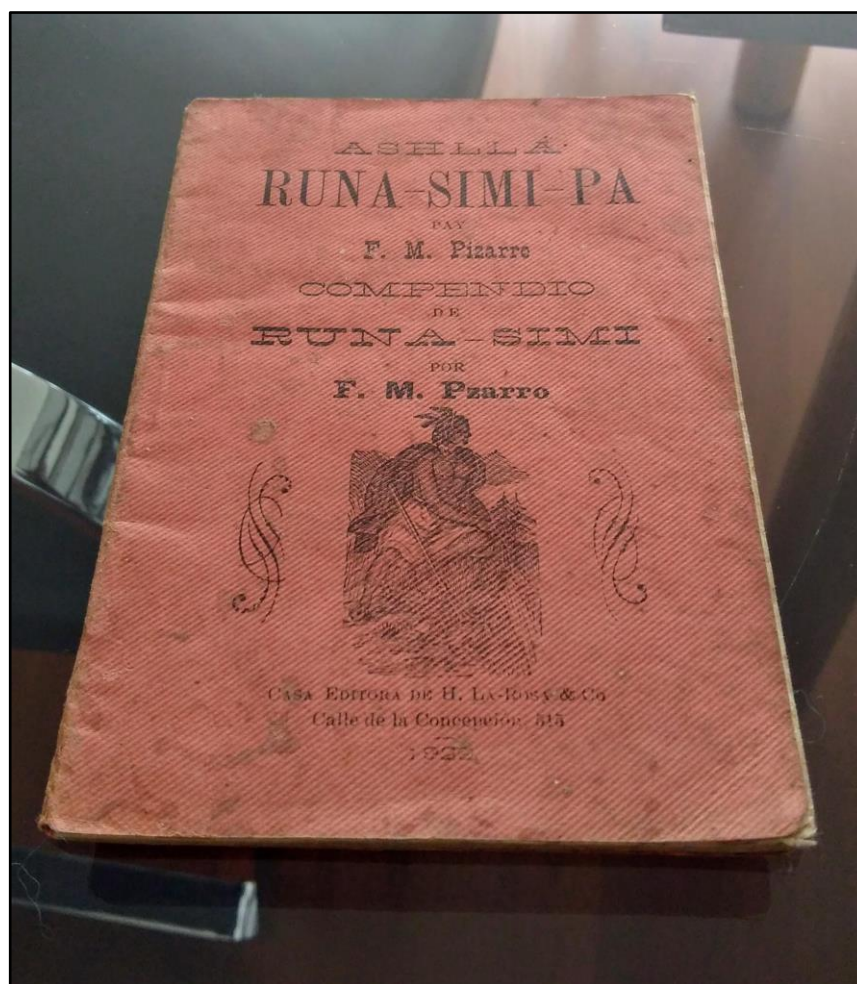


Figure 5: Mariátegui's personal copy of *Ashlla Runa-Simi-Pa: compendio de Runa-Simi*, a primer on the Quechua language. Original photograph taken by the author at the José Carlos Mariátegui Archive, Lima, Peru.

To work around these obstacles, he arrives at the proposal to systematically foster relationships between the small numbers of indigenous workers who had migrated to cities and

²⁰¹ Mariátegui made some personal effort to overcome this language barrier. His personal archive in Lima preserves a book he owned titled *Ashlla Runa-Simi-Pa: compendio de Runa-Simi* (written by F. M. Pizarro, published 1929); this book was an introduction to the grammar, pronunciation, and orthography of the Quechua language. It should be noted that matters such as orthography were very much in flux, as Quechua was an oral language with no written component prior to European colonial contact, and the majority of Quechua speakers in Peru were not educated in reading and writing in Mariátegui's lifetime.

begun working in industrial contexts, and their radicalized white and mestizo coworkers who were already initiated in Marxist discourse:

For the progressive ideological education of the Indigenous masses, the workers' vanguard has at its disposal those militant elements of the Indian race who, in mines or particularly in urban centers, come into contact with trade union and political movements. They assimilate its principles and receive training to play a role in the emancipation of their race. Workers from an Indigenous milieu often return temporarily or permanently to their communities. Their language skills allow them to carry out an effective mission as instructors of their racial and class brothers.²⁰²

Elsewhere in the paper, he elaborates further:

The language barrier stands between the Indian peasant masses and the white or mestizo nuclei of revolutionary workers. But, through Indian propagandists, the socialist doctrine, because of the nature of the demands that are generated, will readily take root among the Indigenous masses. What has been lacking until now is the systematic preparation of these propagandists... [I]n the city, in the environment of revolutionary workers, Indians have already begun to assimilate the revolutionary idea, to appropriate it, to understand its value as an instrument for the emancipation of their race, which is oppressed by the same class that exploits the worker in the factory, whom the Indigenous workers discover to be a class brother.²⁰³

Mariátegui believed that in an industrial context, indigenous workers could recognize the class structures that applied both to them and their white and mestizo “class brothers.”

Specifically, this environment would help indigenous workers recognize that they occupied the same oppressed role and position in the processes of production, in spite of their different racial backgrounds. Indigenous, white, and mestizo workers were all exploited alike by the owners of the means of production. Thus, Mariátegui's analysis did not capitulate to the racial-national reading of the “Indian problem” demanded by the Third International, nor did it adhere to the Comintern's separatist solution. Instead, it took a traditional Marxist approach, promoting a class-based analysis and proposing that workers of various races collaborate towards a revolution for a shared classless society. Indeed, Mariátegui's position in this paper can be said to epitomize

²⁰² Mariátegui, “The Problem,” 324.

²⁰³ Mariátegui, “The Problem,” 315.

his realism; he accounts for, and identifies ways to combat, actually existing historical conditions in Peru that manifest in racial terms, while clarifying that race itself is “obviously insignificant” compared with “the influence of economic factors” in determining the place of *indios* in society and their possibilities for emancipatory politics.²⁰⁴

Codovilla, displaying what historian Marc Becker calls “a much closer and more faithful intellectual and political dependence on Moscow,”²⁰⁵ was hostile to Mariátegui’s position, and delivered harsh criticism of it to Pesce at the meeting. And although Mariátegui had asked Pesce to seek the Peruvian Socialist Party’s official affiliation with the Third International, the Comintern decided to reject their membership, in part because of Mariátegui’s ideological deviation on this issue. Therefore, curiously, the Comintern in 1929 took up a populist position, one that Pesce pointed out “amounted to viewing the entire issue solely in terms of race alone,” while Mariátegui occupied a realist position.

In light of this, the 1941 allegations of populism lodged against Mariátegui by then-adviser of the Latin American Bureau of the Comintern, V. M. Miroshevsky, seem odd. His article detailing these allegations, “‘Populism’ in Peru: The Role of Mariátegui in the History of Latin American Social Thought,” centers largely on Mariátegui’s indigenism, which Miroshevsky perceives to be anti-historical and romantic. He asserts that Mariátegui “appeals to arguments that set out from nationalist romanticism, idealization of the Inca social regime, and the ‘populist’ fetishization of the peasant community.”²⁰⁶ Because Mariátegui argued that Peru’s indigenous communities retained certain aspects of cooperation and communal work that originated in pre-Columbian times and were indicative of a cultural predisposition that would be

²⁰⁴ Mariátegui, “The Problem,” 314.

²⁰⁵ Becker, “Mariátegui,” 457.

²⁰⁶ Miroshevsky, “El ‘populismo’,” 67.

useful in a twentieth-century communist revolution, Miroshkevsky accuses Mariátegui of believing that “the indigenous peasant community did not suffer any change with Spanish domination, nor with the development of capitalism in Peru in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.”²⁰⁷ He further emphasizes Mariátegui’s alleged anti-historicity by asserting that Mariátegui wishes to “simply reestablish in Peru the ‘communist regime’ that collapsed in the sixteenth century under the pressure of the conquistadors.”²⁰⁸ Additionally, he suggests that Mariátegui paints an “idealist picture” of Inca society, glossing over the problem of class relations within that society.²⁰⁹ And he argues that Mariátegui advocated an exceptional kind of socialist revolution in Peru, deviating from standard Marxist-Leninist method; for him, Mariátegui “did not understand the historical role of the [urban, industrial] proletariat... [and] denied their hegemony in the revolutionary movement.”²¹⁰ In short, he argues that Mariátegui is guilty of building up a “‘populist’ fantasy” of what pre-Columbian Inca communities were, and of the revolutionary potential of twentieth-century indigenous communities.²¹¹ The anti-historicity, idealism, and exceptionalism of which Miroshkevsky accuses Mariátegui would place Mariátegui’s indigenism squarely on the side of populism and not realism, if true.

However, not all Soviet commentators remained in agreement with Miroshkevsky’s condemnation of Mariátegui. Shortly after Nikita Khrushchev’s “secret speech” officially initiated the USSR’s transition out of Stalinism at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union,²¹² Soviet historians S. Semionov and A. Shulgovski published an article attempting to redeem the reputation of the Peruvian thinker. Importantly, a central focus of

²⁰⁷ Miroshkevsky, “El ‘populismo’,” 64.

²⁰⁸ Miroshkevsky, “El ‘populismo’,” 65.

²⁰⁹ Miroshkevsky, “El ‘populismo’,” 63–4.

²¹⁰ Miroshkevsky, “El ‘populismo’,” 67.

²¹¹ Miroshkevsky, “El ‘populismo’,” 65.

²¹² This speech was delivered on February 24–25, 1956.

Khrushchev's "secret speech" had been Stalin's state-sponsored terror that led to the arrests and executions of thousands of people—including numerous Communist Party members—usually on unfounded charges. In the speech, Khrushchev describes the specific cases of several individuals who were executed, portraying them as loyal communists who were accused unjustly of "two-facedness," "espionage," or of otherwise being enemies of the party and the revolution.²¹³

Khrushchev repeatedly uses language of "rehabilitation" to describe the vindication of these people achieved through judicial re-evaluation of their cases. For instance, he states, "Suffice it to say that from 1954 to the present time the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court has rehabilitated 7,679 persons, many of whom have been rehabilitated posthumously."²¹⁴ It was in this cultural climate of post-Stalinist posthumous rehabilitation that Semionov and Shulgovski approached the question of Mariátegui's thought.

In their 1957 article, "The Role of José Carlos Mariátegui in the Formation of the Communist Party of Peru," the two authors state: "Unfortunately, Soviet publications have not always correctly judged the works and activity of Mariátegui. In studying his ideological legacy, some Soviet researchers centered their attention on isolated or out-of-context formulas, not confronted with the fundamental proposals... and final conclusions of the author."²¹⁵ They continue by specifically citing "Miroshvsky's false idea that Mariátegui was a representative of populism in Peru."²¹⁶ According to Semionov and Shulgovski:

... attentive study of [Mariátegui's] ideological heritage and theory and his colossal labor in the creation of the Communist Party of Peru prove that such affirmations and criticisms are completely arbitrary. The peculiarities of the liberation movement in Peru

²¹³ Nikita Khrushchev, "Speech to 20th Congress of the C.P.S.U.," delivered February 24–25, 1956, Marxists Internet Archive, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/khrushchev/1956/02/24.htm>.

²¹⁴ Khrushchev, "Speech."

²¹⁵ S. Semionov and A. Shulgovski, "El papel de Mariátegui en la formación del Partido Comunista del Perú," in *Mariátegui y los orígenes del marxismo latinoamericano*, 2nd ed., ed. José Aricó (Mexico City: Ediciones Pasado y Presente, 1980): 166.

²¹⁶ Semionov and Shulgovski, "El papel," 166.

*in the first third of the twentieth century derived from the character of the socio-economic regime of the country and its place in the capitalist world economic system.*²¹⁷

In other words, the two historians perceive Mariátegui as being attentive to the concrete reality of the economic situation of Peru, while maintaining clarity about its inextricability from global capital. They even quote Mariátegui to refute his purported Peruvian or Latin American exceptionalism: “The Latin American revolution will be nothing more and nothing less than a stage, a phase in the world revolution. It will be socialist revolution, pure and simple.”²¹⁸ This anti-exceptionalist view is consistent with realism.

Regarding Mariátegui’s indigenism, Semionov and Shulgovski point out that he does not defend the social organization of the Indian community due to “abstract” ideas of justice or “sentimental” desire to conserve idealized autochthonous customs and institutions; rather, they argue, he does so for economic reasons. They quote Mariátegui as contrasting the concentration of land into large latifundium holdings under Peruvian neo-feudalism with the concentration of land into large industrial farms under European capitalism. Mariátegui argues that such concentration of land ownership under bourgeois capitalism can at least ostensibly be justified by its greater productivity, which would theoretically provide benefits for society. In contrast, the prevailing latifundium form of land organization in Peru did not exceed the productivity of the Indian “community”; thus, it was not progressive, as it did not “respond... to an economic need” that the “community” could not address.²¹⁹ Semionov and Shulgovski also point out that the Presidium of the Executive Committee of the Communist International approved in 1928 of the idea that, as they put it, the “remains of tribal organization of the enduring Indians in various Latin American countries, rural communes, collective working of the land in great latifundia and

²¹⁷ Semionov and Shulgovski, “El papel,” 167.

²¹⁸ Semionov and Shulgovski, “El papel,” 180.

²¹⁹ Semionov and Shulgovski, “El papel,” 178.

plantations... can facilitate the passage of these countries to a socialist regime.”²²⁰ Therefore, they argue that “the suggestion that the Indian communes and diverse existing collective forms of work could facilitate the transition of Peru, and other similar Latin American countries, to socialism didn’t have anything in common with populism.”²²¹

Semionov and Shulgovski refute Miroshovsky’s allegations of Mariátegui’s anti-historicity by pointing out that Mariátegui acknowledged the difference between what he called “Inca communism” and what they refer to as “the scientific concept of communism represented by Marxism.”²²² This can be backed up by Mariátegui’s own writing, in which he clearly states, “Modern communism is different from Inca communism. This is the first thing that must be learned and understood by the scholar who delves into Tawantinsuyo. The two communisms are products of different human experiences. They belong to different historical epochs. They were evolved by dissimilar civilizations... All that can be compared is their essential and material likeness, within the essential and material difference of time and space.”²²³

The two historians also combat Miroshovsky’s claims that Mariátegui was a populist, romantic nationalist by counterposing Mariátegui and the political party he founded with the contemporaneous Peruvian political party, APRA. According to Semionov and Shulgovski, APRA and its leader, Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre, were the ones that truly possessed the qualities that Miroshovsky perceived in Mariátegui and his party. APRA, which even contains the word “popular” in its name, considered itself a party of various classes, and a Latin American version of the Chinese Kuomintang, betraying its nationalism and lack of class consciousness, according to Semionov and Shulgovski. APRA aimed to nationalize land and fight North

²²⁰ Semionov and Shulgovski, “El papel,” 184.

²²¹ Semionov and Shulgovski, “El papel,” 184.

²²² Semionov and Shulgovski, “El papel,” 183.

²²³ Mariátegui, *Seven*, 74.

American imperialism, but Haya de la Torre judged “Marxism as a product of European conditions, unusable ‘without deep modifications’ to explain Latin American reality. The ‘exclusivity’ and ‘national originality’ of Latin America were the pretexts that Haya de la Torre used to justify his adulteration of Marxism.”²²⁴ In contrast, Semionov and Shulgovski quote Mariátegui at length to show that he insisted on the class basis of his party:

*The Socialist Party [of Peru] is a class Party and as a result it rejects every tendency that indicates a fusion with the forces or political organs of other classes. It condemns as opportunist all politics that suggest the momentary renunciation of the proletariat's independence of program and action, which should at all times be integrally maintained; for this reason, it condemns and rejects the APRA movement. The Socialist Party recognizes that within national conditions, reality will impose on us the ratification of pacts, alliances, generally with the revolutionary petit bourgeoisie. The Socialist Party can form a part of these revolutionary alliances, but in all cases, it will claim for the proletariat the broadest liberty of critique, action, press, and organization.*²²⁵

Through these defenses, Semionov and Shulgovski demonstrate that Mariátegui's theories, ranging from his theories of class to those regarding the role of indigenous people in Peruvian society, should not be understood as populist. Mariátegui and his realism thus became beneficiaries of Khrushchev-era rehabilitation.

²²⁴ Semionov and Shulgovski, “El papel,” 170.

²²⁵ Semionov and Shulgovski, “El papel,” 172–3. Mariátegui's language here bears a resemblance to that of Lenin in his 1920 tract, *“Left-Wing” Communism*. In that text, Lenin insists on the importance of allowing for tactical and temporary alliances with political entities of other classes, or with reactionary political entities, provided that the integrity of the party of the working class is always ultimately maintained and all alliances work to prepare the ground for its revolutionary goals. See V. I. Lenin, *“Left-Wing” Communism: An Infantile Disorder* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1947?).

“PAINTING THE PEOPLE” OR DEMYSTIFYING PERUVIAN REALITY?:

AMAUTA’S VISUAL CONTENT

To return to questions raised in the second section of this thesis: What of Mariátegui’s “lazy formula”? What of “painting the people”? To what extent did Mariátegui deploy his realist political aesthetics in his editing of *Amauta*? How can his decisions about the visual material published be understood to address, demystify, and enable transformative action with respect to the key concrete issues that constituted reality? Given that the twin issues of “the problem of the Indian” and “the problem of land” were the most salient aspects of “Peruvian reality” in his account, it is not surprising that much of the art published in *Amauta* depicts indigenous people of Peru. In the case of *Amauta*, *indigenismo* is perhaps best represented by the work of José Sabogal, the most frequently-reproduced artist in the journal.²²⁶

Some of Sabogal’s work in *Amauta* conforms readily to common expectations regarding realism in visual art. A good example of this is his 1925 painting *El gamonal*, which was reproduced in the July 1928 issue of *Amauta* (Figure 3). This painting depicts a *gamonal* landowner on horseback in a rural environment, overseeing arduous physical labor on the part of three indigenous figures—two men, at right, and a woman at left. The three indigenous figures carry large loads on their backs, and are bent and frowning under the weight. In addition to her load, the woman carries an infant in her hands. The painting follows a roughly diagonal compositional structure that creates a power hierarchy, with the *gamonal* in the top right corner holding the most power, and the infant in the bottom left corner being the least powerful and most vulnerable. In addition, the gazes of all the adult figures are averted, but the infant looks directly out at the viewer.

²²⁶ Craven, “Postcolonial,” 14.

This painting depicts the nature of daily work for most of Peru's population at the time—as noted earlier, Mariátegui estimated that four-fifths of Peru's population was comprised of indigenous peasants. Thus, the image amounts to a depiction of the processes of production in most of the country. But the painting doesn't limit itself to visual description of the present; it suggests that these conditions might be otherwise. The title of the painting points to the fact that the mode of production depicted—which causes the misery evident on the faces of the Indians—is inherently tied to the system of *gamonalismo*. And the infant's gaze outward implicates the viewer, asking them to take action to abolish *gamonalismo* and create a better future in which the infant can live.

Nonetheless, most of Sabogal's work published in *Amauta* does not conform to these standards of realism. Instead, the published work often consists of portraiture of nameless indigenous "types," such as *India del Collao* (1925), a portrait of a woman from the Lake Titicaca region in traditional garb (Figure 6). This portrait does not reveal economic processes of labor; the woman is depicted on a generic, placeless background and is not shown in active relation with anything or anyone else. Nor does the image obviously suggest interventions into the present state of affairs. Nonetheless, Mariátegui considered this type of art to hold the potential to inspire real revolutionary action, based on the role he believed peasant-focused art played in the Russian revolution. In *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality*, Mariátegui writes about literature of this flavor, which he calls "muzhikist" (using the Russian word that translates roughly as "peasant"). He explicitly compares indigenist art to "muzhikist" art, and suggests that simply making the (feudal) peasantry a central topic of the arts helped to put "Russian Feudalism on trial" in the eyes of the public. According to him, "The muzhikist novel and poetry were prodromes in the socialization of land as carried out by the Bolshevik

revolution. It does not matter that the Russian novelist and poet had no thought of socialization when they portrayed the muzhik, nor does it matter whether they caricatured or idealized him.”²²⁷

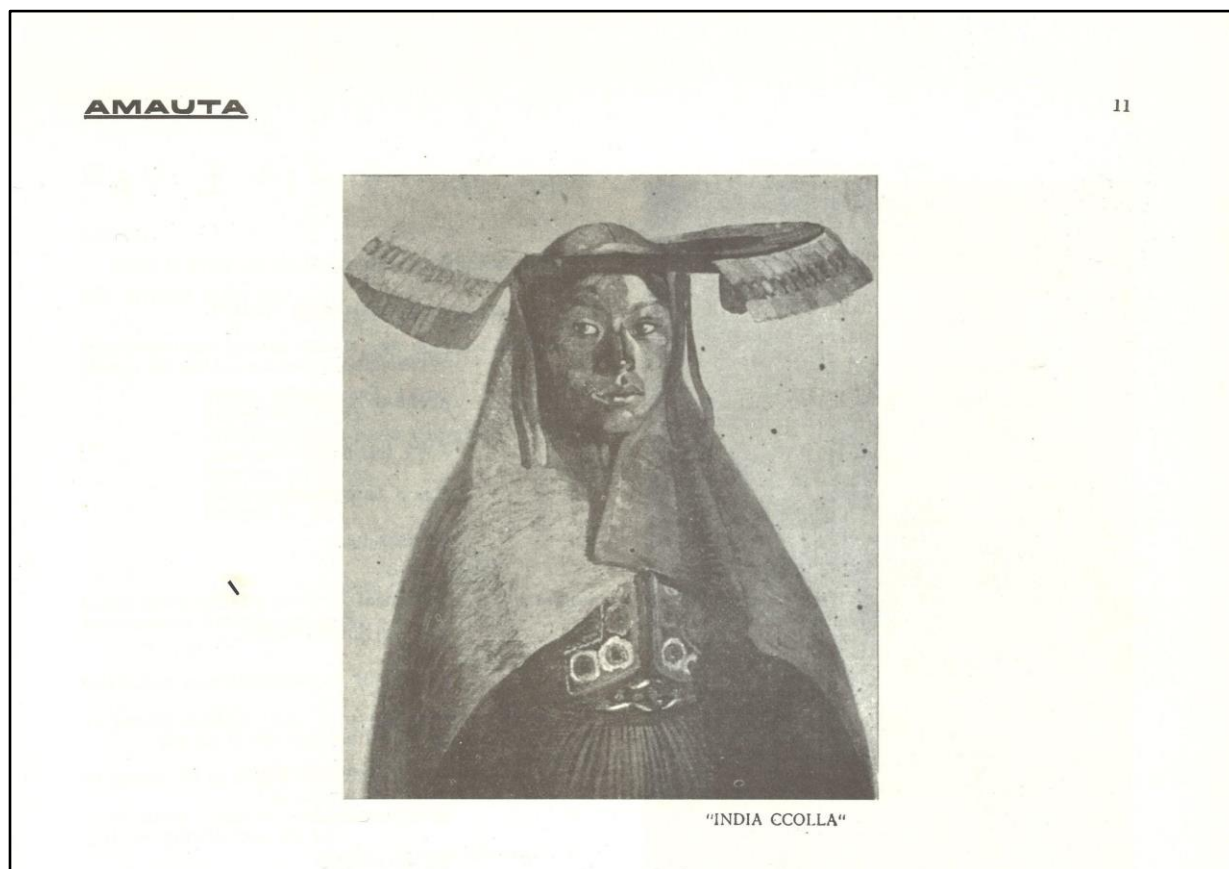


Figure 6: The painting *India del Collao* by Peruvian artist José Sabogal, as reproduced in *Amauta* in February 1927. The title (and adapted caption) refers to the sitter's origins among the Kolla,²²⁸ an Aymara-speaking group of peoples occupying parts of southeastern Peru and neighboring countries. Original scan of facsimile *Amauta* page.

This set of ideas about “muzhikist” art, and comparable *indigenista* art, resonates with Díaz-Polanco’s account in the second section of how Marxism occasionally identifies populism as progressive. To reiterate, Díaz-Polanco portrays populism as a “romantic” form of anti-capitalism, which is only “progressive” when capitalism is weak and not fully developed. This is

²²⁷ Mariátegui, *Seven*, 268.

²²⁸ Alternate spellings include Qulla, Colla, and Coya.

consistent with Mariátegui's account here; the populism of idealizing or caricaturing "muzhikist" art predated the communist critiques and revolutionary actions of Bolshevism. These artistic articulations were "prodromes" of the revolution, essentially because they made the peasantry an important and worthy topic of art and discussion in the public mind. Mariátegui envisions populist forms of *indigenista* art, such as this Sabogal portrait, as functioning similarly in the context of Peru, where capitalism was still relatively weak, having failed to fully develop and replace feudalism. At this stage, Mariátegui judged, *indigenista* art could put *gamonalismo* "on trial" in much the same way that he believed "muzhikist" art had accused the untimely persistence of feudalism in Russia.²²⁹ It could therefore help to install the Indian peasants in the public mind, laying the groundwork for Peru's future communist revolution.

However, it is likely that Mariátegui viewed this type of art as playing a role even in the post-revolutionary communist state. In 1929, *Amauta* reproduced a painted portrait of a Russian peasant woman by Abram Arkhipov that follows many of the same tropes as Sabogal's portrait (Figure 7). It depicts a nameless woman in a generic setting, dressed in traditional attire and identified in the title as a "type" typical of a specific region. Arkhipov had won the prestigious state title of "People's Artist of the USSR" in 1927;²³⁰ it is possible that this official approval from the Soviet state influenced Mariátegui's decision to accept this kind of aesthetic work.

²²⁹ Mariátegui's account of "muzhikism," and implicitly, of *indigenista* aesthetics, also coincides with Lukács' account of "romantic anti-capitalism." In his 1962 introduction to *The Theory of the Novel*, Lukács expresses skepticism towards such approaches to critique, and describes romantic anti-capitalism as possessing a "philosophically as well as politically uncertain attitude." Yet, Lukács preserves the possibility of some political utility for romantic anti-capitalism. According to him, it can at times present "a preliminary form of socialist critique." See Georg Lukács, "Preface to *The Theory of the Novel*," in *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, trans. Anna Bostock, (New York: The Merlin Press, 1971), Marxists Internet Archive, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lukacs/works/theory-novel/preface.htm>.

²³⁰ "Washer Women: Art in the Christian Tradition," Divinity Library, Jean and Alexander Heard Library, Vanderbilt University, accessed April 19, 2019, <http://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=46239>.

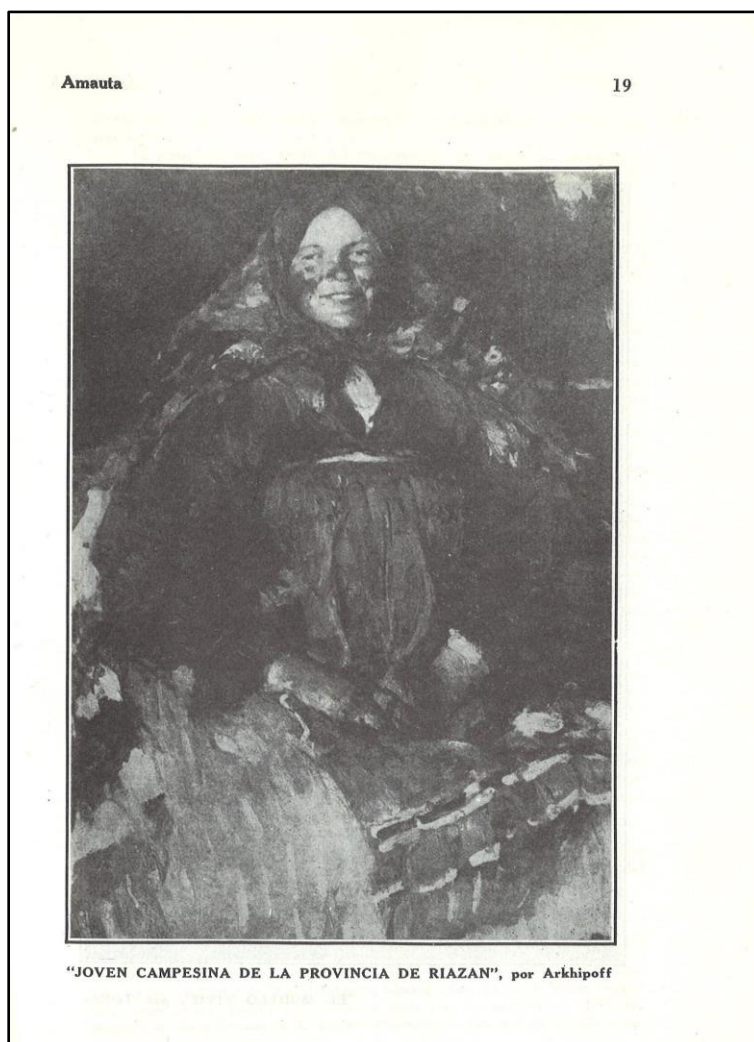


Figure 7: A painting by Russian artist Abram Arkhipov, as reproduced in *Amauta* in June 1929. This painting probably embodied the potential Mariátegui saw in artistic “muzhikism.” The caption translates as, “‘Young peasant woman from Ryazan Province’, by Arkhipov.” Original scan of facsimile *Amauta* page.

While Mariátegui had political reasons for including this type of indigenist art in *Amauta*, one must admit that the art cannot be rigorously defined as realist according to Mariátegui’s stated standards; it is, quite literally, “painting the people.” Nonetheless, it can be said to conform with Lukács’ ideas about realism as popular art. In fact, in Mariátegui’s writings on Sabogal, it is possible to observe language very similar to that used by Lukács in *Realism in the Balance*.

In his 1928 essay “The Work of José Sabogal,” Mariátegui claims that Sabogal recognizes, “the necessity of a historical humus, of a vital root in all great artistic creation.”²³¹ He also states, “In the gestation of this work, neither improvisation nor artifice ever appear. It has a biological, spontaneous, ordered process.”²³² These statements closely reflect Lukács’ organicist language of 1938 regarding realism, realists, and the people. Furthermore, they echo Lukács’ sentiment that realism as popular art must not make arbitrary use of cultural heritage for its “montage value,” but must rather must preserve and transcend it in a logical and historically progressive way.

Late in the essay, Mariátegui states, “In the spiritual movement of a people, the painter’s images are sometimes the culminating expression. Images engender concepts, just as concepts inspire images.” Thus, he stakes a claim for the development of Sabogal’s art out of the historical process of “a people,” as well as the active role this art can play in “engendering concepts” to move that process forward; he argues that Sabogal’s work makes him “one of the constructors of the future of this people.” The “people” in question here is not strictly racial, but appears rather to be national, just as in Lukács. Sabogal was a *mestizo*, not an indigenous person, and Mariátegui dubs him “the first ‘Peruvian painter’.”²³³ Mariátegui makes this claim while noting that, although various talented indigenous artists have existed, “the native still suffers an evident ostracization from Peruvianness. The resolve of the new spirits wishes, precisely, to put an end to this ostracization.”²³⁴ Therefore, great indigenous artists would not have been “Peruvian” proper,

²³¹ José Carlos Mariátegui, “La obra de José Sabogal,” *Mundial*, June 28, 1928, Marxists Internet Archive, https://www.marxists.org/espanol/mariateg/oc/el_artista_y_la_epoca/paginas/la%20obra%20de%20jose%20sabogal.htm.

²³² Mariátegui, “La obra.”

²³³ Mariátegui, “La obra.”

²³⁴ Mariátegui, “La obra.”

because of their alienation from the modern Peruvian nation. As demonstrated in the previous section, Mariátegui envisioned achieving the end to this alienation through the revolutionary collaboration of Peruvian workers and peasants of various races towards a shared, classless Peru.²³⁵

We can gain another perspective on the role of realism in Mariátegui's visual editorial choices by considering *Amauta*'s visual content in comparison with that of the journal *La Sierra*. *La Sierra* was published from 1927-1930, making it roughly coeval with *Amauta*. It featured a mixture of political and social writing, literature, documentary photographs, and visual art, as well as musical scores. As alluded to in the second section, the producers of *La Sierra* were concerned with the oppressed condition of Peru's indigenous population. However, unlike Mariátegui, *La Sierra* did not approach this issue from a Marxist perspective. They approached the question in a nationalist and Andean regionalist way, rejecting European and other foreign influence (including Marxism) and glorifying Cuzco, the former Inca capital. Crucially, *La Sierra*'s visual art content was nearly exclusively Peruvian. Two notable exceptions came toward the end of the life of the journal, when illustrated articles were published about the canonical Spanish artists Francisco Goya and Diego Velázquez.

In contrast, *Amauta* frequently featured work by artists from outside of Peru, in addition to Peruvian work. In fact, the journal often made a point of highlighting the national origins of different selections of artworks. The journal featured a recurring spread titled by the word "Art" accompanied by one adjective—usually denoting nationality. These spreads included "Chinese

²³⁵ In a piece published in *La Sierra* titled "The Indigenous Problem," Cuzco intellectual Víctor J. Guevara also expressed concern about the alienation of Peru's indigenous population from constructions of the post-colonial Peruvian nation: "When asked, they do not know how to answer with a clear and distinct idea of what Peru is." However, Guevara perceived the underlying issue to be "ethnic," so his proposed solution revolved around policy changes to attract European immigrants who might "cross" with the indigenous population and thereby "produce a progressive equilibrium." Guevara, "El problema," 10.

Art,” “Russian Art,” “Spanish Art,” “Mexican Art,” “Futurist Art” (which featured work by the Italian Ivo Pannaggi),²³⁶ and “American Art” (by which was meant art of the Americas). Rather than asserting the singularity or supreme importance of Peruvian art like *La Sierra*, these *Amauta* features visually reinforced Peru’s relationships to, and inextricability from, the total system of world art. Visually, these pages were an articulation of Mariátegui’s assertion that, “We have the duty to not ignore national reality; but we also have the duty to not ignore world reality.”²³⁷ The same historical and economic forces that subsumed Peru into the totality of global capital brought Peru’s art into relationships with art from every corner of the world. Mariátegui’s visual acknowledgment of this fact through editorial choice enacted a realism of the aesthetic in the pages of *Amauta*.

Yet to observe Mariátegui’s realism at work in his presentation of visual material, it is perhaps most fruitful to compare the respective treatments of the medium of photography by *Amauta* and *La Sierra*. Andean scholar Jorge Coronado has pointed out that photography was introduced in Peru at a very early date, with Lima’s first daguerreotype studio advertising its services as early as July 1842. This places Lima chronologically ahead of some important European cities, such as Berlin, in its encounter with photography.²³⁸

²³⁶ Pannaggi is loosely associated with the communist wing of Italian futurism, though Christina Brungardt points out that his political position was less clear than that of another communist futurist, Vinicio Paladini. See Christina Brungardt, “On the Fringe of Italian Fascism: An Examination of the Relationship between Vinicio Paladini and the Soviet Avant-Garde” (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 2015), CUNY Academic Works, https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1531&context=gc_etds.

²³⁷ Mariátegui, “Lo nacional.”

²³⁸ Jorge Coronado, *Portraits in the Andes: Photography and Agency, 1900–1950* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018), 9.

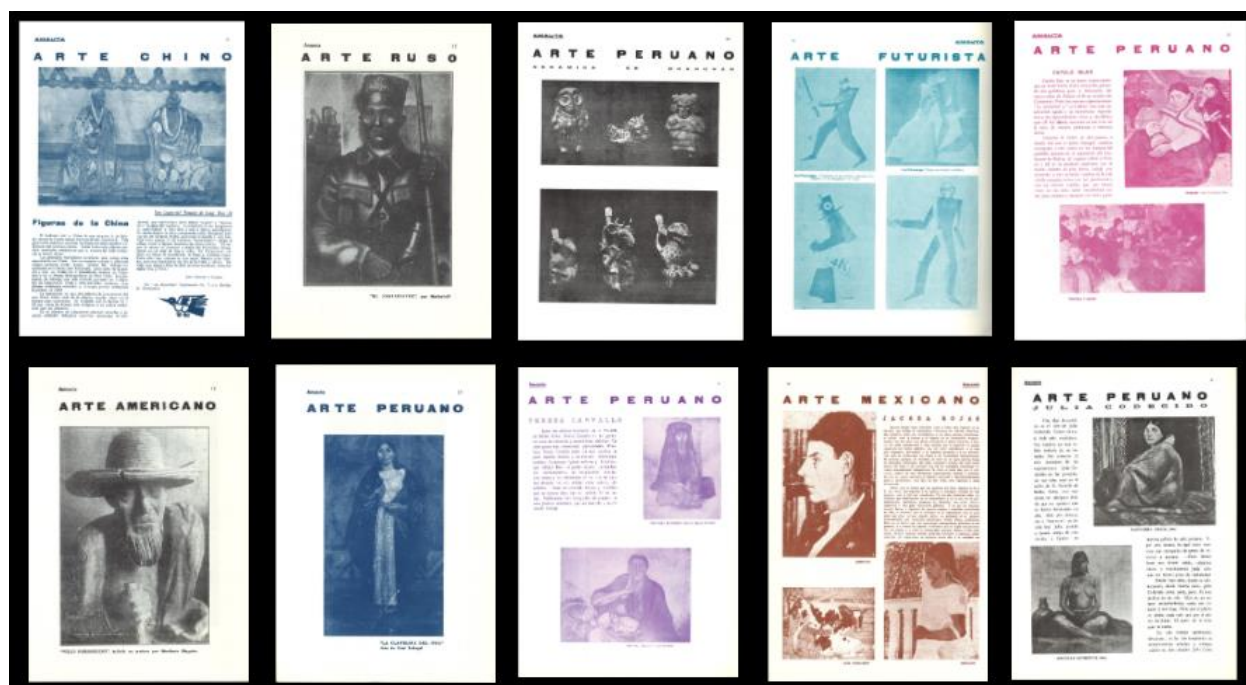


Figure 8: Selected art features from *Amauta* issues, 1926–1929, demonstrating Mariátegui’s interest in showcasing art from Peru alongside art from locations across the globe. Graphic created by author from original scans of facsimile *Amauta* pages.

Nonetheless, anthropologist Deborah Poole has noted that in early twentieth century Peru, photography did not have automatic access to the category of “art,” even though it was already accepted as an art form in Europe and North America. In fact, its mechanical and reproducible nature led some critics to assert that it had “a value more industrial than artistic,” associating it with kitschy bourgeois taste rather than the traditional artistic values of the landed oligarchy, which favored painting.²³⁹ If interested in producing “art,” Poole suggests that photographers essentially had two options available: 1) “intervening *as artists* in the chemical and mechanical process of photographic production,” (i.e. by making the metaphorical artist’s hand visible through stylization of focus, framing, angle, etc.) or 2) transforming the mechanically-produced image into a work of art through manual intervention on the print, for example with retouching

²³⁹ Poole, “Figuerola,” 44.

or coloring.²⁴⁰ By manipulating photography in one of these two ways, artists could make their photographs transcend mere documentation or technology; these were the strategies by which the “undesirable realism of photography might be sentimentalized and improved.”²⁴¹

It is this link between sentimentalization and the making of photographic art that many photographs published in *La Sierra* exploited. *La Sierra* featured photographs employing both of the aforementioned strategies, in addition to some employing neither (and thus lacking the status of “art”). Here, I will only examine the art photographs *La Sierra* published that made use of the former strategy.

One prime example is a photograph by the well-known Cusco photographer Martín Chambi (Figure 9). Notably, the photograph was printed with an attribution to Chambi, implying the importance of the individual artist, and signaling that this was a special kind of creative work. It shows a solitary figure playing an indigenous reed flute known as a *quena* while sitting on the stones of a pre-Columbian architectural ruin. The image is backlit by the early morning sun. The caption published with the photograph names the region and village where the image was taken, then states, “As Inti, the tutelary God of the Race, sets fire to the land with his sacred flame, the Indian pours the melancholy of his poetic soul into his *quena*.” This caption invokes the specifically Inca past as the past of the entire “Indian” “race” through its mention of Inti as the “tutelary God of the Race”; *Inti* is the Quechua name for the sun as well as the solar deity at the center of Inca state religion.²⁴² And while the “melancholy” in this extremely sentimental caption

²⁴⁰ Poole, “Figueroa,” 44.

²⁴¹ Poole, “Figueroa,” 46.

²⁴² Klarén, *Peru*, 18.

is not explained, it is implied by the ruins upon which the subject sits—it is the melancholy of having fallen from Inca civilizational glory.²⁴³



Figure 9: Photograph by Martín Chambi, as reproduced in *La Sierra*, Year 1, Number 8, 1927 (rotated 90° clockwise). The caption translates to, “Nuñoa—Ccajsilli. As Inti, the tutelary God of the Race, sets fire to the land with his sacred flame, the Indian pours the melancholy of his poetic soul into his *quena* [reed flute].” Original scan of *La Sierra* page.

While this photograph was not explicitly labeled as “art” in the journal, it displayed qualities for which the journal had previously praised Chambi as an artist. In the inaugural issue of *La Sierra*, the journal’s director, Juan G. Guevara, lauded Chambi with the following words: “Martín Chambi.—He is one of the young and brilliant artists of the lens. Admirable captor of

²⁴³ Víctor J. Guevara spends considerable time detailing the manifestations of this fall from glory in his essay on “the indigenous problem” published in the second issue of *La Sierra*. For example, “Their ancient skills in fabrics, ceramics, and others, have decayed enormously in relation to the Inca age... Their prodigious roads and their stupendous aqueducts have disappeared... They don’t construct anything like their ancient monuments.” See Guevara, “El problema,” 9.

backlit images. The photographs that we publish are to place the artist at the top of the line, anywhere.” From this statement, it becomes evident that Guevara considered Chambi an “artist of the lens” because of his lighting choices, i.e., due to his intervention “as an artist” in the mechanical process of photography making.



Figure 10: Photograph by Martín Chambi, as reproduced in *La Sierra*, Year 1, Number 1, 1927. It was captioned with a Spanish phrase translating to, “Evoking the Inca Past.” Original scan from *La Sierra* page.

This inaugural issue of *La Sierra* also featured photographs by Chambi, such as the one shown in Figure 10. The photograph appears on a page consisting entirely of images taken in Cusco, the capital of the former Inca empire. This photograph, captioned “Evoking the Inca Past,” again deploys the trope of romantic backlighting to add drama, mystique, and emotional weight to the depicted scene. However, the faceless subjects of this photograph are two imagined

Inca people—people who could not really appear before the lens of the twentieth-century camera. Thus, the artifice of the photograph is here played up through the presence of defunct historical figures, as well as through the choice to use backlighting, the archaizing costumes, and the stylized poses the figures hold. This image is not meant to depict the real, but rather to artistically depict an imagined historical ideal that could be evoked, and perhaps even magically invoked, in the twentieth-century present.

Additional photographs appear in *La Sierra*, which display some similar qualities. One example is a Chambi image located right next to the photo captioned “Evoking the Inca Past,” on the same page in the journal’s first issue (Figure 11). Cusco’s status as former capital of the Inca empire is emphasized on that page by the backlit image of the two purportedly Inca figures. For *La Sierra*’s producers, this status reinforced Cusco as a pure source of power for indigenous regeneration and Peruvian nationhood. An excerpt from Luis E. Valcárcel’s book *Tempestad en los Andes*, published in the same *La Sierra* issue, states that Cusco is “vernacular, nationalist, pure, with an ancient pride of legitimate American lineage.” Yet the backlit image here deploys the same romanticizing photographic technique to portray not autochthonous subject matter, but rather a European-influenced fountain purchased in 1872 from a New York-based company called Janes, Kirtland & Co.²⁴⁴ The image is captioned, “Beautiful fountain in the Plaza de Armas.” This use of the same technique for the two photos, and the placement of the photos side by side, “sentimentalizes and improves” the reality of the impurities embedded in Cusco’s materiality in order to assimilate the Euro-American landscape architecture into Chambi’s visual argument about the spiritual power of the city. A nearly identical backlit photo of a plaza

²⁴⁴ “Manco Capac Statue, Monument of the Inca in Cusco, Peru,” Getty Images, accessed May 14, 2018, <https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/photo/manco-capac-statue-monument-of-the-inca-in-cusco-royalty-free-image/849749794>.

fountain in the Andean town of Huánuco, taken by Julio C. Acevedo, was published the following year (1928), on a page clearly labeled “*Arte fotográfico*,” or “Photographic Art.” This image sees Acevedo, as artist, extending the visual argument beyond Cusco to include the broader Andean region in the magical territory infused with Inca spirit and purity.



Figure 11: Photograph by Martín Chambi, as published in *La Sierra* in 1927. The photograph shows the fountain purchased in 1872 for the Plaza de Armas in Cusco, which came from a New York-based company called Janes, Kirtland & Co. The caption translates to, “Beautiful fountain of the Plaza de Armas.” Original scan from *La Sierra* page.

Another Chambi image published in this journal, titled *Andean Dawn*, makes a similar case using a different approach (Figure 12). Here, Chambi occupies the role of artist by taking advantage of the early morning sun to capture a dramatically lit scene. Unlike the first three Chambi images discussed, however, this one is not squarely backlit, and it places an emphasis on the natural landscape as an essential component of indigenous life. Two indigenous figures can

be seen in the image, but they occupy a much smaller proportion of the frame compared to the figures in the other photographs we have seen; the landscape plays a more prominent role here. The figures stand among stony ruins and trees at what appears to be the outskirts of a settlement. Meanwhile, the contour of the nearby mountains provides compositional structure, roughly bisecting the frame diagonally, and additional, paler mountains are visible in the distance. The printed title above the image, *Andean Dawn*, declares the territorial specificity of the depicted scene, and the caption reinforces this.

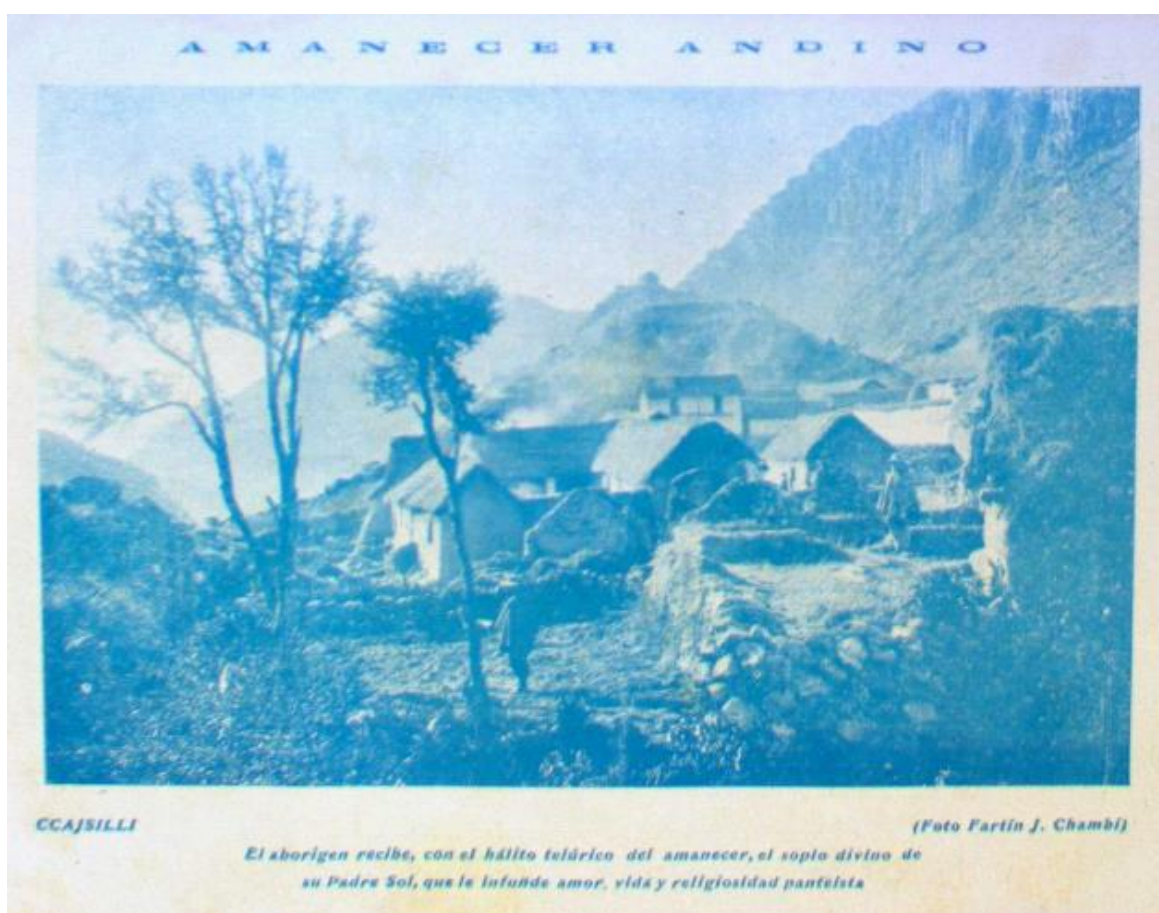


Figure 12: Photograph by Martín Chambi, as published in *La Sierra*, Year 1, Number 10, 1927. The title above the image reads, “Andean Dawn.” Original scan from *La Sierra* page.

Like the caption of the first Chambi image discussed, this one conveys a romanticized idea of indigenous life with a focus on the spiritual: “The native receives, with the telluric breeze

of the dawn, the divine breath of his Father Sun, who infuses him with love, life, and pantheistic religiosity.”²⁴⁵ But here, the spiritual is tied directly to the land itself. The “telluric breeze of the dawn” is metaphorically equated with the “divine breath of... Father Sun”—the Spanish words *hálito* and *soplo* both have connotations related to breath. Thus, the “divine breath” of Inti is itself “telluric,” that is, tied inherently to the soil of the place. While the caption was probably written by the staff of *La Sierra* and not by Chambi, the heightened emotion of the artist-photographer’s high contrast lighting choice, the apparent orientation of the indigenous figures toward the sun, and the prominence of the landscape elements in the composition all lend themselves to a reading such as the one provided in the caption.

In contrast, *Amauta* tended to publish photography that emphasized its connection to an indexed reality rather than its artistic “sentimentalization and improvement” of “undesirable realism.” In fact, it was precisely for realism that *Amauta* valued photography. For *Amauta*, photography was not just another artistic medium; its physical-chemical registering of the subjects it depicts meant that it provided incomparably materialist opportunities for visual representation. Because the criterion for production of photography *as art* in early twentieth century Peru was the eradication or mitigation of “undesirable realism,” to use photography as an art form in a Marxist journal that already reproduced art in other media would be to squander a unique opportunity to disseminate a more objective form of visual truth.

Thus, eschewing the crafted and nostalgic racial-national communities of *La Sierra*’s photography, *Amauta* instead valued photography as a documentary tool to convey the economic and revolutionary realities of the day. It would be misleading to suggest that *Amauta* only published images focused on class politics and was devoid of imagery focusing on race or

²⁴⁵ The original Spanish reads, “El aborigen recibe, con el hálito telúrico del amanecer, el soplo divino de su Padre Sol, que le infunde amor, vida, y religiosidad panteísta.”

portraying indigenous people in romanticized ways. However, the question at hand is how photography was used in the journal. When romanticized or archaizing imagery did show up in *Amauta*, it was in the form of more traditional arts, such as painted friezes.

The journal's deployment of photography is consistent with Mariátegui's political and aesthetic interest in realism. In 1925, Mariátegui wrote of Luis E. Valcárcel that, "Eagerness to poeticize the history of Tawantinsuyu and the life of the Indian dominates his prose and his thought"; later in the same essay, he asserted that "realist men must have a bit of distrust for pure poetry."²⁴⁶ As we have seen in previous sections, for Mariátegui, it was essential to "understand" reality in order to "utilize" and "transform" it through the dynamic dialectical relationship between human thought and perceptible reality, mediated by decision and action. It was realism's role to facilitate this understanding, and photography took up a part of this role in *Amauta*.

The contrast between the art photography of *La Sierra* and the non-art photography of *Amauta* is evident when one considers the way that indigenous people were represented through photography in the two journals. I have already presented examples from *La Sierra* that were powerfully romanticizing and stylized, and that showed indigenous people engaged in moments of spirituality or emotionality. In contrast, the photo page shown in Figure 13, which comes from the first iteration of a regular spread in *Amauta* titled "Economic Life," showed people engaged in what it called "Indigenous Agriculture and Commerce." The "Economic Life" feature explicitly asserted its intention to facilitate historical materialist analysis of Peru's contemporary situation by providing statistics and information about finance, agriculture, mining, industry, insurance, and transport.

²⁴⁶ Mariátegui, "El rostro."

This photo page displays two images, neither of which is attributed to a specific photographer. The top image, captioned “The Indian Farmhand,” shows an indigenous laborer plowing a field with cattle; the bottom image, captioned “The Huancayo Fair,” depicts a market day in the prominent Andean town of Huancayo. Far from focusing on the sentimentality of idealized or archaized indigenous subjects, these images are all about the economic relationships of contemporary indigenous people, and their inseparability from the political-economic systems of Peru and of the world.

This idea is driven home by the surrounding pages, which discuss matters ranging from Peru’s incipient industrial development and international trade policy to currency exchange rates and foreign debt. The inclusion in the spread of these two photographs of the economic activity of Peru’s indigenous people, and particularly “The Huancayo Fair,” contrasts with opinions like that of Cuzco intellectual Víctor J. Guevara, published in *La Sierra*, that indigenous people “don’t engage in commerce except at a scale that doesn’t deserve mention.”²⁴⁷ This editorial act also emphasizes the fact that, regardless of whatever autochthonous authenticity these people possess, they are embroiled in the totality of global capitalism.

²⁴⁷ Guevara, “El problema,” 9.

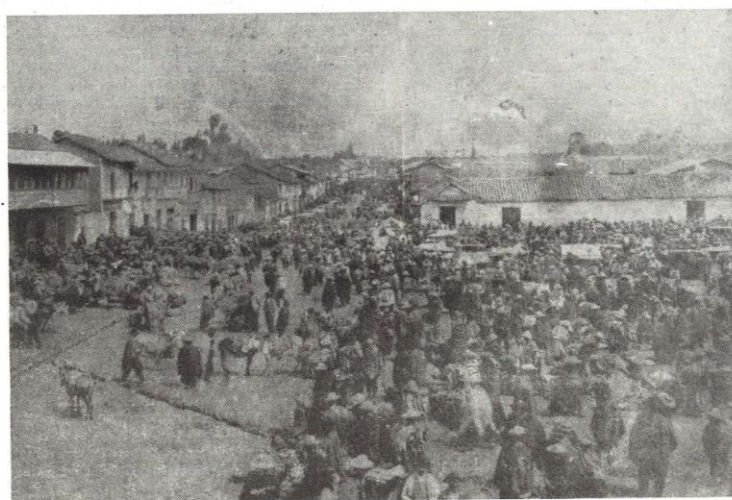
AGRICULTURA Y COMERCIO INDIGENAS**EL INDIO GAÑAN****LA FERIA DE HUANCAYO**

Figure 13: Unattributed photographs from the first iteration of the recurring *Amauta* feature, “La vida económica” (“Economic Life”), published December 1927. The caption of the top image translates to, “The Indian Farmhand”; the caption of the bottom image translates as, “The Huancayo Fair.” Original scan from facsimile *Amauta* page.

cho para las compañías nacionales y extranjeras de seguros, en sus diversos ramos. Hasta ahora, solo conocemos las memorias de la Compañía de Seguros "Rimac" y "La Popular". La primera ha obtenido una utilidad de Lp. 36.247.1.14 sin tomar en cuenta la utilidad habida en la venta de la finca situada en la calle de Lampa, que arroja Lp. 23.655.8.71. El capital suscrito de la Compañía es de Lp. 225.000.

La Compañía de Seguros "La Popular", en el mismo ejercicio, ha obtenido una utilidad de Lp. 10.159.8.20, siendo su capital suscrito de Lp. 200.000.0.00 del cual solo han erogado los accionistas Lp. 50.000.0.00. La Compañía de Seguros "La Popular" tiene un fondo de reserva de Lp. 31.500.0.00 y un fondo para dividendos de Lp. 6.000.0.00.

FINANZAS

Banco Hipotecario y Crédito Agrícola

El Gobierno ha sometido al Congreso dos proyectos de ley creando el Banco Hipotecario del Perú y el Crédito Agrícola Intermediario a los cuales ha prestado ya su aprobación la Cámara de Diputados. Es esta la realización que se da al antiguo proyecto de un Banco Agrícola. Extractamos del proyecto de ley aprobado la parte concerniente al capital del Banco y a sus operaciones:

El capital del Banco será de un millón quinientas mil libras peruanas, y constará de ciento cincuenta mil acciones de un valor nominal de diez libras peruanas cada una, que se emitirán a la par, de las cuales cincuenta mil acciones recibirán el nombre de acciones de la clase "A", cincuenta mil acciones de la clase "B", y cincuenta mil serán denominadas de la clase "C".

Las acciones de la clase A, serán suscritas y poseídas solamente por el Estado; las acciones de la clase B, serán suscritas y poseídas solamente por Bancos e Instituciones bancarias constituidas en la República o que realicen operaciones dentro de ella, o por el Estado; y las acciones de la Clase C, serán suscritas y poseídas solamente por las Municipalidades de la República y por el público en general, o por el Estado. Si las acciones de la Clase B, y C, son ofrecidas a los Bancos e Instituciones bancarias y a las Municipalidades y al público en general respectivamente y si el número total de las acciones de cada una de las Clases B y C, suscritas fuese inferior a las otras acciones de cada clase, autorizadas, el Estado suscribirá el resto de dichas acciones y podrá revender las acciones de la Clase B a los Bancos e Instituciones bancarias, y las acciones de la Clase C, a las Municipalidades y al público en cualquier fecha posterior, si lo considera conveniente.

El Banco podrá realizar las operaciones siguientes:

- a)—Hacer préstamos garantizados por primeras hipotecas sobre fundos rústicos, situados dentro de la República, con sujeción a las disposiciones del artículo 25 de esta ley;
- b)—Hacer préstamos garantizados por primeras hipotecas sobre fundos urbanos, situados en ciudades o pueblos de la República, con sujeción a las disposiciones del artículo 25o. de esta ley;
- c)—Hacer préstamos a la Municipalidades de la República, garantizados por primeras hipotecas sobre inmuebles situados dentro de la República o por primeras hipotecas a gravámenes sobre el producto bruto de rentas específicas de dichas Municipalidades, con sujeción a las disposiciones de los artículos 26 y 27 de esta ley, respectivamente;
- d)—Comprar o adquirir en otra forma, y vender o enajenar en otra forma, hipotecas dadas en garantía de préstamos sobre propiedades de la naturaleza prevista en los incisos a), b) y c) de este

La máquina en la agricultura de la costa



Tres tractores en pleno trabajo en las tierras de la nueva irrigación de "Huando"

Figure 14: Unattributed photograph from the second iteration of "La vida económica," published in *Amauta* in January 1928. The phrase at the top of the photograph functions as a de facto title, and translates to, "The machine in the agriculture of the coast." Original scan from facsimile *Amauta* page.

Furthermore, these spreads showed that Peru's economic systems were not stagnant. The photographs of traditional "Indigenous Agriculture and Commerce" can be juxtaposed with an unattributed photograph featured in the subsequent iteration of "Economic Life" (Figure 14). This photograph was taken in broad daylight, and provides a dispassionate, centered perspective on several tractors and figures with the title "The machine in the agriculture of the coast." The caption reads, "Three tractors at work on the lands of the new irrigation of 'Huando'" (Huando is a district in the Andean province of Huancavelica). These spreads thus evoked processes of economic and technological change, which inevitably would bring social change with it. Changes to Peru's "Indigenous Agriculture and Commerce" would have impacts on national and international economic and social reality, and vice versa.



Figure 15: Unattributed, autographed photograph of Diego Rivera, as published in *Amauta* in 1927. The image accompanied an article titled, "Diego Rivera: The Artist of a Class." Original scan from facsimile *Amauta* page.

Amauta also printed several autographed photographs of people, which were consistently unattributed and treated as non-art. One example is an autographed photo of Mexican indigenist communist painter Diego Rivera, published alongside an article titled, “Diego Rivera: The Artist of a Class.” The inscription on this photograph is a manual intervention in the printed image, but rather than assign the photograph a status as art, the autograph distances the photograph from art, further linking it to the real. Linguistic theorist J. L. Austin argued that signatures “tether” writing to its “utterance-origin,” i.e. to the agent from whom writing issues.²⁴⁸ And Jacques Derrida argued that a handwritten signature implies the “empirical nonpresence” of the signer, yet attests to the signer’s “having-been present in a past now or present which will remain... in the transcendental form of presentness.”²⁴⁹ In other words, the signature can be understood as an enduring marker of a real moment in time, not unlike the photograph itself. The signatures on the photographs in *Amauta* function *unlike* the signature on a painting, for example, which would signal the past-presence of the person who produced the image. Here, the signature is of the person depicted. Therefore, the depicted person is registered with a kind of amplified or doubled reality—their visage is indexed through the chemical and mechanical processes of photography, and they further index their presence and agency through the physical act of signing the image. In the case of Rivera, the double reality of this signed photograph reinforces the reality of his living and working as a pro-indigenous, communist revolutionary artist. It suggests that events of historical importance are being enacted in real, present time, by real people, and that it is not necessary to turn to a nostalgic imaginary to find a great history. Rather, it is possible to make history now through intervention in the present reality.

²⁴⁸ J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 60–1.

²⁴⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 20.

In short, photography was often granted the status of art in *La Sierra*, while it was never considered art in *Amauta*. Guevara and the contributors to *La Sierra* embraced photography as art because they valued it as a tool for creating romantic identitarian imagery. Allowing photography to be art, which frequently manifested formally with dramatic backlighting, allowed photographers to use the medium to depart from contemporary realities, imagining solutions to the inequalities of Peruvian society based on Inca nostalgia and Andean regionalist tellurism. In contrast, Mariátegui and *Amauta* rejected photography as art, and instead exploited its indexical connection to the real in an attempt to help readers understand contemporary political economic realities, ongoing processes of change, and possibilities for action. Through the grounded understanding of contemporary political economy that photography was to help foment, the hope was that *Amauta*'s audience would become equipped to intervene dialectically in material reality, taking up revolutionary, class-based action for themselves.

CONCLUSION

For both Mariátegui and Lukács, the promise of realism was that it might foster an accurate, objective understanding of history in order to facilitate dialectical, class-based intervention in its course. In other words, the ultimate goal of realism for both theorists was to galvanize people to engage in emancipatory struggles towards a communist future. Perhaps the best way to conclude this investigation of Mariátegui's realist indigenism is to ask whether *Amauta* achieved this goal.

Víctor Mazzi Huaycucho recently published an assessment of the direct and concrete effects of *Amauta* on workers in the Peruvian mining center of Morococha, in the central part of the country. He examined the ways the magazine affected both real-world organizing and the local mining press, during and immediately after Mariátegui's life. According to him, *Amauta* circulated in Morococha and other mining centers of Peru from the publication of its first issue. Mariátegui maintained friendships with Italian immigrants who settled in the area, including Carlo Pezzutti, who ran a bookstore in Morococha. These relationships formed a conduit for contact between Mariátegui and his Lima-based circle and the local workers and intellectuals of Morococha, Jauja, Cerro de Pasco, and Huancayo.²⁵⁰

As a result of this early distribution, Gamaniel Blanco (a teacher) and Adrián Sovero (a worker in the mines of the Cerro de Pasco Copper Corporation)²⁵¹ entered into epistolary contact with Mariátegui, and took it upon themselves to further distribute *Amauta* and Mariátegui's biweekly newspaper, *Labor*, among workers in the region.²⁵² Their written relation with

²⁵⁰ Mazzi Huaycucho, "Impacto," 92.

²⁵¹ Cerro de Pasco Copper Corporation was a North American company formally constituted in 1915 that bought the mining concessions of Cerro de Pasco and Morococha in the early twentieth century. Mazzi Huaycucho, "Impacto," 92.

²⁵² Mazzi Huaycucho, "Impacto," 93.

Mariátegui led him to send one of his close associates, Julio Portocarrero, to aid them in unionization efforts among the mine workers, many of whom were indigenous.²⁵³ In addition to these unionization efforts, Blanco and Sovero founded the Sociedad Pro-Cultura Nacional, or National Pro-Culture Society, which aimed to provide “revolutionary culture” and education to mine workers in hopes of raising their political consciousness.²⁵⁴

Significantly, it was *Amauta*’s “objectivity” in reporting on a 1928 flooding incident in the Morococha mines that raised the journal’s credibility and importance among workers in the area.²⁵⁵ The flood resulted in the deaths of dozens of miners, but the vast majority of press coverage failed to address the specific causes of the flood or the Cerro de Pasco Copper Corporation’s responsibility for its occurrence.²⁵⁶ The fact that *Amauta* clearly held the corporation accountable for the disaster, and explicitly pointed out its habit of “treating the rights of its indigenous workers with insolent contempt” led locals to trust the publication for accurate information about working conditions.²⁵⁷

The following year, the organizing efforts came to fruition with the formation of a Tactical Workers’ Committee at Morococha, which led a strike in October 1929. Delegates of the Tactical Workers’ Committee traveled to Lima to petition for official recognition from the Ministry of Development, which moderated labor disputes.²⁵⁸ Although they failed to win the raise they were seeking, they won official recognition of their right to unionize.

²⁵³ Mazzi Huaycucho, “Impacto,” 94. This was an enactment of the Marxist radicalization of indigenous proletarians in industrial or semi-industrial contexts that Mariátegui envisioned in his final years.

²⁵⁴ Mazzi Huaycucho, “Impacto,” 93.

²⁵⁵ Mazzi Huaycucho, “Impacto,” 94.

²⁵⁶ The mine’s superintendent at the time, George B. Dillingham, had ordered the perforation of a ventilation shaft that ran directly under the Morococha lagoon. Mazzi Huaycucho states that suspicion exists that the flood was induced knowingly, in order to lower the costs of production by draining the lagoon and thus eliminating the need to filter its water. See Mazzi Huaycucho, “Impacto,” 94.

²⁵⁷ Mazzi Huaycucho, “Impacto,” 94.

²⁵⁸ Mazzi Huaycucho, “Impacto” 96. Members of this delegation, including Sovero, met Mariátegui while in Lima.

Also in 1929, Gamaniel Blanco co-founded a publication in Morococha with another teacher from the local Workers' School, César Augusto Palacios. This publication was titled *Alborada* ("Daybreak"), and it served as a cultural magazine, offering articles about literature, union rights, and self-education. According to Mazzi Huaycucho, *Alborada* "imitated the journal *Amauta* with regard to sections and treatment of cultural topics."²⁵⁹ And in 1930, Blanco published a work titled *Monographic Notes from Morococha*. Likewise, Mazzi Huaycucho states that "One who reviews *Monographic Notes from Morococha* will promptly enter into the conviction that its format adopts and adapts the journalistic design of the magazine *Amauta*."²⁶⁰

In short, both the politics and the aesthetics of *Amauta* proved to be influential in labor organizing in Morococha. Mazzi Huaycucho credits the journal with "leaving a set of styles, formats, and critical position as a journalistic model in each article published."²⁶¹ In addition, he points to the influence of *Amauta*'s realist lens, which never remained strictly local, but instead emphasized the relationships between local matters and the totality of world economic and historical change. He notes that mining journalism in Morococha came to adopt a similar broad "panorama of the culture of its age," and states that *Amauta* led to correspondence between workers at Morococha and other workers outside the country.²⁶²

Overall, it would be hard not to acknowledge that *Amauta*'s political aesthetics managed to "rouse progressive forces to new, politically effective activity," to use Lukács' terms.²⁶³ The journal and its editor have passed through many phases of skepticism, from those who viewed it as too Marxist as well as those who viewed it as not Marxist enough, and likewise from those

²⁵⁹ Mazzi Huaycucho, "Impacto," 98.

²⁶⁰ Mazzi Huaycucho, "Impacto," 99.

²⁶¹ Mazzi Huaycucho, "Impacto," 99.

²⁶² Mazzi Huaycucho, "Impacto," 99.

²⁶³ Lukács, "Realism," 57.

who viewed it as too indigenist and those who viewed it as not indigenist enough. Yet Mariátegui's realist indigenism succeeded in providing the spark for a continually developing yet crucial insight: That white, mestizo, and indigenous workers are all brothers in the class struggle.

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