

# The Latin American Left and the Contribution of Diego Rivera to National Liberation

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## THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

Alongside the struggles for national liberation and the efforts to democratise the bourgeois nations of Latin America, there exists a reflection on the discursive formations tenaciously constructed by the organic intellectuals of these popular movements. This implies a general characterisation of the various movements' local practices. This can be seen as the tendency that requires placing historical and social structures within theory, while at the same time praxis specialises the modes of replication of each social formation.<sup>1</sup> However, we have heard enough of crisis, external debt and the democracy movements as sole observable examples of how structural processes transform into concrete situations. The struggle for power can be articulated without resorting to generalisations or oversimplified empirical particularities. The transnational character of capitalism cannot be rejected without specific ruptures. Just as capitalism vaporises praxis into a generalising theory, so too it dilutes the transformative power of isolated movements into extremely ineffective particularities. Politics, as the struggle for power, is the encounter between historically structured consciousness and the concrete specificities of history requiring change. In this sense, revolutionary transformation is not possible without revolutionary theory.

Another problem that we need to address is the non-textual discursive formation of national liberation in Latin America. This applies to underdeveloped nations and those peripheral to Western capitalism. For the Left, 'textuality' is something less than universal in as much as illiteracy is a condition characteristic of rural populations and large parts of the working class. Functional illiteracy consists precisely of reducing reading to only the most elemental needs: reproduction, circulation and capitalist production. This ultimately affects all social

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1. For more on these concepts see Louis Althusser, *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus*, various editions. My references to discursive forms arrive by way of Michel Foucault, *El orden del discurso* [*Archaeology of Scientific Reason*], Archivo de Filosofía, no 4, Populares, Mexico City, 1982. Also see Michel Pecheux, *Lingüística y Marxismo: Formaciones ideológicas, aparatos ideológicos del Estado y formaciones discursivas*, Archivo de Filosofía, no 4, Populares, Mexico City, 1981.

classes because there are functional illiterates among the exploiters too.

If we then merge functional illiteracy with the absence of a theoretical tradition, the result on the discursive formation of the Latin American Left will be to incorporate the modes of diversity appropriate to local communities. Ethnic groups, as well as artisans and workers, must contribute their hybrid and unequal modes to current theoretical foundations. These complex and contradictory modes of signification are deciphered and orientated by intellectuals and artists as organic components working towards national liberation. This formulates a project in which discourse is constant, on the basis of what popular communities signify at the same time as they appropriate the historical reality that they signify. The ideological state apparatus functions for its own benefit and constructs the discourse on power; the Left must do the same for national liberation.

### *NATIONAL LIBERATION AND DIEGO RIVERA*

Diego Rivera is an oversized man in overalls who carries an Apizaco cane, wears large shoes and a Sandinista hat (or does Sandino wear a Riverian hat?). But he is also a myth-maker, brilliant lecturer and clever artist creating scandals through the media. He is a muralist, illustrator and promoter of populist publications, while simultaneously being a womaniser, an inconsistent militant, the man of jolting political shocks, the Cubist, Trotskyite and supporter of the Soviet Union and China. He is a materialist unsure whether his thinking is based on philosophy or economics; but also a historian engaged in synthesising images of the Pre-Columbian past. What are we to make of Diego Rivera? Should we divide him into compartments that distinguish between his art and his public image? Or wait until we discover the political expedient of the militant Rivera? One hundred years after his birth, none of this should be forgotten. We must not turn to Rivera for mere commemorative reasons but rather for the historic need to locate the complex and contradictory discourses of this individual engaged in creating the historical subject of national liberation.

In no sense do any of Rivera's multiple facets contradict his true commitment to national and Latin American liberation. Even his choice to paint for imperialist North American patrons could be considered one of his astute liberation tactics. But this points to a major difficulty in conducting a political analysis of Diego Rivera. It seems that each of his actions must be accommodated to singular moments within a process – none other than national liberation. This approach would permit that even his skids to the Right might be assumed as the 'cunning manoeuvres' of an abstract subject superior to the concrete subject who realised them. If this analysis is achieved, not only will Rivera's position be secured within national history, but it will also be recognised as a process that requires the construction of its historical subject in the ideological struggle orientated by the politics of the class for which Rivera endeavoured.

## MEANING AND POWER

Rivera's political propositions march to the beat of the consolidation of the Mexican state and the people's organisations that tended to oppose it. Since painting his first mural in the Bolívar Amphitheatre at the National Preparatory School (1922), Rivera constructed his own personal Positivism which is complicated by his exaltation of the harmony between science and art. This mural attempts to show the position of the *científicos*<sup>2</sup> contradicted by the orientalisng spiritualism of figures such as José Vasconcelos.<sup>3</sup> The bureaucratically rigid figures, signified by the application of gold, are entirely detached from the rural and Mexican in this painting. The inclusion of actress and love interest Lupe Rivas Cacho and author Palma Guillén as models does not merely signal a private joke but expresses a quotidian sense of experience normally kept secret in elite private life. This is equivalent to Rivera's use of Cubism merging with the Tricolour of the Mexican flag and his references to the armed struggle of the Mexican Revolution. During this time, Rivera's political position began to form along three lines: reference to daily experiences in the consolidation of the post-revolutionary state with working-class organisations; the struggle between Positivism and Vasconcelos's idealism; and an urge to signify that nature, as much human as animal or plant, all corresponds to a newly emerging Mexican national identity. The reduction of all this to visual signs had to pass the trial of the Bolívar Amphitheatre mural to culminate in his murals at the Ministry of Public Education (1923–28) in which a new subject is included: *el pueblo*, the people.

As an enactment of his popular ideology, Rivera participated in the foundation of the journal *El Machete* (1924–29), which initially served as the official mouthpiece of the Painters' and Sculptors' Union and later became the organ of the Mexican Communist Party (PCM). Within his painting and writing, Rivera regularly evokes *el pueblo*, the nation and socialism. These interrelated concepts in his work refer to a discursive formation accomplished through visual signs, pointing to a way of life as forming the nodes of society and towards the production of texts that align themselves ideologically in solidarity with 'the exploited peoples', such as in the manifestos Rivera 'signed' (for example, 'Manifiesto For An Independent Revolutionary Art', 1938).

A vacuum, never resolved, was the characterisation of the state to which the PCM contributed with its thesis on winning over the soldiers. Rivera undertook to show this utopian idea through his incorporation of a Zapatista *corrido* (a popular narrative song form) in his Ministry of Public Education mural, just as fellow muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros had done in an illustration for *El Machete*. The repressive character of the state was thereby obscured by a concurrently unifying and pacifist ideology. This corresponds to a PCM without strategic clarity and a tendency to substitute its absence with temporary tactics.

The political will to encourage the struggle in the interests of the exploited remains unconcretised in the absence of explicit definition from rival political parties. Things grind to a halt in metaphors or in references from the so-called 'experts' of those represented. This gives Rivera's position an overt and precise ideological character that reduces it to voluntarism. Voluntarism in his images of *campesinos*<sup>4</sup> and the

2. *Científicos* were members of the elite class that prescribed to a rational, scientific belief in liberal progress.

3. Post-revolutionary President Alvaro Obregón appointed José Vasconcelos to serve as the Secretary of Education. In turn, Vasconcelos selected Rivera and other radical muralists to produce educational murals inside public buildings. Vasconcelos's politics were far from revolutionary. In fact, his most respected project, the publishing of *La Raza Cósmica*, was an extremely ethnocentric diatribe against indigenous peoples.

4. Although *campesino* may easily translate as 'peasant', I feel that it does not carry the level of condescension often apparent in its English usage. Throughout this translation, I have kept *campesino* in its original un-translated form.

working classes; voluntarism in his sense of social and historical proposals; voluntarism in his enunciative texts that do not convert into motivational slogans. Such is the internal ideological limit of the discourse on Rivera. His proclamations appear merely scandalous and his paintings constitute a significant subject of popular struggles, which is not the *pueblo* itself.<sup>5</sup> Neither in his way of life nor in his public activities was Rivera a 'popular' figure in the widest sense. He was the known working-class adviser and labour leader, the famous painter and a public persona whose work was always obstructed by the bourgeois and communist media.

Two examples illustrate this. The first is Carlos Gutiérrez Cruz's poem included in Rivera's painting of a mine at the Ministry of Public Education.<sup>6</sup> The other is a drawing that presents the post-revolutionary agrarian reform as a project compatible with Catholicism. The Gutiérrez Cruz verses, evoked by Rivera, had to be replaced in the painting due to public pressure on Secretary of Education José Vasconcelos. The poem declares:

fellow miner  
bent by the weight of the earth  
your hand mistaken  
when you extract metal for money.  
Make daggers  
with all these metals,  
and in this manner  
you will see that the metal,  
is then for you.

Rivera's political effectiveness would seem to depend on the media, 'surprised' that such an evidently anti-state artist was permitted to paint a mural within the Ministry of Public Education. This demonstrates Rivera's mode of politics, which demands two goals: the securing of subjects that result from partisan ideological evidences and a constant reply to the state's position. This latter goal need not always take an adverse position but can encourage state projects considered progressive by the Mexican Communist Party. Such is Rivera's position in his politically engaged prints urging Catholic acceptance of the post-revolutionary agrarian reforms, at the same time that the state was using the anarcho-syndicalist Casa del Obrero Mundial intellectually and physically to attack Catholic church institutions. Rivera attempts to minimise these confrontations by calling for coexistence between state projects and Catholic doctrine. Rivera does not otherwise pronounce on religion, the state or private property. He proceeds instead to influence the struggle for power through other routes, such as the media, direct action and artistic aims.

Rivera's artistic position is the key to this discourse and is easily recognisable by the public in one mural. Rivera's attitude towards the artists Jean Charlot and his colleague Amado de la Cueva came to public attention when he used his administrative authority, conceded to him by the state, to expel them from the Ministry of Public Education. He further complicated his artistic authority by overpainting the murals of these colleagues with his own work on almost two complete sections of the Ministry. Rivera imposed an ideology, not by way of mere

5. Muralist José Clemente Orozco is self-critical of this problem by establishing three forms: the political militancy of the artist who should be on one side or the other; the ignorance of the '*pueblo* against others and the myths and rites imposed by their readings'. See José Clemente Orozco, *Autobiografía*, Era, Mexico City, 1970.

6. Carlos Gutiérrez Cruz, *Obra poética revolucionaria*, Domés, Mexico City, 1981.

authoritarianism but based rather on the rigour of his own muralistic discourse. Rivera in fact left two murals by Charlot and de la Cueva as testimony to how poor the results would have been if the entire programme had been left to them. The internal politics of muralism and the politics against the state constitute the starting point of the discourse on Diego Rivera. But it was Rivera's aesthetic quality and his ability to create new meanings within the national reality that really made him so influential. Not only did he use the themes of workers, *campesinos* and Mexican nature, but he also discovered significant pictorial methods and ways to include pertinent texts without violating artistic licence. His synthesis of design, skilful use of colour and, above all else, his presentation of a non-picturesque discourse make the Ministry of Public Education murals the definitive beginning of a position that obtains its value in the ideological struggle to make politics.

Rivera left unsigned the document 'In the Margins of the Painters' Union Manifesto' published in *El Machete*. This offhand gesture by the 'official government painter' scorns those opposed to the mural in the National Preparatory School. Rivera knew that his mural was situated in an inaccessible location and responded with political praxis against another of the lifelong attacks against him by the right-wing media.

### NATURE AND IDEOLOGIES

To signify nature and rescue the image of the *pueblo* required historical and social reflection. Rivera discovered the political dimension by way of disclosing the history of popular sources. The inclusion of the popular reference to the *corrido* about revolutionary Emiliano Zapata and the verses of Gutiérrez Cruz in the Ministry of Public Education mural was political in intention. The *corrido* reveals a need to signify history in its own distinctively popular manner, just as the images of the Gutiérrez Cruz verses expressed popular sentiment. In this manner, art acquires in the eyes of the *pueblo* something deeper than a 'mere motif'. Something similar had been seen in the works of vernacular portrait painter Saturnino Herrán (1887–1918). On the other hand, academic painters, such as Leandro Izaguirre (1867–1941), created anachronistic Pre-Hispanic history paintings. None of this is reproduced by Rivera whose achievements mark the beginning of revealing history as essentially resistance and popular struggle, not simply by including popular references but by producing new meaning. The historic truth is manifested by Rivera's aggressively new sign system that confronts the outdated bourgeois notion of 'ugliness' as an artistic evil.

### OTHER SIGNIFICATION

New meanings in artistic practice do not solely involve social and historical investigation as the grounds for political militancy, but simultaneously begin to establish links of discovery to its predecessors. In this respect, printmaker José Guadalupe Posada, who stood out as the leading figure in Mexican art precisely because he was indigenously popular,

could be deliberately ignored through the machinations of the newspaper magnate Antonio Vanegas Arroyo. The ideological construct of creative genius tends to impede not only radical reflection but also praxis itself. But to find Posada completely indifferent towards the bourgeois prestige of artistry gives another dimension to his political position. In *El Machete* Rivera states:

the worker and campesino need the professional technician but require that he acts as a brother and not an overseer. In Russia, they are treated as equals and because of the necessity of their work are protected with much consideration; they do not try to make them slaves as it is claimed here in Mexico by lying playboys who think they are party bosses.<sup>7</sup>

This characterisation of the technician at the service of the *pueblo* compels Rivera to adopt a certain persona in his unconventional mode of dress, including a pistol to signify the need for struggle. The title *¡fíjate trabajador!* [Just imagine, worker!] is Rivera's socialist call in which the working classes discover a new 'truth' already realised in 'Russia'.

Politics is not a hankering after power itself but rather a complex demand for a 'new order'. The government that had to admit the necessity of this 'as the only possibility for peace, development and justice in Mexico' also had to accept that 'each worker and campesino organisation be permitted to retain arms'. This corporatist position, put forward by Rivera, promotes a type of defence as guarantee of both life and government.<sup>8</sup> This quasi-fascist thesis, which overrides the class struggle, reveals considerably less than what lies behind it as the practical proposition of true socialist consciousness.

### THE POPULAR REFERENT

Two referents demonstrate Rivera's preoccupation with constructing new meaning. The first is his reflection on working-class taverns, known as *pulquerías*.<sup>9</sup> *Pulquerías* are evoked not only for their use, but also as productive sites of a language that counters the dominant institutionalised rules of the bourgeoisie. He states: 'pulquería paintings are a perfect art ... the art of the new order'. It is not just the art of the *pulquería* bars that attains this significant character but also their names, which have virtual folklore status – such as the 'mundane social swamp of the best quality', which can end in the 'disorder' of the bourgeois visitors' distinguished activities. In *Mexican Folkways*, a journal of multi-class diffusion, Rivera adduces similar reasons to exalt *retablo* art.<sup>10</sup> He champions 'Mardonio Magaña, campesino, the greatest contemporary Mexican sculptor' as the producer of 'those mysterious dimensions that function through their empty space and by way of their volume'.<sup>11</sup>

Just as Rivera's own image is constructed as a popular one, so too he seeks to establish national symbols in all his political critiques. For example, in 1927 Rivera published an article in *El Libertador*, 'The Current Situation in Mexico', in which he instances 'el rancherismo' as the rural petty bourgeoisie that would neutralise and terminate the *ejido* system of communal land-ownership.<sup>12</sup> He discusses the 'progressive

7. 'Fíjate Trabajador', *El Machete*, 2, March 1924, cited in Tibol, p 37.
8. 'La inercia del Gobierno da pie a un nuevo golpe reaccionario, cuestión de vida o muerte', *El Machete*, 3, April 1934. Cited in Raquel Tibol, *Diego Rivera: Ilustrador*, SEP, Mexico City, 1986, p 39.
9. 'La pintura de las pulquerías', *Mexican Folkways*, 7, June–July 1926. Cited in Tibol, *ibid*, p 65.
10. 'Los retablos: verdadera, actual y única expresión pictórica del pueblo mexicano', *Mexican Folkways*, 3, October–November 1925. Cited in Tibol, *ibid*, p 35.
11. 'Mardonio Magaña, campesino, el más grande escultor mexicano contemporáneo', *Mexican Folkways*, March–April 1930. Cited in Tibol, *ibid*, p 85.
12. *El Libertador* 12, June 1927. *El Libertador* was the organ of the Continental Organizing Committee of the Anti-Imperialist League of the Americas. Rivera served as its director, while Salvador de la Plaza was its administrator.

Texanisation of Mexico' in its political and economic effects and foresees the creation of a system in which:

a labourer would begin to consume such items as a felt hat and shoes – much less comfortable, hygienic and very hideous looking [in comparison with what they previously wore]. Inside the wooden cabin, that he now inhabits instead of the traditional *jacal* dwelling, the labourer has a phonograph and a sewing machine which his *compañera* uses. He does not appear to be the sort of slave we know today, but one much less dangerous for being in a subdued position. He appears not to be a slave because of some insignificant comforts which control him as a mass consumer of manufactured goods in the land of imperialism.<sup>13</sup>

The ideas, the geographical and historical referents in their use of materials, the scale, perspective and intense colour characteristic of the work of Mardonio Magaña, Hermenegildo Bustos<sup>14</sup> and Abraham Angel<sup>15</sup> in *retablos*, children's drawing<sup>16</sup> and Obregón Santacilia's architecture, are constantly present in Rivera's work. These comparisons extend even to Frida Kahlo's house in Coyoacán, the Anahuacalli on Altavista Street. Rivera comments on a house designed by Obregón Santacilia that:

it is obvious that the true architectonic style determines the aesthetic connection to certain social needs, as well as to specified climatological conditions and the quality of the most available construction materials. Significantly, it is also the ability of labour and the economic structure involved in securing a living place that finally produces a style.<sup>17</sup>

In the body of the article, Rivera attacks the 'colonial style imposed on Mexico by the conquistadors and the caste system that followed', emphasising that only 'when the Hispanic aesthetic contribution was profoundly infiltrated by the genius of the indigenous worker, were the best results obtained'. Referring to the architectural works of the dictatorial period known as the Porfiriato, Rivera called this style the 'architectonic shame' of an 'idiotic Mexican bourgeoisie'. Rivera then attacked this reversion to European-style edifices as the 'sensational, boastful and dramatic extramural nationalism' from which 'the mundane *charro* and neo-colonial style arrive'.

Appropriating the theoretical jargon of the functionalist architects, Rivera argues that recovering the space of the neighbourhood, as Obregón did, is to recapture the logical and rightful handling of forms, volumes and colours. As such, architecture becomes a site of struggle between old and new traditions, between colonialism and national perspectives, between a false and superficial nationalism and one with a profoundly popular base. His prosecution of the 'playboy' architects culminates with his incursion into the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), which has its roots in Rivera's political struggle to create new meaning and signification. Such is the thrust of Rivera's response against the attacks he received for his intervention at the Ministry of Public Education.<sup>18</sup> He does not simply show off his knowledge of architectonics at UNAM but instead defends the knowledge that is architecturally at the base of the plastic arts. The point that we must recognise is not Rivera's discussion of the use of space. Rather, it is the importance of his political theses, the abundant evidence of the indigenous worker's hands-on labour in colonial buildings and the failures of the 'playboy'

13. Ibid.
14. 'La pintura mexicana: el retrato', *Mexican Folkways*, 5, February–March 1926. Cited in Tibol, *ibid*, p 59.
15. 'Abraham Angel', from the 1924 portfolio printed by the Talleres Gráficos de la Nación in homage to the painter Abraham Angel. Angel was born on 7 March 1905 in Mineral del Oro and died in Mexico City on 27 October 1924.
16. 'El dibujo infantil en el México actual', *Mexican Folkways*, 10, December 1926–January 1927. Cited in Tibol, *ibid*, p 75.
17. 'La nueva arquitectura mexicana: una casa de Carlos Obregón Cantacilia', *Mexican Folkways*, 9, October–November 1926. Cited in Tibol, *ibid*, p 71.
18. 'Sobre arquitectura', *El Universal*, 28 April 1924. Cited in Tibol, *ibid*, p 41.

architects. Like the Soviet 'New Order', the architectonic question is a struggle to find and implement a liberating spatiality. This spatiality is found both in decoration and in the 'logical and rightful' adaptation of each space in accordance with anti-colonial traditions and customs that will open new modes of living.

Rivera's politics culminated in multiple conflicts in 1929. As a political leader in the Anti-Imperialist League of the Americas, Rivera suffered the May Day repression and began to understand the repressive nature of the bourgeois state under President Plutarco Elías Calles, who then served as the Honorary President of the League. In August of that year, Rivera was named Director of the Faculty of Fine Arts at the Universidad Nacional de México. In this capacity, he drew up a programme of study that would establish the school as 'a great workshop that will continue the function of collective artistic production as it was seen in the great days of art'. This plan 'would permit the pedagogical access to certain materials and techniques to students whose economic circumstances would not normally have allowed entry to higher education'. This was too much for the 'playboy' architects who shared the building with the Faculty of Fine Arts. A long note at the end of Rivera's programme describes the vicissitudes of this confrontation 'in the face of the hard attacks' and until 'a manifesto was issued'.<sup>19</sup> The 'Manifiesto for the Workers and Campesinos of Mexico' denounced UNAM for its declaration that 'each and every Faculty has joined in solidarity to block the criticism made by working-class organisations'.<sup>20</sup> Rivera specified the events that led to his leaving the Faculty of Fine Arts and called for the creation of a National Worker and Campesino University. At this point Rivera encountered the divergent class-affiliations that separated the students of architecture from those studying fine arts. When originally designated Director of the Faculty of Fine Arts, he had characterised the role of art-making:

more important than any other objective, art is a means to contribute to the social organization and is an extremely effective weapon when used by the working classes as part of the class war. Art should posit new ways of thinking about beauty, a revolutionary beauty.

He then went on to denounce the political separatism of the architects, which demonstrated their tendency to 'gratify the desires of the elites that assigned them work' and rendered them 'inoperable' in character towards the interests of the working classes. Rivera concluded that 'all of this, then, is the typical engagement of class'. He ends with a call to the productive classes:

All public riches have been created by the hands of workers and campesinos!! They are the ones that pay entirely for the state system, in addition to the so-called Autonomous University!!

Rivera wondered if 'the bourgeois-Autonomous University is ever going to give us what we need? Never!! It will only create exploitative futures and endeavour to shut us up by giving us the crumbs of culture.' So with that, 'the proletariat must protest in the street to demonstrate their desire for a Worker and Campesino University'.

19. 'Exposición de motivos para la formación del plan de estudios de la Escuela Central de Artes Plásticas de México'. Cited in Tibol, *ibid*, p 87.

20. In *El Nacional Revolucionario*, 26 May 1930. Cited in Tibol, *ibid*, p 99.

### THE USES OF DIEGO

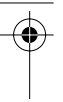
During his life, Diego Rivera was co-opted by various bourgeois fashions. Yet there was something resistant that impeded a complete expropriation. A certain imperialist tendency honoured him in vain, acting as a distractive manoeuvre but unable to defeat the popular line that Rivera had adopted. His fate is similar to that of other like projects. As in the case of most art, Rivera's is also dissociated from its original purposes, and no less when simplified by a radical line of national liberation. We have seen more than one form of liberation attempting to appropriate it. An important example of this is Samuel Ramos's attempt to reduce Rivera to a 'national aesthetic' in accord with his peculiar philosophy of all things Mexican. Ramos, the leader of a uniquely 'Mexican' philosophical current, was a member of a Mexican delegation to the IV Congress of the International Red Union. Pedro Rojas, the driving force behind the art collection at the Universidad Autónoma Nacional de México, decided to edit a monograph of Ramos's writings on Diego Rivera. The project was supervised by Rivera as a way for him to vindicate his conflict with UNAM. He must surely have protested to Ramos before the book went to press. For instance, the section dealing with 'style' states:

The merits of Rivera consist of bringing to light the possibilities of beauty in an exiled world, transfigured and exalted by the magic of art. If such observations have not much influenced the adverse reactions to Rivera, as a way of producing a favourable response to his painting, there is one fact that no one can ignore. No matter where in the political spectrum one falls, the artistic activity of Diego Rivera is one of the most important events in the spiritual history of our nation.<sup>21</sup>

Ramos does not strive towards a particularly Mexican philosophy, but instead posits an ideological solution to the cultural value of Rivera's oeuvre by elevating it above any political position. This dissociation of Rivera's work from his political and social convictions, which have been relatively vindicated with time, is the means by which the artist himself has been depoliticised. This is attained with regard to the murals by drawing on documents only relevant to the time of their painting. But Rivera's production of new symbols that criticise bourgeois exploitation, depict the colonisation of Mexico and the advancement of socialism, while at the same time opening a space for the unnamed masses of history, thankfully does not stop here.

The present corpus of texts on Rivera is dominated by its focus on his pictorial vision. This fails to account for the history of Rivera's murals and instead concentrates on his artistic abilities as an easel and mural painter. Yet, despite these many deformations, be they biographic, cinematic, sexist, art historical or state-sponsored, Rivera's political contribution withstands because the discursive formation in which it is inserted will triumph. This is not voluntarist continuity but is supported by historical evidence. One hundred years after his birth, Diego Rivera remains one of Mexico's most contradictory figures in need of a complete re-reading. Rivera resists Leftist jargon as well as that of the Right. Interpretations of Rivera need not be arbitrary if founded on the inescapable proposition articulated in his murals and on its vital

21. Samuel Ramos, 'El estilo indígena mexicano', in *Diego Rivera*, UNAM, Mexico City, 1958.



discourse. Those presently engaged in the complexities of socialist liberation do not have time to pause for reflection. Nonetheless, we know, Rivera waits and endures because he never lost sight of victory. Rivera might have lacked theoretical consistency and partisan orientation, but neither is an ideological or practical defect when one contributes as many open-ended possibilities as he did.

Translated by Dylan A T Miner

