MARIATEGUI'S AESTHETIC THOUGHT:
A Critical Reading of the Avant-Gardes*

Vicky Unruh
University of Kansas

José Carlos Mariátegui devoted the most productive years of his short life (1894–1930) to analyzing contemporary Peru. Because of this emphasis, a substantial portion of the research conducted in the past thirty years has addressed his political and social thought. More recent investigations, however, have sought to document the significance of his aesthetic ideas, an appropriate development in light of Mariátegui's extensive writings on literature and the visual arts. For example, the periodical *Amauta*, which appeared under his editorship twenty-nine times between September 1926 and March 1930, was primarily a magazine of the arts and intellectual life, notwithstanding its political agenda and *indigenista* orientation.[1] Also, Mariátegui's detailed essay on Peruvian literature, "El proceso de la literatura," is the most extensive of the *Siete ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana* (1928). In addition, between 1924 and 1930, the widely read Lima weeklies *Variedades* and *Mundial* regularly published his critical articles on national and international topics, including a large number of pieces on literature and the arts. Recent inquiries into Mariátegui's literary thought have addressed such issues as his modern concept of literary realism, the relationship between his artistic concerns and a Marxism that has been repeatedly characterized as "open," and the role of aesthetic issues in his social agenda for Peru.[2] This research has established Mariátegui's importance in the arts, not as a creative writer (although he did write poetry, plays, and short stories in his youth) but as one of Latin America's first practicing literary critics.

*Support for this study came from two sources. Initial research into Mariátegui's role in Peru's avant-gardes was conducted in the summer of 1983 in Lima with the support of a Tinker Foundation grant. Additional investigations, particularly into contemporary theories of the avant-gardes, were carried out in the spring of 1986 under a resident fellowship at the Center for Twentieth-Century Studies at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. I would like to thank *LARR* Managing Editor Sharon Kellum and one anonymous *LARR* reviewer for constructive editorial suggestions.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100022998 Published online by Cambridge University Press

A salient feature of Mariátegui's aesthetic criticism was his close attention to the positions and practices of the interwar avant-garde movements in Europe and Latin America as well. He had originally planned to call *Amauta* by the name *Vanguardia*, an orientation evident in the journal's commitment to disseminating innovative intellectual and aesthetic currents as well as in Mariátegui's frequent references to himself and his contemporaries as "hombres de la vanguardia." He also commented extensively on expressionism, futurism, dada, surrealism, and Latin American responses to these movements. In addition, Mariátegui has often been characterized as the prime mover of Peruvian vanguardism of the 1920s, particularly in his role as editor of *Amauta*.[3] But although scholars have noted the connections between his support of aesthetic innovation and his social agenda for Peru, no in-depth investigation has been done on the relationship between his exegesis of the avant-gardes and the development of his aesthetic thought. The purpose of the present study is to undertake this investigation.

Mariátegui was an avowed Marxist, "convicto y confeso," and a founder of Peruvian socialism. But in politics as well as art, he was also a divergent thinker and a critical interpreter of contemporary movements who appropriated diverse ideological currents in forming his own conception of Latin American history and life. For example, his political thought was shaped not only by his readings of Marx but also by Bergsonian and Nietzschean antipositivist vitalism, Benedetto Croce's aesthetic idealism, Georges Sorel's theory of myths, and the concern with cultural issues characteristic of Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci. Mariátegui's aesthetic tastes and sources were similarly diverse. His favorite artists and writers included Luigi Pirandello, Vladimir Mayakovsky, George Bernard Shaw, Waldo Frank, Panait Israti, Blaise Cendrars, George Grosz, and César Vallejo, and he drew on a multitude of contemporary experimental movements to form his own ideas about art and his own program for Peru's cultural renewal.[4] The complex connections between Mariátegui's aesthetic thought and social agenda were both manifested in and shaped by his response to the postulates and practices of the avant-gardes.

MARIATEGUI AS OBSERVER AND PROMOTER OF THE AVANT-GARDES

The European avant-gardes of the period immediately before and after World War I, which Mariátegui observed, analyzed, and publicized in Peru, undertook a serious critique of the prevailing technical modes and social relationships that had shaped artistic production. On the one hand, in rejecting mimetic conventions, avant-garde artists sought a more "authentic" apprehension of life and a return to primary experience unmediated by censors of reason. On the other hand, they

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100022998 Published online by Cambridge University Press

attacked the artist's autonomy and distance from everyday life, a privileged status originating with romanticism and culminating in late-nineteenth-century aestheticism. Although it can be argued that the vanguardists created their own brand of elitism by producing highly inaccessible works, they also promoted the model of a critically engaged artist as an alternative to the self-involved *poète maudit* of the art-for-art's-sake mode. In *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Peter Bürger posits the emergence of vanguardist discourse as a stage of self-criticism in art history and a challenge to art's social status as a bourgeois institution. "What is involved in these manifestations," Bürger asserts, "is far more than the liquidation of the category 'work' [of art]. It is the liquidation of art that is split off from the praxis of life that is intended."[5] The centrality of engagement to the avant-garde project was underscored not only by assaults on implied readers and spectators from the page and the stage but also by the eventual conversion of many vanguardists to ideologically diverse causes.

The fundamental economic and social transformations that took place in Latin American life during the decades following World War I gave Latin American vanguardism its distinct character. In the 1920s and early 1930s, self-consciously experimental artistic ventures arose in almost every Latin American country and were designated by such names as *vanguardia, arte nuevo, espíritu nuevo,* and, in Brazil, *modernismo*. These activities were undertaken primarily by groups but also by individuals and were shaped in part by Europe's avant-gardes through writers with transcontinental experience such as Vicente Huidobro, Jorge Luis Borges, and Oswald de Andrade. These efforts, which were often marked by indigenous cultural exigencies, were characterized by the affirmation of specific aesthetic positions, engagement in artistic experiments through often ephemeral little magazines, manifestoes, or manifesto-style creative texts, and occasionally serious interdisciplinary investigations into language, history, folklore, and politics.[6] Despite their regional differences, these undertakings often reflected similar agendas and generated parallel debates about issues concerning modernity versus cultural authenticity. Out of this debate arose a critical inquiry into the aesthetic values and social relationships shaping artistic practice in Latin America.[7] Because of Mariátegui's fascination with the European avant-gardes and his commitment to developing a program for Peruvian cultural independence, he became one of the more cogent and imaginative architects of that inquiry.

Mariátegui's interest in the avant-gardes dates from his European exile from December 1919 to March 1923. He had initiated his journalistic career at the age of fifteen with Lima's conservative *La Prensa* but soon became involved in movements for aesthetic and social change. During these years, he wrote poetry, plays, and short stories. In 1916

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100022998 Published online by Cambridge University Press

he participated in the aestheticist literary group that published the magazine *Colónida* and sent poetry to this review. Edited by Abraham Valdelomar, *Colónida* with its iconoclastic tone and nationalist orientation prefigured Peru's literary avant-gardes of the mid-1920s. Meanwhile, however, Mariátegui's intensified participation in Lima's radical university reform movement had begun to blur the lines between his aesthetic and social concerns, and moving toward socialism, he distanced himself from what he later called his life as a "decadent, Byzantine literary savant."[8] In 1918 he left *La Prensa* for the more liberal *El Tiempo*, where he wrote critiques of the national scene. He also founded two journals of political commentary: the ephemeral *Nuestra época* (1918) and, with César Falcón, *La Razón* (1919), in which he supported Lima's emerging labor movement and opposed the reformist dictatorship of Augusto Leguía (1919–1930). As a result, shortly after the new president assumed power, he arranged for Mariátegui's European sojourn as an "information agent" for Peru, an officially scripted exile.

Mariátegui's European experience proved fundamental to the development of his political thought, particularly his emergent Marxism. This sojourn also vastly enriched his knowledge of contemporary artistic movements and exposed him to the postwar avant-gardes at their peak.[9] He arrived in Paris at the time when dada founders, dispersed from their Zurich center, were regrouping there and in Berlin. In Paris, dada leader Tristan Tzara's encounters with André Breton and Phillippe Souppault were paving the way for the merger into surrealism. Mariátegui's most significant Paris contact, however, was Henri Barbusse, founder of the leftist group *Clarté*, to which many surrealists were later drawn. This association kept Mariátegui in touch with developments in French surrealism even after he returned to Peru.

Mariátegui spent most of his time in Europe in Italy, where he was exposed to the visual avant-gardes at the 1920 International Exposition in Venice of works by major painters and sculptors. He developed a strong admiration for the theater and narrative of Pirandello, an enthusiasm that survived the latter's conversion to fascism. Shortly after Mariátegui arrived in Rome, he read the major futurist manifestoes and heard futurist founder F. T. Marinetti speak. At the Teatro Sperimentale degli Indipendenti, founded by former futurist Antonio Bragaglia in 1922, Mariátegui attended performances of plays by major modern dramatists and of futurist *sintesi* (brief, stylized compositions) and heard musical experiments by Francesco Balilla Pratella, author of the *Technical Manifesto of Futurist Music*.

In 1923 Mariátegui arrived in Berlin, then a center for literary and visual expressionism, for the Berlin phase of dada and for the emerging experimental theater of Erwin Piscator and Bertolt Brecht. There Mariátegui met Herwarth Walden, editor of *Der Sturm*, with whom he corre-

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100022998 Published online by Cambridge University Press

sponded after his return to Peru and whose work he published in *Amauta*. He also visited Walden's private galleries of contemporary art, which he later called one of the world's most "complete museums of modern culture."[10] At Berlin's Café Schoteldam, Mariátegui became acquainted with the satirical paintings of George Grosz, an artist he continued to admire, and he also attended performances of expressionist drama. Although he canceled a projected trip to the Soviet Union, Mariátegui began to follow developments in Russian postrevolutionary visual arts, literature, and film during this time. He also became interested in the progressive cultural policies of Anatol Lunatcharsky, whom he praised for keeping the USSR open to cubist, expressionist, and futurist experiments. Mariátegui later observed approvingly that nowhere did the arts of the avant-gardes receive greater official encouragement than in the Soviet Union of Lunatcharsky's era (1:114).

Mariátegui's Italian chronicles appeared in Lima's *El Tiempo* between 1920 and 1922, and a few of them addressed artistic topics such as futurism. When he returned to Lima in 1923, however, he undertook a serious analysis of the European avant-gardes in various forums: in his articles for *Mundial* and *Variedades*, in the regular literary discussion groups held in his home between 1924 and 1926, and in the pages of *Amauta* from 1926 to 1930. Mariátegui predicted in 1924 that the playful dimension of the new art, its cosmopolitan "pirouettes," would not take root in the New World, but he perceived a potential source for Latin America's cultural development in vanguardism's critical power and creative spirit (11:19). For this reason, he actively encouraged and supported every group, artist, and ephemeral magazine in Peru and many throughout Spanish America that called themselves innovative or avant-garde. In Peru most of these publications appeared between 1926 and 1930, coinciding with the life span of *Amauta*. Those published in Lima were edited by friends or acquaintances whom Mariátegui knew through political activities or the literary gatherings in his home.[11] The work of a small number of people, several of whom were involved in forming Peru's emerging leftist parties, these magazines combined literary experiments in the vanguardist mode with Americanist, Peruvianist, or indigenista cultural politics.[12] Mariátegui encouraged these activities editorially in the pages of *Amauta* and also through personal correspondence. He gave even stronger support to individual Peruvian artists whose work was highly innovative or influenced by the literary avant-gardes.[13] He also directed generally favorable attention toward selected Hispanic vanguardists outside Peru, although he did not analyze their aesthetic positions with the same rigor to which he subjected the European movements.[14]

Although Mariátegui's support of self-designated vanguardist artists and activities transcended ideological affiliations, his assessment

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100022998 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of the pertinence of the European avant-gardes to Latin America provided a focal point for his inquiry into the relationship of art to social life. Unlike Marinetti, Breton, or Huidobro, Mariátegui was neither a "believer" in vanguardism nor a promoter of a specific aesthetic creed. Rather, he viewed the avant-gardes as the most important aesthetic development of the postwar era. He wrote in 1924, "Los más grandes artistas contemporáneos son, sin duda, los artistas de vanguardia" (6:63). He later submitted that because art was a barometer of the times, the avant-gardes in their playful and iconoclastic modes were the "quintessence" of the same declining bourgeois society whose artistic expectations they sought to attack. But the attack on bourgeois art, Mariátegui asserted, could be in intent as well as outcome either reactionary, leading to an extreme aestheticist posture of art for art's sake or the "decadence" of mere "formal conquests," or revolutionary, posing a reconstruction of positive cultural values (6:18–22).

Mariátegui believed that the avant-garde movements were coherent, despite their internecine differences and chaotic demonstrations: "El proceso del arte moderno es un proceso coherente, lógico, orgánico, bajo su apariencia desordenada y anárquica" (6:63). He also viewed these movements as constructive and integrative: "El cubismo, el dadaísmo, el expresionismo, al mismo tiempo que acusan una crisis anuncian una reconstrucción" (6:19). Although each avant-garde tendency in isolation might not present a specific new formula for art, each provided a different "element," "value," or "principle" in the elaboration of an integrated whole (6:19). Although Mariátegui occasionally defended the playful dimension of modern art and confessed personal delight in savoring its offerings like "bonbons" (12:109), he perceived a serious purpose in its experiments. "Aunque tengan todo el aire de cosas grotescas," he wrote, "se trata, en realidad, de cosas serias" (6:69). His exegesis of vanguardism was therefore directed toward discerning its coherent, constructive, and integrative elements as well as the substance of its critical potential and "revolutionary spirit." In Mariátegui's view, these qualities had been announced by dada but had culminated in surrealism. Through this analysis, he gradually developed a concept of an "authentic" or "comprehensive" vanguardism, which was epitomized in his mind by some of his favorite artists like Mayakovsky, Grosz, and Vallejo. Their art constituted an original and eclectic synthesis of many vanguardist techniques, Mariátegui suggested, and was motivated by a unifying and constructively critical worldview.[15]

Amauta's first issue cast its own vanguardism in similarly eclectic terms: "Estudiaremos todos los grandes movimientos de renovación—políticos, filosóficos, artísticos, literarios, científicos. Todo lo humano es nuestro."[16] Artistic material always made up a significant portion of *Amauta*'s offerings—even after its commitment in 1928 to more explicitly

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100022998 Published online by Cambridge University Press

political ends. But a certain anti-aestheticism was implicit even in the review's initial position, which placed art on an equal footing with other intellectual activities as only one of several endeavors to be undertaken by Peru's "hombres nuevos." The title of Mariátegui's essay on Peruvian literature, "El proceso de la literatura," reveals a good deal about his views on the artistic issues of his time. As he explained, he was employing the word *proceso* in its forensic sense, thus affirming that in his examination of Peruvian materials, and by extension in his commentaries on the avant-gardes, he was placing literature, or art itself, under scrutiny and on trial. For Mariátegui, that critical process addressed three fundamental issues, which will be examined here: the mimetic connection, or art's relationship to reality; divisions and connections between artists and their public and between high art and popular culture; and the implications of vanguardism for creating a new Peru.

MARIATEGUI'S CRITICAL READING OF THE AVANT-GARDES

Art and Reality

One unifying thread in the international avant-garde project was its attack on conventions of representation. Underlying visual and verbal experiments was a rejection of referential mimesis, an antipathy toward narrative, and a loss of faith in the cognitive power and vitality of Cartesian discourse. The avant-gardes' antimimetic stance was a legacy of the romantic tradition and turn-of-the-century symbolism, but it differed from these movements in conception and intent, if not always in results. For example, Chile's Vicente Huidobro, whose work bridged the avant-gardes of the Old World and the New, affirmed in his 1914 *Non serviam* manifesto that young poets should turn their backs on both nature and literary tradition to create an autonomous world.[17] At this point, he was still writing within the aestheticist tradition of the poète maudit. In contrast, futurists, dadaists, and surrealists alike affirmed that in rejecting representation, they were turning toward reality, not away from it. "I love nature but not its substitute," wrote dada artist Hans Arp in opposing the artistic practices of naturalism.[18]

The denigration in Mariátegui's writings of the scientific and the rational in favor of the intuitive, the unconscious, and the metaphysical can be traced in part to the diverse antipositivist, vitalist turn-of-the-century philosophical currents that shaped his intellectual development, but this attitude also constitutes one of his strongest ties to the avant-gardes. Rationalism, the foundation of the postwar bourgeois world in decline, had served only to discredit the rationalist project with its "paradójica eficacia de conducir a la humanidad a la desconso-

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100022998 Published online by Cambridge University Press

lada convicción de que la Razón no puede darle ningún camino" (3:23). Declaring that the era of Descartes had ended, Mariátegui celebrated the demise of the "mediocre positivist edifice" (3:26) and characterized his own age as antirationalist and "shaken by the strong currents of the irrational and the unconscious" (7:39). Agreeing with the surrealists, Mariátegui affirmed that reinstating the fictitious, the irrational, and the fantastic would reintegrate art with life: "El arte se nutre de la vida y la vida se nutre del arte" (6:186). His vitalist declaration that art was a symptom of the "plentitude of life" (6:186) was comparable in spirit to Berlin dada founder Richard Hülsenbeck's account of his simultaneous poems as nothing more than a "hurrah for life!"[19] Mariátegui also praised the French surrealists for having paved the way for the "recovery of the superreal" (6:178) and suggested that the demise of artistic realism had actually facilitated knowledge of reality and energized man's relationship to the world. Once liberated from the "trammel of verisimilitude," artists would be free to launch themselves into the "conquest of new horizons" (6:24).

International vanguardism blamed art's distortion of human experience not only on mimetic realism but also on the institutionalization of art itself, particularly literature. Tristan Tzara characterized literature as "a note of human imbecility to aid future professors,"[20] while Breton described it as "one of the saddest roads that leads to everything."[21] Walter Benjamin's landmark essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," posited that the work of art, having gradually lost all claims to authenticity or uniqueness, had relinquished in the modern era the remnants of its ritual or sacred function, its distance from ordinary life or "aura."[22] But the avant-gardes' response to the demise of the aura of art was actually equivocal. In reacting against aestheticism, vanguardists attacked art's distance from everyday life. As alternatives to the concept of an organic work of art, their decontextualized "works" parodied art's techniques and questioned its status.[23] Yet by setting the search for primary experience against the mediated quality of mimetic activity, they created a new myth of the authenticity and originality of art, an aura of immediacy rather than of distance. This quest for unmediated experience was manifested in denigrating the verbal, particularly the discursive, and favoring the visual, either directly by suppressing narrative in the visual arts or by emphasizing the visual and synthetic aspects of verbal art. "No more words," proclaimed Tristan Tzara,[24] as the futurist sintesi, the multigeneric collage form *Merz* of dada, and the unexpected surrealist metaphor all sought the imminence of (in)sight.

Mariátegui, who has been called the Walter Benjamin of Latin American letters,[25] also recognized that the avant-gardes were attacking art as an institution. He observed that ultramodern aesthetic experi-

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100022998 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ments arose from a conception of art that was "absolutely diverse" (6:64) and that the dada reaction against contemporary art's intellectualism contained the "germs of a new aesthetic" (6:43). But he was drawn far more toward the avant-garde impulse to recreate art's aura through a new idea of authenticity than toward the critique of aura implicit in verbal gymnastics and decontextualized works. Mariátegui recognized the critique of aestheticism implicit in the avant-gardes' iconoclasm and the attack on rationalism underlying linguistic experiments. He also valued visual and verbal satire, as in the work of George Grosz. Elsewhere Mariátegui affirmed the inextricable relationship between form and content (2:309) and conceded the critical power of "pure nonsense" in his review of the work of Peruvian writer Martín Adán (11:155). Nevertheless, Mariátegui's writings on art revealed a fundamental prejudice against self-reflexivity, and he suggested that contemporary art's obsession with form as an end in itself was ultimately a sign of sterility and decadence. Asserting art's proximity to the authenticity of life, he preferred art in which devices were not laid bare and the illusion of organicity was maintained. This preference can be detected in his review of Soviet writer G. Ognev's *Diario de Kostia Riabtzev*: "La literatura decadente y 'deshumanizada' nos ha habituado tanto al ruido de su tramoya que esta obra en la que funcionan silenciosamente las ruedas y las poleas del artificio nos llega con la naturalidad de un mensaje directo de la vida" (7:110–11).

A sustained dichotomy emerged in Mariátegui's own discourse between art as distorting artifice and art as primary or "organic" engagement with life. This contrast is reminiscent of avant-garde rhetoric affirming that language served both to deform the more primary activity of thought and to mask what might be more directly experienced without it. Similarly, Mariátegui argued for art that would capture the "living essence" of reality (7:23) and praised works that contained the "smallest possible dose of literature" (7:110). He censured writers whom he regarded as mere "artisans of the word" (1:172) while praising those like Vallejo who synthesized elements from symbolism, expressionism, dada, and surrealism but also used a language divested of "all rhetorical ornament" (2:310, 316). In his critique of verbal artifice, Mariátegui characterized visual experience as more immediate than verbal. He perceived this predilection in the avant-gardes, and it also permeated his own writing. For example, his observations on the Italian landscape linked visual experience with intensity and authenticity but traditional literary verbiage with artificiality and deceit. He asserted that in order to know Italy "naked and living," he wished to see it "without literature" and without the "ambiguous and captious lens of erudition" (3:77–78). In Mariátegui's opinion, the desire to see the world differently was the motivation behind avant-garde innovations in the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100022998 Published online by Cambridge University Press

visual arts (6:62), and he suggested that synthetic principles had enriched verbal art as well. For example, the dramatic work of Pirandello and the futurist sintesi had eliminated traditionally "literary" and "wordy" theater and created a more faithful apprehension of reality (3:71). Similarly, the best silent films were those that almost totally eliminated the verbiage of captions and relied instead on the immediacy of the image, like Charlie Chaplin's *The Circus*, a work that Mariátegui awarded his highest praise. He also commended the interaction of the visual and the verbal in the poetic art of Peruvian José María Eguren, in the synthetic poems of Argentine *ultraísta* Oliverio Girondo, and in the overpowering of words by image in the cinematographic techniques of Cendrars's *L'Or* (6:114).

It must be kept in mind, however, that in Mariátegui's worldview, restoring experiential immediacy to art and achieving a productive interaction between the real and the fictitious were desirable because of their implications for pragmatic and metaphysical human needs. He affirmed humanity's need for a metaphysical conception of life (3:24) and manifested his intellectual kinship with the surrealists who sought in their pursuit of the marvelous an intensification of human experience. Accordingly, Mariátegui suggested that a new art, divested of the rationalizations of realism and the pretensions of aestheticism, ought to satisfy "man's need for the infinite" (3:23) and encourage the development of a myth that might serve as an ideal, "una gran ficción que pueda ser su mito y su estrella" (6:24–25). This Sorelian concept of the contemporary world's need for a "great fiction" to overcome postwar skepticism is fundamental to Mariátegui's idea of art. Furthermore, because he viewed his own era as revolutionary and quixotic, it was the activist impulse of this search for a new faith that linked his artistic agenda with that of the vanguardists who saw poetry as a "fabulous form of action."[26] Mariátegui wrote, "La vida, más que pensamiento, quiere ser hoy acción, esto es combate" (3:17). Thus the activity of art was inextricably intertwined with the conduct of human affairs, and for this reason, Mariátegui's assessment of the avant-gardes returned repeatedly to his conception of art's engagement with social life.

The Artist and the Public: Bridging the "Great Divide"

Although the relationship of artists and intellectuals to the public they were addressing was called into question by the European avant-gardes, the tone of this inquiry was often equivocal. The avant-gardes' ideal of the new artist attacked the academic spirit of intellectual life as well as the often megalomaniacal aestheticism of the poète maudit, the visionary artist who had "often seen God face to face."[27] But the new

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100022998 Published online by Cambridge University Press

model of the critically engaged artist was as ambiguous as the avant-gardes' attitude toward the public, which it simultaneously assaulted with invectives and unintelligible works and courted in attempting to forge a new alliance. Andreas Huyssens, a contemporary theorist of international vanguardism, recently coined the term "the great divide" to describe the "volatile" quality that has characterized the relationship between high art and mass culture since the mid-nineteenth century, and more specifically, to designate the kind of critical discourse that distinguishes between the two.[28] The avant-gardes' critique of aestheticism unquestionably attacked such dichotomies, but their attempts to bridge the great divide often exacerbated the breach. For example, although the futurists provoked riots at their *serate* (evening demonstrations), they declared that their objective was to instill a "current of confidence" in the audience.[29] "We spit on humanity," the dadaists declared,[30] yet Tzara later envisioned a messianic, transformational union between artists and their knowledgeable public: "the wisdom of crowds . . . joined with the occasional madness of a few delicious beings."[31] Although the surrealists inherited the mystical legacy of the poète maudit, they called for an art "capable of facing the breadth of the street"[32] and affirmed that "poetry must be understood by everyone."[33]

As an incisive reader of the avant-gardes, Mariátegui often perceived these contradictions. He shared the rejection of the aestheticist artist and the disengaged intellectual, however, and he spoke disparagingly of the secessionist spirit of the "morbid art of turn-of-the-century literati in whom a worn-out epoch is in decline" (3:160). In its overestimation of art and its "fondness for reclusion," the aestheticist ivory tower had removed art from effective social engagement. Despite the fact that aestheticism persisted in some postwar art, Mariátegui believed that the attack upon cultural conservativism was the most salubrious feature of the avant-gardes. As alternatives to the traditional "hierophants" and "priests" of high art, modern movements like expressionism and dada had promoted artists as latter-day jesters and minstrels in an attempt to level hierarchies between artist and public (6:65). Mariátegui also praised futurism for having contributed to the demolition of "the tedium of the academic, the old, and the known," which had isolated artists and intellectuals from the mainstream of Italian life (15:221). But he concluded that the movement's mistake was reinstituting the "artocracy," or what Marinetti called "the proletariat of the gifted men in power."[34]

According to Mariátegui, the most isolating feature of the aestheticist worldview was its overestimation of the individual poetic subject, whose intimate psychological upheavals had provided art with its center and its shape. He sometimes classified such art as "decadent," although he admired the subjectivity of writers like André Gide, Marcel

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100022998 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Proust, and Sergei Eissenin and suggested their work was a key to understanding their times. Mariátegui also admired Freud, whom he credited with having articulated in scientific discourse what poets had intuited through their art, and he agreed with the surrealists that exploring the unconscious might transform human experience. His objection to psychologism concerned its obsession with the isolated "case" of the individual artist, a cloistering, self-reflexive tendency in contemporary art that he characterized as "morbid," "sickly," a "voluptuous laxity," "neurosis," or "lassitude." In Mariátegui's opinion, such exaggerated subjectivity contributed to overestimation of the artist and an inflated judgment of art's place in society (1:198) and absorbed creative energy that might otherwise be directed toward a positive engagement with life.

On the face of it, Mariátegui's reaction against subjectivity constitutes an essential point of contact with the avant-gardes in that the decentering of the individual consciousness was a significant element of the avant-garde attack on both turn-of-the-century aestheticism and the romantic tradition. *The Technical Manifesto of Futurism and Literature* urged artists to "destroy the *I* in literature,"[35] and dada linked the cult of the individual to the decline of Western civilization. Similarly, Berlin dadaist Hans Arp declared that man was "no longer to be the measure of all things,"[36] and the surrealists campaigned against "the narcissistic individual, the one who has . . . eaten up the universe. . . ."[37] But in Mariátegui's view, the avant-gardes' censure of subjectivism was prone to "relapses" into aestheticism: "Es frecuente la presencia de relajos de decadencia en el arte de vanguardia hasta cuando superando el subjetivismo, que a veces lo enferma, se propone metas realmente revolucionarias" (6:21). The possibility of such revolutionary goals implicit in the avant-garde project was precisely what sustained Mariátegui's interest, particularly the potential role for a new breed of artists or intellectuals in bringing about change in Latin America. He often grouped traditional artists and intellectuals into a single category, disdaining the "bacillus of skepticism" that both groups had recently suffered and their status as malcontents in conflict with life and history (3:35). Yet even while Mariátegui aimed his most acerbic barbs at intellectuals and artists, he highly esteemed them, particularly those whose divergent aesthetics or ideology made them impossible to categorize. He often wrote of the emergence in a modern revolutionary era of "new men" who would assume a more engaged role in contemporary events while maintaining a critical stance.

In his search for models for these "new men," Mariátegui was intrigued by the avant-gardes' exploration of the relationship of art to politics. He insisted that no great artist had been apolitical in his pas-

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100022998 Published online by Cambridge University Press

sions and that man's indivisible spirit inevitably brought moral, political, and religious issues to bear on aesthetic, intellectual, and critical activity, just as it had in Mariátegui's own development. But in the practical world, he affirmed, cultural life and politics often operated in separate domains. The futurists' error had occurred not in exploiting the political ideals of art but rather in imagining that a committee of artists could create a political doctrine (15:222). Similarly, intellectuals as intellectuals could not engage in formulating a doctrinal line, which was the function of political parties; the proper role of intellectuals in such ventures was to contribute elements of "criticism, investigation, and debate" (7:46). Mariátegui's model for engaged intellectual critique was Henri Barbusse's periodical *Monde*, which was similar in intent to *Amauta*. Among artists of the avant-gardes, the surrealist followers of André Breton (who had neither fallen into the futurist trap of submitting politics to the "rules and the tastes of art" nor confined their activities to "pure artistic speculation") exemplified the desired balance between aesthetic ideals and political commitment (6:47). According to Mariátegui, this connection between intellectual or cultural activity and politics would naturally be strengthened in revolutionary periods. He wrote of art's relationship to the Mexican revolution, "El poder de creación es uno solo" (12:85). But he also emphasized that revolution was not merely a material enterprise: "La Revolución . . . será para los pobres no sólo la conquista del pan, sino también la conquista de la belleza, del arte, del pensamiento y de todas las complacencias del espíritu" (1:172). But even in service of the revolution, art would necessarily function within its own domain: "a la revolución, los artistas y técnicos le son más útiles y preciosos cuando más artistas y técnicos se mantienen" (3:336).

Mariátegui believed that during eras of great social upheaval like his own, the true vanguardists or "new men" were those who not only sharpened the critical tools of their own disciplines through contact with the most innovative trends but also sought to overcome the distance those disciplines often imposed from ordinary human affairs. The best artistic vanguardists (like Grosz, Girondo, Vallejo, and Diego Rivera) were those who synthesized the technical virtuosity of a range of avant-garde styles while staying in touch with everyday experience. Intellectual vanguardists were those who could somehow expose the fictive status of human myths and at the same time overcome their own skepticism and mitigate oppositions between mind and heart, critique and commitment. For Mariátegui, these passionate rationalists and faithful skeptics included such figures as *Der Sturm*'s Walden, Barbusse, Waldo Frank, José Ingenieros, Miguel de Unamuno, and Pedro Henríquez Ureña. The political impact of art and intellectual activity was to

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100022998 Published online by Cambridge University Press

be founded not on their practitioners' participation in political parties or elaborations of political doctrine but on their capacity to keep in touch through their work with ordinary life.

The need to be in touch with popular culture lay at the heart of Mariátegui's conception of the new intellectual and artist. But it is important to note that he held qualified views about the ability of the mass public to comprehend artistic creation or criteria, and his own discourse (like that of the avant-gardes) sometimes reinforced the idea of a moderate, if not great, divide. He suggested that the "common taste" had always rejected the work of great artists initially and that the general public, which possessed essentially classical tastes, denied the status of art to the radically different spirit of modern works (6:64). Mariátegui also rejected as illusion the underlying premise of the more politicized avant-gardes that an empowered proletariat could immediately create its own art. He praised Lunatcharsky for preserving the "artistic patrimony" of prerevolutionary aristocratic and bourgeois culture as well as for his efforts to educate the general public about art, and he affirmed that art was a symptom of the plentitude of a social order (1:113–14). Progress had always been achieved by the imaginative few (3:45), and transformational epochs required a creative and engaged elite, a team of "heroic and superior men" (3:52) charged with increasing the public's cultural awareness and encouraging the development of its aesthetic talents. Lunatcharsky, as both a cultural guardian of tradition and an ardent promoter of the artistic avant-gardes, was an exemplary member of such an elite, whose function was both educational and creative and whose ability to effect change depended upon a healthy relationship with "the people."

But in Mariátegui's writings, "the people" constituted a multiform entity, reflecting his mixed views on this subject. On the one hand, he saw the "unlettered man" as a "nonreflexive" believer, one generally ill-equipped to discern the relativity of his own truths and under some circumstances prey to fascist demagoguery. On the other hand, Mariátegui often spoke enviously of the ordinary person's capacity for commitment and action:

> El hombre iletrado no se preocupa de la relatividad de su mito. No le sería dable siquiera comprenderla. Pero generalmente encuentra, mejor que el literato y que el filósofo, su propio camino. Puesto que debe actuar, actúa. Puesto que debe creer, cree. Puesto que debe combatir, combate. Nada sabe de la relativa insignificancia de su esfuerzo en el tiempo y en el espacio. Su instinto lo desvía de la duda estéril. No ambiciona más que lo que puede y debe ambicionar todo hombre: cumplir bien su jornada (3:33).

The connection between artists or intellectuals and the ordinary public, however, could neither be forged through the political agenda of an assemblage of aesthetes (15:222) nor be founded on a naive return

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100022998 Published online by Cambridge University Press

to the mimetic recipe directing artists to "depict the people" (6:33). France's populist literary movement in the Zola tradition offered nothing for the revolutionary artist or critic: "Sobre la mesa de trabajo del crítico revolucionario . . . un libro de Joyce será en todo instante un documento más valioso que el de cualquier neo-Zola" (6:35). Mariátegui nevertheless considered a healthy connection with ordinary people to be the source for art's organicity and its link with life, as evidenced by his frequent employment of organicist metaphors in characterizing this relationship: "Ninguna literatura puede vivir y crecer sin raíces en una sociedad y en un pueblo vivientes" (6:159). The common sources were to be found in the artist's intuition of people's deeper concerns, in the "awareness of humanity" or the "experience or emotion of the world" (3:120). "El artista," Mariátegui wrote, "que no siente las agitaciones, las inquietudes, las ansias de su pueblo y de su época, es un artista de sensibilidad mediocre, de comprensión anémica" (15:222). In these declarations, his wording favored the collective over the individual dimension of such constructs as "the people" or "humanity." While the work of a poet might express the emotions of a single person, the spirit of the revolutionary epoch made the expression of shared pain more pertinent than the isolated emotional "case." Mariátegui observed that César Vallejo "siente todo el dolor humano. Su pena no es personal" (2:313). Mayakovsky's poetry expressed a "multitudinous faith" comparable to an epic narrative (1:176), while the greatness of Pirandello's work rested in part on its having appropriated the life of the street: "La calle, o sea el vulgo; o sea, la muchedumbre. La calle, cauce proceloso de la vida, del dolor, del placer, del bien y del mal" (6:29).

Mariátegui's belief in the organicity of art and in the need for a creative elite suggests that he saw a more privileged role for artistic activity than did the more iconoclastic avant-gardes. Yet his support for art that had descended from the ivory tower to the pains and pleasures of the street manifested the more egalitarian dimension of the avant-garde phenomenon. In his view, art could best serve its "hedonistic and liberating function" by incorporating the great divide's polarities. This kind of art would be simultaneously "rigorously aristocratic and democratic," qualities he found in Chaplin's work. Mariátegui wrote that "Chaplin alivia, con su sonrisa y su traza dolidas, la tristeza del mundo. Y concurre a la miserable felicidad de los hombres, más que ningunos de sus estadistas, filósofos, industriales y artistas" (3:74). But even if Chaplin's upheavals and antics might alleviate the sadness of the world, Mariátegui's goals were more focused and less global, although certainly no less challenging, and they ultimately brought him (and his analyses of the avant-gardes) much closer to home.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100022998 Published online by Cambridge University Press

An Indigenous Avant-Garde Agenda: Creating a New Peru

The bold objective of Mariátegui's intellectual and political project was to create a new Peru, and the material and ideological terms of this enterprise were, in his view, both autonomously discrete and inextricably linked. Realizing this goal would require not only a new Peruvian economy and social structure but also a new idea of Peru and *peruanidad*. Considering the subject matter of the other six essays in the collection that includes "El proceso de la literatura" (economics, the Indian, the land, public instruction, regionalism, and centralism), critics have understandably wondered what possible connection Mariátegui might have perceived between the experiments of the avant-gardes and the urgent material needs of Peru's Indians, peasants, and workers. Critic Gerardo Goloboff and others have correctly suggested that the avant-gardes provided a necessary link between Mariátegui's social thought and his aesthetic ideas.[38] This connection has been explored here thus far by analyzing his critical exegesis of avant-garde discourse, particularly its call for a more vital relationship between art and reality and for more engagement by artists or intellectuals in the tribulations of the ordinary public. To discern the relationship of these ideas to the specifics of the Peruvian situation, however, it is necessary to understand that Mariátegui viewed the ideological dimension of the project of a new peruanidad as a creative, critical undertaking in the hands of Peru's "new men"—its engaged artists and intellectuals. It was primarily these people that he was addressing (those he knew as well as those he hoped would emerge) in the title of his column "Peruanicemos al Perú," which appeared in *Mundial* from 1925 to 1929.

In Mariátegui's opinion, the new peruanidad was to be created out of the interaction of the international and the modern with the autochthonous and the traditional. This stance earned him harsh criticism from some contemporaries, particularly APRA founder Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre and his followers. During an era of intense nationalist rhetoric, Mariátegui was insisting on the importance of European intellectual and aesthetic trends for developing Latin American art and thought. "No hay salvación para Indo-América sin la ciencia y el pensamiento europeos u occidentales," he wrote in the preface to his *Siete ensayos* (2:12). Mariátegui repeatedly affirmed that for the postwar generation, the European experience had provided the means for Latin America's self-understanding and the stimulus for its best forms of artistic expression, as exemplified in the works of Vallejo, Rivera, Girondo, Borges, José Sabogal, and Ricardo Güiraldes. Furthermore, one major path by which American and Peruvian artists were discovering their own worlds was through avant-garde experiments. Mariátegui suggested that the accusation that vanguardism was not Peruvian was sim-

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100022998 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ply a reactionary response to its critical spirit. He cautioned nevertheless that the ideas and techniques of the European avant-gardes must be appropriated selectively; they should neither be aped uncritically nor be naively pressed into the service of "superamericanist" demagoguery by those "provincially persuaded" of the originality and cultural authenticity of their "most mediocre rhapsodies" of European "isms" (12:75).

Mariátegui's conception of the relationship between international vanguardism and the creation of the new peruanidad was shaped by his view of nationalism. The nation, he affirmed, was itself a variety of fiction whose relationship to reality was not fixed: "una abstracción, una alegoría, un mito, que no corresponde a una realidad constante y precisa, científicamente determinable" (2:235). By extension, the concept of a national art or literature was still not "excessively concrete" (2:235). It was neither something fixed waiting to be discovered by Peruvian artists nor an autonomous essence independent of historical contingencies. Instead, the new peruanidad was a "labor of creation" (2:254), a critical and creative enterprise to be shaped by a healthy interaction with reality using tools selectively appropriated from the European avant-gardes. "Lo más peruano, lo más nacional del Perú contemporáneo es el sentimiento de la nueva generación" (11:72). Yet national feeling ought to be a fundamental element of any "positive and authentic vanguardism" (11:72).

Creating the new peruanidad would first require a break with the literary models of the immediate past, and the iconoclastic spirit of international vanguardism could provide a model for this step. The aestheticist concept of an autonomous artist was a fairly recent idea in Peru and Latin America. It had emerged with turn-of-the-century poetic movements (modernism in Spanish America and symbolism in Brazil) and had been superimposed on a long-standing great divide between learned and popular culture. This tension in Latin America between what Mikhail Bakhtin would call centripetal (or normative) and centrifugal (or divergent) linguistic forces[39] was at one time characterized by Angel Rama as a continuing struggle persisting into modern times between the colonialist-shaped "lettered city" and the democratizing forces within it.[40]

Mariátegui affirmed that, with a few notable exceptions, Peruvian artistic and intellectual life was still tied to Spain by a "sickly umbilical cord" (2:24) and had extended colonialist relationships into the early twentieth century. He posited three stages in a nation's cultural development—the colonial, the cosmopolitan (allowing the influx of a variety of international trends), and the national—and he characterized his own era as the beginning of Peru's cosmopolitan period. Yet he believed that Manuel González Prada, whose most important work had

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100022998 Published online by Cambridge University Press

predated World War I by two decades, had been the first to initiate change in recommending that Peruvian art break with Spain and the conservative Lima spirit, explore Peru's indigenous traditions, seek linguistic renewal through popular sources, and search for new forms in other literary traditions.[41] Mariátegui and most of Peru's self-designated vanguardists therefore claimed González Prada as a mentor for their attack on the attempt to reinstate colonialist cultural ideals represented by Lima's "futurist" generation.[42] An important member of this group was José de la Riva Agüero, whose *Carácter de la literatura del Perú independiente* (1905) occasioned Mariátegui's essay on literature as a direct response. According to Mariátegui, Riva Agüero and his contemporaries had helped to institutionalize Peruvian culture and literature by establishing the Instituto Histórico del Perú, the *Revista Histórica*, and the Academia Peruana de la Lengua, the Peruvian counterpart of Spain's Academia Real de la Lengua. According to Mariátegui, this approach and much of the content of these efforts represented a restoration of colonialist thinking, particularly Riva Agüero's thesis that advocated adhering to peninsular models, accepting the cultural hegemony of Europe and North America, and abandoning the concept of literary Americanism as mere exoticism.[43]

The first task before Peru's and Spanish America's avant-gardes, therefore, was to complete the "rupture with the metropolis," to divest themselves of the colonialist aristocracy, and to refuse at all costs to "make ourselves fiefs to Spain again" (12:117). Eliminating cultural dependence would also require abandoning the reactionary *arielista* notion of Spanish America's Latin roots (3:148). Mariátegui more than once compared the initial role of Peruvian vanguardism to that of early Italian futurism, before its avant-gardes had become domesticated and had sought to restore aestheticist goals.

The value of the avant-gardes for creating a new peruanidad, however, went beyond the model they presented for ending cultural dependence. Mariátegui shared his contemporaries' attraction to Oswald Spengler's New World idealism and peppered his own assessment of postwar European culture with Spenglerian metaphors: a decadent civilization of "decrepitude" was facing its "twilight" and its "sunset." Yet Mariátegui often criticized his generation's utopian Americanism. He insisted instead that there were no indications that whatever emerged from a declining Western bourgeois culture would exclude Europe or spring forth spontaneously from New World soil. He believed that José Vasconcelos's prophecy of an emerging Latin American cosmic race was too utopian and that the concept of Spanish America was a fashionable phantasm of intellectual and political rhetoric that had yet to assume a coherent shape. In the case of Peru, the New World seemed at times even more weary than the Old, laboring under a lassi-

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100022998 Published online by Cambridge University Press

tude that differed in kind from the self-reflexive skepticism of a declining West: "la pobreza, la anemia, la limitación, el provincialismo del ambiente, . . . el cansancio de los que no han hecho nada" (11:17–18). Mariátegui's hope was that such an enervated environment could draw energy from the vitalist and liberationist metaphors of vanguardism, which encouraged artists to be "superior to all limitations" (11:79).

Mariátegui suggested that, to some extent, the liberating power of art could be tapped by deploying technical innovations of the avant-gardes, as demonstrated by the work of Sabogal, Girondo, and Vallejo. But Mariátegui also insisted on the need for an original spirit. As art critic Rosalind Krauss has pointed out, within international vanguardism, "originality" was a fiction of a special kind, "conceived as a literal origin, a beginning from ground zero, a birth." In this process, "originality becomes an organicist metaphor referring not so much to invention as to sources of life."[44] Interestingly, Mariátegui recognized the fictive quality of vanguardism's metaphors of origin, as when he referred to futurism's "verbal illusion of inaugurating all things" (11:118). He insisted that revolutionaries in both politics and art must realize that history did not begin with them. At the same time, Mariátegui voluntarily subscribed to the illusion of inauguration, which he seemed to believe had a salutary creative power. His own characterizations of his era, the new art, and the new peruanidad were cast in originist terms: his was the age of the "dawning spirit"; his generation was witnessing "the world in gestation" and the "germination of the New World" and bringing about the "dawn" of Peruvian literature. By casting off the skepticism of the Old World and eliminating all the "refuse" of bourgeois literature, artists could create works in which "art and the world recover their innocence" (12:107).

In Peru, the originating space that could help create a new peruanidad was to be found in part by recovering the cultural origins that had been obscured by the colonialist experience. But while Mariátegui was unequivocally committed to creating a more equitable material life and a more just environment for Peru's Indian population, his support of aesthetic *indigenismo* was circumspect. As has been shown here, in the aesthetic domain, he favored the intuitive, the unconscious, and the metaphysical over the scientific and the rational. This preference drew him toward the avant-gardes' antirationalist dimension, a feature of European vanguardism sometimes manifested in the cultivation of primitivist art forms. But Mariátegui suggested that this primitivist impulse was often merely a form of exoticism, an extension of the romantic tradition, and one more manifestation of cultural decadence. Such exoticist views of Latin America had led to ridiculous demands that Peru's Parisian-based surrealist poet César Moro produce work with indigenous themes. While distinguishing indigenist art from indige-

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100022998 Published online by Cambridge University Press

nous art (which would be produced only when Indians themselves created it), Mariátegui proposed that Peru's new artists could acquire an original creative spirit from mestizo and indigenous cultures.

In keeping with his rejection of conventional realism, Mariátegui cautioned that this approach did not mean merely using the Indian as a picturesque type, motif, or character. Instead, a creative myth for the new peruanidad, an originating "mood" could be gleaned by intuitively apprehending indigenous life and thought (2:328). "Si el indio ocupa el primer plano en la literatura y el arte peruanos," he wrote, "no será seguramente por su interés literario o plástico, sino porque las fuerzas nuevas y el impulso vital de la nación tienden a reivindicarlo. El fenómeno es más instintivo y biológico que intelectual y teórico" (2:333). By apprehending the "intimate indigenous truth," artists would communicate the poetic and the metaphysical (not the historical) truths of that world, as well as its more universal "cosmic sentiment" (11:63–64). But the purpose of artistic indigenismo, Mariátegui cautioned, was not for artists to bury themselves in tradition to extract lost emotions from some "obscure substratum" (2:310), and he parted company with indigenist writers like Luis Valcárcel who suggested a total rejection of Western thought and a return to indigenous life. Rather, the "native energy" of indigenous cultures could help artists elaborate the great myths of a new peruanidad (as Rivera had done with postrevolutionary Mexican art) and thus create an art more organically joined to the realities of life in Peru.

"El literato peruano," Mariátegui wrote, "no ha sabido nunca sentirse vinculado al pueblo. No ha podido ni ha deseado traducir el penoso trabajo de formación de un Perú integral, de un Perú nuevo" (2:242). Connections between Peruvian art and Peruvian experience were to be created by Peru's "new men" not only through the pursuit of myths linking artistic originality to origins but also through forms divested of literary artificiality. In keeping with the preference for "natural" language over verbal artifice and the belief that the art of his era should express a "multitudinous" experience, Mariátegui proposed that Spanish America and Peru's literary vanguardists could bridge the divide that had traditionally separated them from everyday experience by employing vernacular language. All classical national literatures, he affirmed, had originated with the language of the street. The Peruvian writers who had contributed most to the creation of a national literature were those who, irrespective of the quality of their art, had kept in touch with its popular linguistic sources: Abelardo Gamarra (el Tunante) through his use of street language, Ricardo Palma through his popular tone, and Mariano Melgar for his "plebeian turns of phrase" and his "streetlike syntax." Thus popular language both originated national literatures and provided the perpetual source of literary innova-

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100022998 Published online by Cambridge University Press

tion. Consequently, González Prada should be regarded as the initiator of Peruvian modernity both because he had sought formal innovations in a range of international currents and because he had supported linguistic renewal through popular sources. The innovative potential of popular language had been exploited by even the most cosmopolitan of Spanish America's vanguardist poets, among them Borges, one of those most "saturated by Occidentalism and modernity" who frequently adopted the "prosody of the people" (2:244). But because Mariátegui preferred art that maintained an aura of authenticity, he believed that popular language was most effective when it emerged from an organic connection with its sources. Thus Vallejo's use of the "vernacular turn" was considered the most authentic because it was neither deliberate nor studied: "su poesía y su lenguaje emanan de su carne y su ánima" (2:310). Through more direct contact with indigenous and popular languages and cultures, contemporary artists could draw closer to the social realities of Peru and create a "more fertile" human art.

CONCLUSION

Mariátegui's assiduous analyses of the avant-gardes were germane to the development of his ideas about art and to his interrogation of art's status as a cultural institution. These investigations of vanguardism shaped his approach to several problems: first, the relationship of artistic representation to human experience and this connection's implications for the aura and organicity of art; second, the relationship between artistic or intellectual activity and the language, culture, and experience of ordinary people; and third, the potential of the new art's modes and spirit for revitalizing Peruvian and Latin American culture and forging a new sense of peruanidad in building a new Peru.

What is most interesting about Mariátegui's artistic criticism is his resistance to the facile or doctrinaire response to the global questions that he posed. Although an intensely political person concerned with the material sources of social problems, he was also a great lover of art, fascinated by the hedonistic and liberating potential of human creative energy, its capacity to express and alleviate "the sorrow of the world," and its possible impact on social life. In the spirit of the avant-gardes, Mariátegui's critical project placed art itself on trial but insisted on maintaining for art, artists, and intellectuals a privileged, but less self-isolating, space. Although Mariátegui valued the satirical and the parodic, he preferred works of art that, notwithstanding technical experiment, maintained an illusion of organicity, an aura of presence, and an autonomy of domain. He suggested that the best art, like the work of Chaplin, was simultaneously aristocratic in its vanguardism and democratic in its human spirit. Art's relationship to social reality ought

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100022998 Published online by Cambridge University Press

to be one of engaged autonomy: "Autonomía del arte, sí, pero, no clausura del arte" (6:47–48). But if artists and intellectuals in the revolutionary era of the 1920s were to abandon their aestheticist towers to face the demands of the times, specifically the ideological project of creating a new Peru, their attitude should nevertheless remain critical. Art, Mariátegui affirmed, was "substantially and eternally heterodox" (6:64), and the role of the most engaged artists or intellectuals in any social cause would always be to provoke debate and critique.

Writing from the perspective of the third decade, Mariátegui viewed the twentieth century as one of cataclysmic change, shaken by "strong currents of the irrational and the unconscious" (7:39). Ironically, his premature death spared him many events that would have continued to test his ideas and ideals. It is difficult for the contemporary reader not to speculate about how Mariátegui might have responded to the problems of literature and engagement in Latin America posed by subsequent developments in both history and art. His views might have undergone change, as did those of other politically committed intellectuals of his time. But the legacy of Mariátegui's writing suggests that, in keeping with his own idea of Peru's "new men," he would have continued to eschew easy answers to hard questions, remaining steadfastly passionate in his reasonings and critical in his faith.

NOTES

1. The last three issues of *Amauta* (numbers 30–32) appeared after Mariátegui's death, under the editorship of Ricardo Martínez de la Torre.
2. Significant extensive studies of Mariátegui's literary work and views include Eugenio Chang-Rodríguez, *Poética e ideología en José Carlos Mariátegui* (Madrid: José Porrúa Turanzas, 1983); and the collection of critical essays entitled *Mariátegui y la literatura* (Lima: Biblioteca Amauta, 1980), edited by the Centro de Documentación y Estudios "José Carlos Mariátegui" under the direction of Ricardo Luna Vegas. Seminal work has been done by Antonio Melis, whose "Medio siglo de vida de José Carlos Mariátegui" appears in *Mariátegui y la literatura* (125–35); other important pieces include his excellent introductory essay to the anthology of Mariátegui's literary writings, *Crítica literaria: José Carlos Mariátegui* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Jorge Alvarez, 1969), 7–45; his introduction to Mariátegui's *Correspondencia (1915–1930)* (Lima: Biblioteca Amauta, 1984); and "Estética, crítica literaria y política cultural en la obra de José Carlos Mariátegui: apuntes," *Textual*, no. 7 (June 1973):66–69. Other studies dealing with selected elements of Mariátegui's literary thought include Eugenio Chang-Rodríguez, "Poética y marxismo en Mariátegui," *Hispamérica* 12, nos. 34–35 (Apr.–Aug. 1983):51–67; G. M. Aguirre Cárdenas, "La estética de José Carlos Mariátegui," *TEQSE /Fundamento: Revista de Filosofía, Psicología y Arte* (1970):53–65; Peter G. Earle, "Ortega y Gasset y Mariátegui frente al arte nuevo," in *Homenaje a Luis Leal: estudios sobre literatura hispanoamericana*, edited by Donald W. Bleznick and Juan O. Valencia (Madrid: Insula, 1978), 115–27; Elizabeth Garrels, "Mariátegui, la edad de piedra y el nacionalismo literario," *Escritura* 1, no. 1 (1976):115–28; Diego Meseguer Illán, "José Carlos Mariátegui y el realismo literario marxista," *Textual*, nos. 5–6 (Dec. 1972):9–12; Yerko Moretic, *José Carlos Mariátegui: su vida e ideario, su concepción del realismo* (Santiago, Chile: Ediciones de la Universidad Técnica del Estado, 1970); and Antonio Pages Larraya, "Mariátegui y el realismo mágico," *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos*, no. 325 (July 1977):149–54.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100022998 Published online by Cambridge University Press

3. See, for example, Luis Monguió's *La poesía postmodernista peruana* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954): "la influencia que, sin llegar a esos extremos de éxito en el proselitismo, ejercieron Mariátegui y *Amauta* en el vanguardismo peruano fue tal que esta etapa de la literatura peruana bien pudiera llamarse el 'ciclo' o el 'clima' de *Amauta*" (pp. 84–85).
4. For examinations of Mariátegui's unorthodox approach to political ideology, see Jesús Chavarría, *José Carlos Mariátegui and the Rise of Modern Perú (1890–1930)* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1979); and Harry E. Vanden, *National Marxism in Latin America: José Carlos Mariátegui's Thought and Politics* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1986). For commentary on Mariátegui's lack of orthodoxy in the arts, see Antonio Melis's and Eugenio Chang-Rodríguez's work and Gerardo Mario Goloboff, "Mariátegui y el problema estético literario," in Luna Vegas, *Mariátegui y la literatura*, 109–23.
5. Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, translated by Michael Shaw, vol. 4 of *Theory and History of Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 56.
6. The group and its aesthetic position were often identified either with the name of the magazine (*Martín Fierro* in Buenos Aires, *Contemporáneos* in Mexico, *Amauta* in Lima, *Revista de Avance* in Havana, *Klaxon* or *Revista de Antropofagía* in Brazil), or with a specific *ismo* (*agorismo* and *estridentismo* in Mexico, *ultraísmo* in Argentina, *euforismo, diepalismo,* and *atalayismo* in Puerto Rico, *verdeamarelismo* in Brazil, *runrunismo* in Chile, and *postumismo* in the Dominican Republic). In a few cases, the *ismo* was the aesthetic project of one individual, as with Huidobro's *creacionismo* and Peruvian Alberto Hidalgo's *simplismo*.
7. Comprehensive characterizations of Latin America's avant-gardes include Merlin H. Forster, "Latin American *Vanguardismo*: Chronology and Terminology," in *Tradition and Renewal* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), 12–50; Noé Jitrik, "Papeles de trabajo: notas sobre la vanguardia latinoamericana," *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana* 8, no. 15 (first semester 1982):13–24; Klaus Müller-Bergh, "El hombre y la técnica: contribución al conocimiento de corrientes vanguardistas hispanoamericanas," *Revista Iberoamericana* 48, nos. 118–19 (Jan.–June 1982):149–76; Julio Ortega, "La escritura de vanguardia," *Revista Iberoamericana* 45, nos. 106–7 (Jan.–June 1979): 187–98; Nelson Osorio, "Para una caracterización histórica del vanguardismo literario," *Revista Iberoamericana* 48, nos. 118–19 (Jan.–June 1982):227–54; Hugo Verani, *Las vanguardias literarias en Hispanoamérica* (Rome: Bulzoni Editores, 1986), especially the introductory study; and Saúl Yurkievich, "Los avatares de vanguardia," *Revista Iberoamericana* 48, nos. 118–19 (Jan.–June 1982):351–66, and selected essays in his *A través de la trama: sobre vanguardias literarias y otras concomitancias* (Barcelona: Muchnik Editores, 1984).
8. José Carlos Mariátegui, *Correspondencia (1915–1930)*, edited by Antonio Melis, 2 vols. (Lima: Biblioteca Amauta, 1984), 2:331. The translation was taken from Vanden's *National Marxism in Latin America*, 113.
9. The primary source on Mariátegui's European experience is his own collection of *crónicas* and articles published in Lima's *El Tiempo* from 1920 to 1922, which have been reprinted as *Cartas de Italia*, volume 15 of the twenty-volume *Obras completas de José Carlos Mariátegui* (Lima: Biblioteca Amauta, first editions published between 1957 and 1970). The most comprehensive studies of his European experience include Estuardo Núñez's *La experiencia europea de José Carlos Mariátegui y otros ensayos* (Lima: Empresa Editora Amauta, 1978) and Bruno Podesta's *Mariátegui en Italia* (Lima: Biblioteca Amauta, 1981).
10. *Obras completas de José Carlos Mariátegui*, 20 vols., vol. 6 (9th ed.), 81. Subsequent citations from Mariátegui's work will be documented directly in the text according to volume and page numbers of the following editions of individual volumes of the *Obras completas*: vol. 1, *La escena contemporánea* (12th ed.), 1983; vol. 2, *7 ensayos de intepretación de la realidad peruana* (22nd popular ed.), 1982; vol. 3, *El alma matinal* (8th ed.), 1983; vol. 6, *El artista y la época* (9th ed.), 1983; vol. 7, *Signos y obras* (6th ed.), 1980; vol. 11, *Peruanicemos al Perú* (7th ed.), 1981; vol. 12, *Temas de nuestra América* (7th ed.), 1980; and vol. 15, *Cartas de Italia* (5th ed.), 1980. Unless otherwise indicated, all English translations are my own.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100022998 Published online by Cambridge University Press

11. In addition to *Amauta*, other Peruvian vanguardist magazines include the eight issues of *Poliedro* (Aug.–Dec. 1926), edited by Armando Bazán; the four-issue series *Trampolín-Hangar-rascacielos-Timonel* (Oct. 1926–Mar. 1927), edited by Magda Portal and Serafín Delmar; the two issues of *Guerrilla* (1926), edited by Blanca Luz Brum Parra del Riego; the single issue of *Hurra* (1927), edited by Carlos Oquendo de Amat; the thirty-five issues of the *Boletín Titikaka* (1926–1930), edited in Puno by brothers Alejandro Peralta and Gamaliel Churata; and the seven issues of *Chirapu* (Jan.–July 1928), edited in Arequipa by Antero Peralta Vásquez.
12. For more detailed accounts of the literary activities, little magazines, and cultural politics of Peru's avant-garde period, see Wilfredo Kapsoli, "Prospecto del grupo 'Los Zurdos' de Arequipa," *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana* 10, no. 20 (second semester 1984):101–11; Mirko Lauer, "La poesía vanguardista en el Perú," *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana* 8, no. 15 (first semester 1982):77–88; chap. 3 of Monguió, *El vanguardismo en la poesía peruana*, 60–86; chap. 2 of my dissertation, "The Avant-Garde in Peru: Literary Aesthetics and Cultural Nationalism," University of Texas, 1984; and David Wise, "Vanguardismo a 3800 metros: el caso del *Boletín Titikaka* (Puno, 1926–1920)," *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana* 10, no. 20 (second semester 1984):89–100.
13. Peruvian writers who received Mariátegui's support were numerous: José María Eguren, whom he regarded as a link between *modernismo* and vanguardism; Alejandro Peralta (*Ande*, 1926); Carlos Oquendo de Amat (*Cinco metros de poemas*, 1927); surrealists César Moro, Xavier Abril, and Emilio Westphalen; Martín Adán (*La casa de cartón*, 1928); and César Vallejo. For accounts of Mariátegui's or *Amauta*'s support of vanguardist activities in Peru, see Mirla Alcibíades, "Mariátegui, *Amauta* y la vanguardia literaria," *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana* 8, no. 15 (first semester, 1982):123–39; as well as Estuardo Núñez, "José Carlos Mariátegui y la recepción del surrealismo en el Perú," *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana* 3, no. 5 (first semester 1977):57–66; and the chapter "*Amauta* and the Art of the 1920s" in David Wise, "*Amauta* (1926–1930): A Critical Examination," Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, 1978.
14. These writers included Spain's Ramón Gómez de la Serna and Guillermo de la Torre, Argentina's Oliverio Girondo and Ricardo Güiraldes, Mexico's Manuel Maples Arce and the *estridentistas*, and Mexico's Jaime Torres Bodet and the Contemporáneos associated with the review *Contemporáneo*.
15. Other "complete" vanguardists for Mariátegui included Phillippe Souppault, André Breton, Blaise Cendrars, and Emilio Petto Rutti.
16. "Presentación de 'Amauta,'" *Amauta* no. 1 (Sept. 1926):1.
17. *Obras completas de Vicente Huidobro*, 2 vols., edited by Braulio Arenas (Santiago: Zig-Zag, 1964), 1:653–54.
18. *Notes from a Dada Diary*, translated by Eugene Jolas in *The Dada Painters and Poets*, edited by Robert Motherwell (New York: Wittenborn, Schulz, 1951), 222.
19. *En Avant Dada: A History of Dadaism* (Hanover, 1920), translated by Ralph Manheim, in *Dada Painters and Poets*, 36.
20. "Note on Poetry," translated by Mary Ann Caws in *Tristan Tzara: Approximate Man and Other Writings* (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 1973), 169.
21. *Manifesto of Surrealism*, translated by Richard Seavar and Helen R. Lane, in *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 30.
22. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," translated by Harry Zohn, in *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt (New York: Shocken Books, 1969), 223–24.
23. For an analysis of the avant-gardes' attack on the notion of the organic work of art, see the chapter "The Avant-Gardiste Work of Art," in Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 55–82.
24. "Manifesto of mr. aa. the anti-philosopher," from the *Seven Dada Manifestoes*, in Motherwell, *Dada Painters and Poets*, 84.
25. See Roberto González Echevarría, *The Voice of the Masters: Writing and Authority in Modern Latin American Literature* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), 34.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100022998 Published online by Cambridge University Press

26. Tristan Tzara, "Note on Poetry," translated by Mary Ann Caws, *Tristan Tzara: Approximate Man*, 169.
27. Guillaume Apollinaire, *The Poet Assassinated*, translated by Roger Shattuck, in *Selected Writings of Guillaume Apollinaire* (New York: New Directions, 1971), 259.
28. Andreas Huyssens, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), vii–viii.
29. Fillippo Tommaso Marinetti, with Emilio Settimelli and Bruno Corra, *The Futurist Synthetic Theatre*, in *Marinetti: Selected Writings*, translated by R. W. Flint and Arthur A. Cappotelli, edited by R. W. Flint (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1972), 128.
30. Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, *History of Dada*, translated by Ralph Manheim, in *Dada Painters and Poets*, 109.
31. *Seeds and Bran*, translated by Mary Ann Caws, in *Tristan Tzara: Approximate Man*, 215.
32. André Breton, "What Is Surrealism," translated by David Gascoyne, in *What Is Surrealism: Works of André Breton and Other Documents of Surrealism*, edited by Franklin Rosemont (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1978), 116.
33. Breton, "The Surrealist Situation of the Object," in Seavar and Lane, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 262.
34. Marinetti, *Beyond Communism*, translated by Flint, in *Marinetti: Selected Writings*, 155.
35. Marinetti, *Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature*, translated by Flint, in *Marinetti: Selected Writings*, 87.
36. Hans Arp, "Dadaland," in *Dadas on Art*, edited by Lucy Lippard (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1971), 27.
37. René Crevel, "Resumé d'une conférence," from *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, translation by Ana Balakian, in *Surrealism: The Road to the Absolute* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1957), 139.
38. See, for example, Gerardo Goloboff, "Mariátegui y el problema estético literario," in Luna Vegas, *Mariátegui y la literatura*, 110.
39. Mikhail Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," translated by Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson, in *The Dialogic Imagination*, edited by Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 272–73.
40. Angel Rama, *La ciudad letrada* (Hanover, N.H.: Ediciones del Norte, 1984), particularly 23–39.
41. For González Prada's ideas on language and literature, see "Discurso en el Teatro Olimpo," "Conferencia en el Ateneo de Lima," and "Notas acerca del idioma," all in *Páginas Libres / Horas de Lucha*, edited by Luis Alberto Sánchez (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1976).
42. Issue 16 of *Amauta* (July 1928), dedicated to González Prada, included essays on his poetic work and his ideas.
43. See José de la Riva Agüero, *Carácter de la literatura del Perú independiente* (Lima, 1905), Volume 1 of the *Obras completas de José de la Riva Agüero* (Lima: Publicaciones del Instituto Riva Agüero, 1956).
44. See Rosalind Krauss, "The Originality of the Avant-Garde," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985), 157.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100022998 Published online by Cambridge University Press