

Evolutionist conception in the series *La lucha por la vida* [The struggle for life] from anarchist journal *Estudios* (1936)

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Abstract

The present study intends to analyze some imagistic strategies used to formulate a conception of science and technology in the anarchist journal *Estudios*, published in Valencia, Spain, from 1928 to 1937. This journal was the most successful anarchist editorial experience of the period, and encompassed topics as disparate and controversial as: naturalist medicine, sex education, neo-Malthusianism, scientific and technological divulgation, eugenics, pacifism, anticlericalism, feminism, literature and arts, among others. For Javier Navarro, this editorial line was in accordance with an anti-dogmatic eclecticism, the libertarian tradition of autodidacticism and the intention to disseminate and establish an emancipatory culture that would lead to a possibility of a society alternative to capitalism. In this regard, the journal, according to Xavier Diez, continued and gave new meanings to the anarchist tradition of reverence of science and technical progress, especially in biology. We briefly describe some of the main sections of the journal and its graphic design, especially for the phase in which graphic artists Manuel Moleón and Josep Renau collaborated, from 1931 onwards. We gave greater emphasis to the analysis of *La lucha por la vida* [The struggle for life] series, published from February through September 1936, within the context of the Spanish Civil War, in which evolutionary theory was summarized in short texts, illustrated by Renau and which occupied one full page. We discuss how the relationship between text and image constituted different layers of meaning on evolutionism in its imbrication with human development via science, technique, philosophy and art.

Keywords: Josep Renau; journal *Estudios*; Conceptions on evolutionism

Concepção evolucionista na série *La lucha por la vida* da revista anarquista *Estudios* (1936)

Resumo

Este trabalho pretende analisar algumas estratégias imagéticas utilizadas para a construção de uma concepção de ciência e tecnologia na revista anarquista *Estudios*, publicada em Valencia, Espanha, entre 1928 e 1937. Esta revista foi a mais bem-sucedida experiência editorial anarquista no período, compreendendo assuntos tão distintos quanto polêmicos como, por exemplo: medicina naturista, educação sexual, neomalthusianismo, divulgação científica e tecnológica, eugenia, pacifismo, anticlericalismo, feminismo, literatura e arte, entre outros. Para Javier Navarro, esta linha editorial estaria de acordo com um ecletismo antidogmático, com a tradição libertária de autodidatismo e com a intenção de divulgação e de constituição de uma cultura emancipatória que conduzisse à possibilidade de uma sociedade alternativa ao capitalismo. Neste sentido, a revista, segundo Xavier Diez, continuará e dará novos significados à tradição anarquista de reverência à ciência e ao progresso técnico, principalmente no campo da biologia. Apresentaremos sucintamente algumas das principais seções da revista e seu projeto gráfico, especialmente na fase coordenada pelos artistas gráficos Manuel Moleón e Josep Renau, a partir de 1932. Daremos maior ênfase à análise da série *La lucha por la vida*, publicada entre fevereiro e setembro de 1936, já no contexto da guerra civil espanhola, na qual a teoria evolucionista é sintetizada em curtos textos, ilustrados por Renau e que ocupam o espaço de uma página. Tentaremos discutir como a relação entre texto e imagem constitui diferentes camadas de significado sobre o evolucionismo em seu imbricamento com o desenvolvimento humano via ciência, técnica, filosofia e arte.

Palavras-chave: Josep Renau; Revista *Estudios*; Concepção de evolucion

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Introduction

The present work intends to analyze some imagistic strategies used to formulate a conception of science and technology in anarchist journal *Estudios*, published in Valencia, Spain, from 1928 to 1937. We gave greater emphasis to the analysis of the series *La lucha por la vida* [The struggle for life], published from February through September 1936, within the context of the Spanish Civil War, in which evolutionary theory was summarized in short texts, illustrated by Josep Renau (1907-1982) and which occupied a full page. We discuss how the relationship between text and image constituted different layers of meaning on evolutionism in its imbrication with human development via science, technique, philosophy and art. Through the study of this series, we aim at reflecting on a sociocultural history of practices, values and conceptions of science and technology opposite to the hegemonic views.

Journal *Estudios*

Estudios was the most successful anarchist editorial experience of the period, reaching a circulation of 70,000 copies, and encompassing topics as disparate and controversial as naturalist medicine, sex education, neo-Malthusianism, scientific and technological divulgation, eugenics, pacifism, anticlericalism and feminism, among others. For Javier Navarro, this editorial line was in accordance with an anti-dogmatic eclecticism, the libertarian tradition of autodidacticism and the intention to disseminate and establish an emancipatory culture that would lead to a possibility of a society alternative to capitalism.¹ In this regard, the journal, according to Xavier Diez,² brought new meaning to the anarchist tradition of reverence for science and technical progress, understood as “having a liberating role for the individual and society”³, especially in the field of biology. This option was probably due to the considerable participation of naturalist doctors in its editorial board, and to the option to combat the conservative hegemonic anti-evolutionist discourse of religious nature.

Throughout its existence, *Estudios* performed a peculiar appropriation of evolutionism, marked by a defense of neo-Malthusianism and eugenics from a social perspective, with the aim of creating a “rational, healthy, fair and happy society”⁴. Thus it sought to encourage conscious motherhood and birth control by divulging several contraceptive methods, such as Ogino-Knaus’, publishing manuals for sex education, and even using the journal’s office resources to sell or distribute contraceptives, such as the “Azcon eugenic cone and the Fermita pessary”⁵.

¹ Francisco J. Navarro, *El paraíso de la razón: la revista Estudios (1928-1937) y el mundo cultural anarquista* (Valencia: Edicions Alfons el Magnànim, 1997).

² Xavier Diez, *El anarquismo individualista en España (1923-1938)* (Barcelona: Virus Editorial, 2007).

³ Navarro, 158.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 114

⁵ *Ibid.*, 116

Estudios was also part of the effort of the libertarian movement to create new forms of production and management of technical-scientific knowledge, characterized by a process of collective appropriation and redefinition of roles between experts and non-experts, as an attempt to break with hierarchical and unidirectional communicative practices already in place in libertarian associative networks, such as unions, cenacles and rational schools and their activities, including meetings, conferences and rational education.⁶ Thus “Journal *Estudios* had a fundamentally pedagogical character, according to the conception that education and culture were inevitable revolutionary premises”⁷.

From this perspective, *Estudios* avoided the sterile apology of science and advocated “concrete scientific dissemination”⁸, for example, through the presentation of multiple points of view of experts and non-experts, updating old forms of knowledge exchange, such as inclusion of a question-and-answer section,⁹ and using creative forms of graphic expression of knowledge through instigating covers, with frequent depictions of nudity and photomontages by Josep Renau (1907-1982).

Along the period of publication of the series *La lucha por la vida*, the main sections of the journal were: *Atualidades de Dyonisos* [Dionysus’ current affairs] which gradually became a reflection on the strategies of workers in the struggle against rising fascism within the context of the Civil War; *Eugenia e moral sexual* [Eugenics and sexual morality] by Dr. F. Martí Ibañez; *El Fascismo y la oposición obrera* [Fascism and workers’ opposition] by H. Noja Ruiz; *Al día con la ciencia* [Keeping up with science] by Alfonso Martínez Rizo; booklet *Ensayos* [Essays]; series *Los Pecados Capitales* [The capital sins] by Manuel Maleón, which spanned across seven numbers; section *Doctrinas sociales* [social doctrines] with anthological texts by socialist authors; *Questions and answers*, by Dr. R. Remartínez; *O consultorio psíquico-sexual* [Psychosexual clinic] by Dr. Felix Martí Ibañez; *Antología de textos pedagógicos* [Anthology of pedagogical texts]; *A escritura e a leitura* [Writing and reading]; and the book review section, *Bibliography*, by Antonio García Birlán.

Along the analyzed period, the graphic design of the journal was coordinated by the graphic artists Josep Renau and Manuel Monleón (1904-1976) who in addition to the graphic design and covers, also produced photomontage series, such as *The Ten Commandments* (1934), *Black Pages of War* (1933), *Four Seasons* (1935) and *Human Love* (1936), *La lucha por la vida*, by Renau, and *The Seven Deadly Sins*, by Monleón.¹⁰

⁶ Carlos Taberero-Holgado, Isabel Jiménez-Lucena, & Jorge Molero-Mesa, “Movimiento libertario y autogestión del conocimiento en la España del primer tercio del siglo XX: la sección ‘Preguntas y Respuestas’ (1930-1937) de la revista *Estudios*,” *Dynamis* 33, no. 1 (2013): 43:67, on 46.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Navarro, 159.

⁹ Section “Questions and Answers” allows us noticing “the processes of re-signification of the concepts of health and disease, in this case from the point of view of the concerns and expectations of *Estudios* readers, that is, of their experience in everyday life. On the other hand, the relationship of these readers with experts, in this case Remartínez,” Taberero-Holgado, Jiménez-Lucena, & Molero-Mesa, 46

¹⁰ Miguel Cabañas Bravo, “Josep Renau y la recuperación de la belleza perdida,” *Culture and History Digital Journal* 2, no. 2 (2013): e023.

La lucha por la vida

The series *La lucha por la vida* was published from February through September 1936, i.e., at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War.¹¹ Along this period, *Estudios* advocated a critical and strategic engagement with the republican, and then the revolutionary anarchist forces, and one-sided condemnation of war based on a pacifism characteristic of individualist anarchism. In this sense, the journal published a series of articles condemning fascism and its systematic practice of violence, which culminated in the fascist uprising of July 1936. It also advocated, at least since 1933, the constitution of an anti-fascist working class front that would bring together anarchists and communists and their respective trade union centers, CNT (National Confederation of Work) and UGT (General Union of Workers) to prevent falling into a “shameful regime” of fascist nature.¹²

Renau’s participation in *Estudios* is partially explained by this context. The Valencian artist, a sympathizer of libertarian ideals, gradually approached the Spanish communist party (PCE), which he joined at the age of 24. His joining PCE was due to his enthusiasm with the potential for social transformation anticipated by the proclamation of the Spanish republic in 1931, as well as to his growing understanding of art as a revolutionary instrument - shared with communist theorists such as Georgi Plekhanov (1856-1918) in his work *Art and Social Life*.¹³ This commitment was expressed both in Renau’s first mural for the Union of Dockers of the Iberian Anarchist Federation, and in the posters for the Popular Front campaign in the 1936 elections. This political-cultural militancy is also evidenced by his assumption - first within the context of the Civil War - of the presidency of the Valencian section of Alliance of Antifascist Intellectuals for the Defense of Culture (AIADC). Later, in September 1936, during the Popular Front government led by Francisco Largo Caballero (1869-1946), he was in charge of the General Board of Fine Arts, linked to the Ministry of Education and Fine Arts, then directed by the PCE militant, Jesús Hernández Tomás (1907-1971)¹⁴. This engagement translated into aesthetic proposals and was expressed simultaneously to the transformations of his artistic production. The transition from an art-deco perspective to the intensification of experiments inspired by constructivist art and Soviet graphic design, the photomontages of surrealist nature by Marx Ernst (1891-1978) and the political and post-Dadaist posters by the German John Heartfield (1891-1968) took place in this period. He also performed pioneering technical experiments in graphic design with use of airbrush. These technical-artistic experiments are found in anarchist journals *Orto* and *Estudios*, for which he produced a significant number of posters and photomontages. For *Estudios* publishers he also made covers for several books, such as *Huelga de vientres* [Womb strike] by Luis Bluff, *The Conquest of Bread* by Pyotr A. Kropotkin, *Modern School* by Francesc Ferrer i Guàrdia and *Breviary of Experimental Love* by Jules Guyot.¹⁵

¹¹ On the Spanish Civil, see Helen Graham, *The Spanish Civil War: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹² *Estudios*, 152 (1936): 1.

¹³ See Georgi V. Plekhanov, *Unaddressed Letters: Art and Social Life* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1957).

¹⁴ Cabañas Bravo, “Josep Renau.”

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

In his book *The Social Function of Art*, of 1937,¹⁶ Renau suggested a new realism based on the legacy of the Spanish realist painting of the seventeenth century, since “at the very heart of its human value it is the naked foot with which Renaissance humanism steps on the rough and concrete ground of reality”¹⁷. On the language of posters “we conceived of the poster as a possible recipient for a new impulse of creation, our will must be faced boldly, with the full emotion of the social and human *necessity* for which we are responsible, in the face of the endless flow of the world that opens before us”¹⁸. The political poster, his main area of activity, should be “the powerful lever of the new realism in its mission to transform the conditions, in the historical and social orders, for the creation of a new Spain” and incite “the development of this new man who already emerges from the trenches of antifascist struggle through the emotional stimulus of a superior aesthetics of human content”¹⁹.

One may say that *Estudios*, despite sharing the view of science as a revolutionary instrument, distrusted official science and its use by the economic and political power, to advocate a humanist perspective. This crack in the optimism for science was compensated by a fascination with technique, as shown by the growth of the sections devoted to this subject. This paradoxical fascination did not dispense with a combative spirit against technique as used for destruction, coupled to the editorial line of the journal, with a strong materialist tendency and critique of Spanish reactionary institutions, especially the Catholic church. It is in this sense that we can understand the vision imagistically expressed by Renau on the evolutionary process, in which biology lost space to technique and aesthetics as decisive factors.

The series comprises seven chapters that address the following themes: the scenario (the relationship between man and environment), the first element (fire), graphic expression, the transformation of matter (man and machines/industry), the conquest of time, the tragic contradiction (war) and the conquest of the sea. In the illustrations, the overlap of images, the montages, seem to highlight the human knowledge accumulated over time; the plans of representation emphasize the relevance of history, of the knowledge about the past, thus rendering together the scientific, technical and artistic knowledge materialized in artifacts.

¹⁶ Josep Renau, *Función social del cartel publicitario* (Valencia: Tipografía Moderna, 1937).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 41.

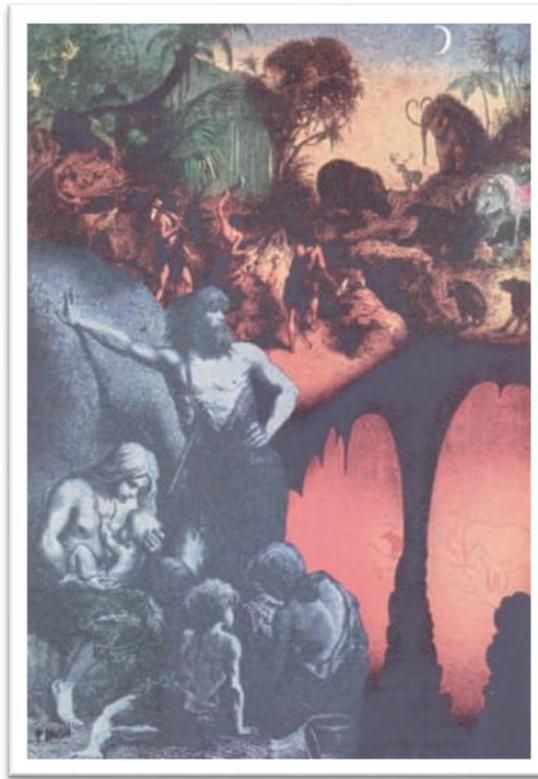


Fig. 1 – Josep Renau. *The Struggle for Life: I – The Scenario* (1936)

In the first image of series *The Struggle for Life: I – The Scenario* (Fig. 1)²⁰, although the relationship between the planes is not hierarchical, one might infer that the old engraving, in black and white, is closer to the reader, as foreground. Here we have a representation of what could be a family. We see a woman sitting, nursing, while the child holds/plays with his mother's necklace, suggesting a scene not only of feeding, but a gesture of maternal affection, a scene that refers to the tenderness so present in the portraits of Renaissance Madonnas. We also see an older child with his back turned, looking at another adult who is showing or teaching him something. It evokes a moment of attention, of sharing of knowledge, of learning and reflection. Material culture is well marked by pots, vessels, bodies covered with animal skins. The man standing, leaning on a rock, appears in such a way that reminds one of a philosopher, with his gaze turned to some distant place on the right. He carries a tool attached to his garments, some sort of pickax or ax, more elaborate than the other tools seen in the image and that seems to be made of metal. There is also a faint glow that might indicate the presence of fire. To the right, on the background, there are cave walls with drawings of mammoths, recognized by their black outline, texture and fur. There are drawings of other animals in red/ochre, quite naturalistic. At the top of the image the scene is colorful, with predominant ochre tones, and we see men in motion, with expressive gestures marking their action, the use of work tools to break stones, to transform their surroundings. They look like axes and pickaxes made of stone. Animals such as a

²⁰ Josep Renau, "La lucha por la vida: I – el escenario," *Estudios* 150 (1936): n.p.

mammoth, a reindeer, a bison, a horse, a rhinoceros and varieties of plants set the tone for the diversity and richness of the environment.

In portraying the scenario of the struggle for life, in addition to strategies for survival, such as food, body protection with clothes, fire, much relevance is given to knowledge, work, modes of expression and communication, drawing and living with other beings. A scenario of hostility, aridity, diversity and abundance is created which is faced with the struggle waged by work, thought, learning and feeling.

Renau presents us his vision of the process of human evolution as strongly conditioned by the relationship between man and environment, from which the human being, to satisfy his needs, seeks to extract, through a 'violent struggle', the elements for his subsistence. This struggle is marked by the differential development of the human conscience, fundamental for the triumph over the obstacles in its path. Though Renau in his reflection emphasizes Marxist themes, of consciousness in its relation to work,²¹ he does not present this relationship in a decisively dialectical manner.

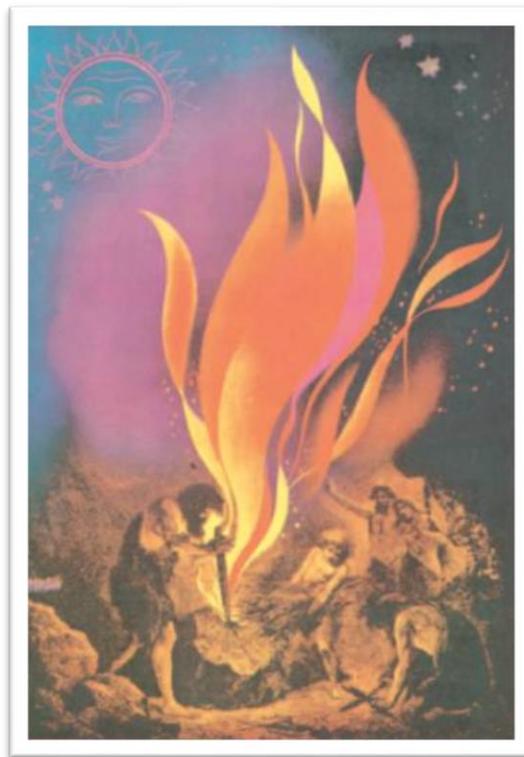


Fig. 2 – Josep Renau. *The Struggle for Life: II – The First Element* (1936)

²¹ For a discussion of this topic, see Erich Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, 1961).

In *The Struggle for Life: II – The First Element* (Fig. 2)²², Renau highlights the role of a technique, fire control, as essential for the biological evolution of humans. The scene shows men making fire by friction of twigs, and from the fire huge, sinuous flames emerge on the center of the image. The fire divides the image between the starry night, on the right, and daylight, on the left, with the sun depicted as a human face. The dynamism of the colors and organic forms creates a strong contrast with the detail of the figures of the five characters, of whom only one seems to be a woman. There is a counterpoint between the effort, the action of the three characters on the foreground and the couple on the background, who are standing, watching. The body and the gesture of the man's erect arm evoke a classic representation of the strength and rationality of the Renaissance male sculptures. It is interesting to note the helping child who carries sticks, twigs, sharing the experience through practical activity, reiterating the relevance of learning, of the transmission of knowledge and experience. The disproportion of the large pink, yellow and orange flames rising toward the universe reminds us of the effects used by surrealism, in dialogue with the language of advertising illustrations and the art-deco posters. One may think of the moment of the birth of a new era, a new day.

For Renau, as for Friedrich Engels²³ and V. Gordon Childe, the human being through the invention/discovery of fire becomes able to deal with abrupt climatic changes, unlike other animals that became extinct. The image seems to dialogue with the evocative description by Childe:

“But in mastery of fire man was controlling a mighty physical force and a conspicuous chemical change. For the first time in history a creature of Nature was directing one of the great forces of Nature. And the exercise of power must react upon the controller. The sight of the bright flame bursting forth when a dry bough was thrust into glowing embers, the transformation of the bough into fine ashes and smoke, must have stimulated man's rudimentary brain. What these phenomena suggested to him is unknowable. But in feeding and damping down the fire, in transporting and using it, man made a revolutionary departure from the behavior of other animals. He was asserting his humanity and making himself.”²⁴

²² Josep Renau, “La lucha por la vida: II – el primer elemento,” *Estudios* 151 (1936): n.p.

²³ See Friedrich Engels, *The Part Played by the Labor in the Transition from Ape to Man* (New York: International Publishers, 1930).

²⁴ V. Gordon Childe, *Man Makes Himself* (New York: New Library Books, 1951), 46.

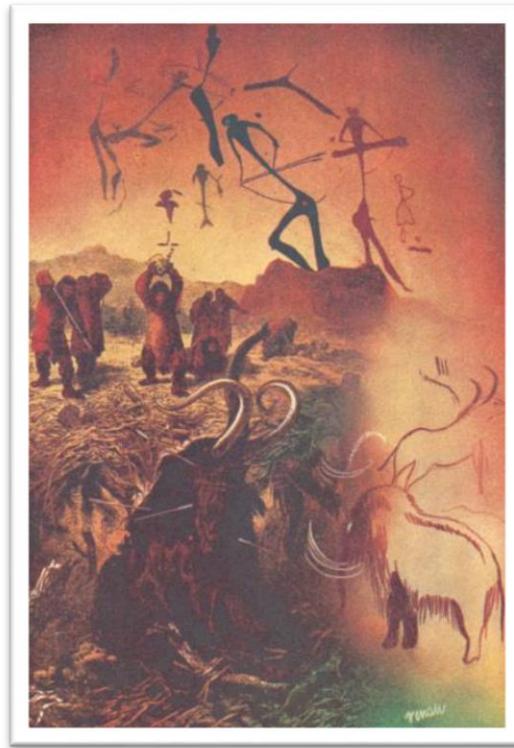


Fig. 3 – Josep Renau. *The Struggle for Life: III – The Graphic Expression* (1936)

In *The Struggle for Life: III – The Graphic Expression* (Fig. 3)²⁵, Renau reminds us of the classic Marxist theme of the interaction between the social relations of production and the emergence of language,²⁶ emphasizing the relevance of communication simultaneously to the effort of domination and transformation of nature. His option for graphic expression as a way of presenting this characteristic draws our attention to the potential relationship between technique and art.

The composition allows us establishing links between the universe of human actions and the universe of representation. The naturalistic drawings of animal (mammoth/bison) outlines contrast with the realistic and expressive image of the strong force of the mammoth struck by arrows, on the left. Above, on the background, the image of hunters is refuted by the large monochromatic figures, stylized human silhouettes in motion. The action of hunting is depicted by the presence of several men wearing coats made of animal skin, boots or more sophisticated footwear: one of them aims the bow and arrow to the animal, another raises a large stone; two men are crouching, looking for or picking up things from the ground; two men are standing, more distant, pointing and watching.

Both image and text seem to convey the idea that the weapons for survival were not just tools for hunting and defense, but also for painting, drawing and writing. There is an

²⁵ Josep Renau, “La lucha por la vida: III – la expresión gráfica,” *Estudios* 152 (1936): n.p.

²⁶ For an important study of this interaction see Mikhail Bakhtin, *Marxismo e Filosofia da Linguagem* (São Paulo: Hucitec, 2002).

emphasis not only on the tools improved with the evolution of the human species, but also on the techniques for recording and on the narratives of the deeds of the human species. Communication is a feat as important as, or more important than, mastery over animals, for it preserves memory and establishes dominion over time.

The text stresses, as an index of human superiority, the “spiritual need to perpetuate its actions and thoughts through external and lasting means: graphic expression”²⁷. The cave paintings and sculptures are seen as documents and testimonies of the spirit and customs of the ancestors, “monuments as letters to the future”²⁸. The recipient of these messages and evidence of human conscience is twentieth-century man.

We need to remember that Renau, in his apology of graphic expression, recovered the socialist and mainly anarchist tradition, always reiterated in journal *Estudios*, of culture in its various expressions as a mark of civilization and of education for emancipation.²⁹

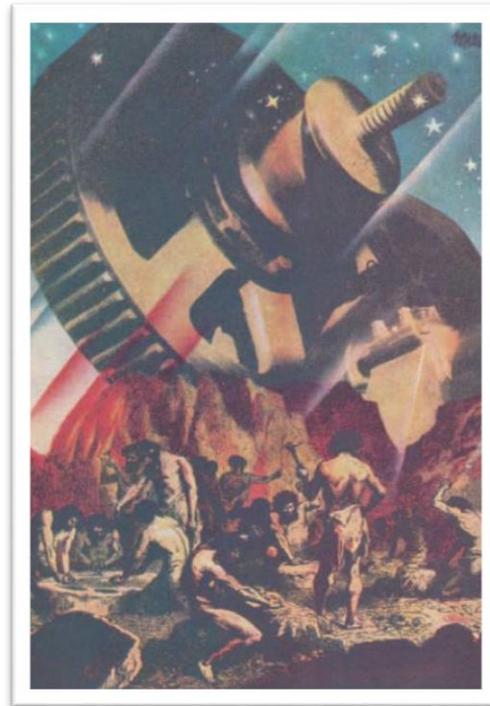


Fig. 4 – Josep Renau. *The Struggle for Life: IV – The Transformation of Matter* (1936)

In *The Struggle for Life: IV – The Transformation of Matter* (Fig. 4)³⁰, Renau formulated the notion that technical knowledge, present in machines, is the result of accumulated

²⁷ *Estudios* 152 (1936): n.p.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Navarro, *Paraíso de la razón*.

³⁰ *Estudios* 153 (1936): n.p.

human experience. This montage provokes a temporal fusion, simultaneously uniting and opposing a prehistoric past and a modern and futuristic present. We see a group of men dealing with stones, working with tools, in groups or alone, some standing, or on stone benches or tables, pounding, breaking and polishing. The postures and gestures resemble the representations of the body in classical and Renaissance paintings and sculptures. Here one might infer that some characters observe, share information, seem to indicate what should be done or how it should be done. Leaving the mountain, at the top, there is a huge gear and the sense of motion is created by the action lines and light beams, elements frequently used by futuristic aesthetics, resumed in posters and art-deco illustrations. Dynamism is accentuated by the relationship between the red and blue hues, highlighting ochre and yellow, aside from the composition with a strong predominance of the diagonal.

A fascination for the grandeur of the machine as a symbol of modernity is revealed.³¹ The text states, “the history of the machine is the history of man, the modern expression of the triumph of man over nature”³². Even when compared to the orangutan, cavemen stand out for their technical evolution – from the chipped stones to the industrial technique, transforming stones, modeling, polishing, adapting according to needs and uses.

Renau strongly expresses the conception that the machine was the result of an evolutionary process of development of the techniques initiated with the use of stones for combat, hunting or food preparation. The ability of transformation of matter led to such perfection in manufacture that it enabled the use of these stone artifacts even as ‘currency’, making room for new social structures. Renau seems to argue that more important than the technique used is its appropriation by society in new configurations of productive forces or of social and economic organization.

In *The Struggle for Life: V – The Conquest of Time* (Fig. 5)³³ there is an overlapping of art images. On the foreground, below, a repetition of stylized figures in black, silhouettes of hunters carrying bows and arrows form a row, with their shadows projected as if they were treading the red ground. On the background, on the right, the *Venus of Willendorf* (Museum of Natural History – Vienna), a feminine statuette of stone, rounded, with large breasts and belly, to which the symbol of fertility, of the force of reproduction of nature, is usually attributed. On the background, centralized, there is an image that refers to a Greek sculpture of a female nude, classical, somewhat resembling Venus de Milo, only headless and showing her legs. More or less at the level of her womb there is the center of a circle that looks like a celestial map, a record of the Zodiac signs (among the stars, one can read Capricorn, Aquarius, Taurus, Virgo, Libra). The colors, from red below to dark blue above, give a more dynamic tone to the composition, defining a chromatic scale between the sky and the earth, but also suggesting the passage of time, an evolution of technical, artistic, astronomical and scientific knowledge. Art is shown as a conquest of time, a record of human discoveries and adventures. The text states that the “eternalizing of beauty is one of the greatest

³¹ See Thomas J. Misa, Philip Brey, & Andrew Feenberg, ed., *Modernity and Technology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).

³² Josep Renau, “La lucha por la vida: IV – la transformación de la materia,” *Estudios* 153 (1936): n.p.

³³ Josep Renau, “la lucha por la vida: V – la conquista del tiempo,” *Estudios* 154 (1936): n.p.

achievements of man in the face of nature,”³⁴ and even what defines it in its essence. Artistic works are seen as emblems of the victories over the environment, and as a testimony to the “historical development”³⁵. They register emotions, ideas and struggles in matter. History of art is considered “the most vivid expression of the historical past, mysterious and inexhaustible source in which civilized men drank their own consciousness of the past”³⁶.

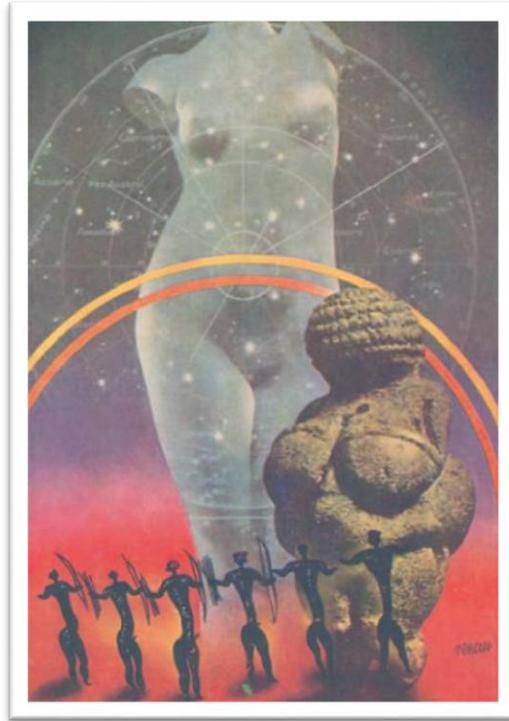


Fig. 5 – Josep Renau. *The Struggle for Life: V – The Conquest of Time* (1936)

In *The Struggle for Life: VI – The Tragic Contradiction* (Fig. 6)³⁷, a large black face predominates, like an African sculpture, half of it in the dark and lot of light on the other, and an expression of anger characterized by closed eyes and clenched teeth. We only see the head and a part of the chest. On the left, a black, geometrized hand holds a knife with the tip stained with blood. In front of the chest, just below the neck, an assembly of fragments of a skeleton and blood completes the suspense and violence of the scene. The tension is reiterated by the background, composed of dense red clouds. The use of colors and the overlapping of elements resemble the language of dreams or the unconsciousness so dear to surrealism. The text elects war as the great contradiction that emerged throughout the history of humanity, compromising the advancement of society.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Josep Renau, “la lucha por la vida: VI – la contradicción trágica,” *Estudios* 155 (1936): n.p.

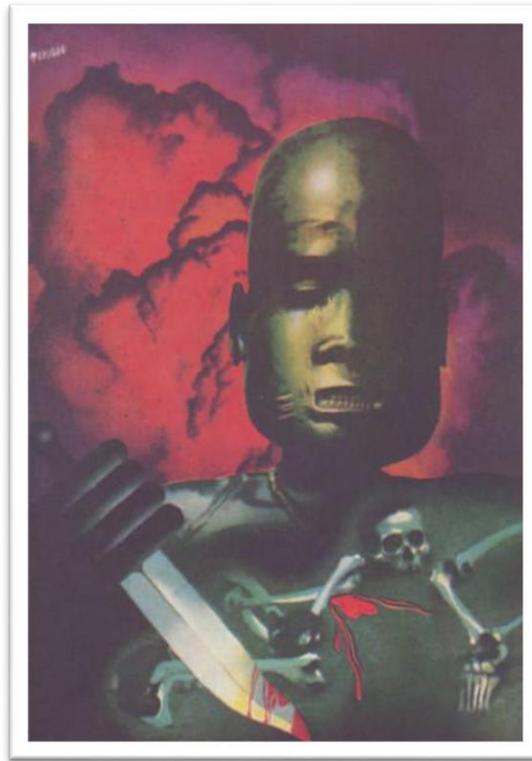


Fig. 6 – Josep Renau. *The Struggle for Life: VI – The Tragic Contradiction* (1936)

Renau perpetrates an attack on fascism and its defense that violence and war are inseparable parts of the human spirit. He argues, within the Marxist tradition, especially Engels' *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*,³⁸ that while the wars and conflicts of the past were due to the self-defense of societies divided into families, clans and tribes, in the present they stem from class struggle, inequality in the distribution of wealth and property, becoming a plague, an obstacle to the progress of science, technique and art.

³⁸ Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (London: Penguin Books, 2010).

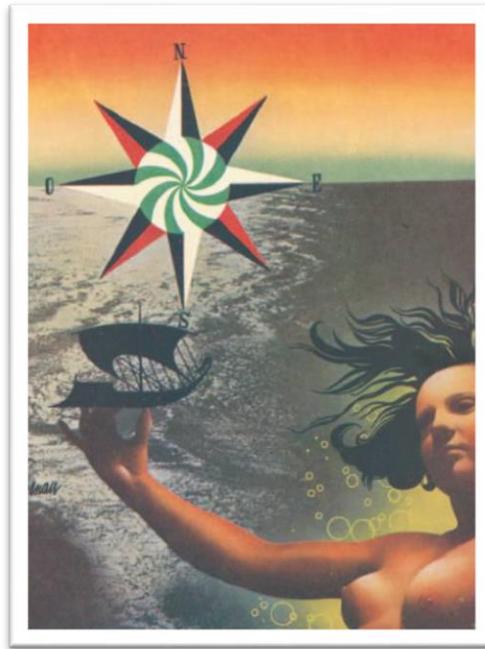


Fig. 7 – Josep Renau. *The Struggle for Life: VII – The Conquest of the Sea* (1936)

The composition *The Struggle for Life: VII – The Conquest of the Sea* (Fig. 7)³⁹ is marked by an asymmetrical curve formed by a naked female image on the bottom right corner, with her hair curling on the water, raising her right arm and holding a sailboat, perhaps Phoenician, that touches the southern tip of a wind rose with the cardinal points shown, the east/west line coinciding with the horizon. The movement of the waves and the reflection of the sun on the water, added to the warm colors of the woman's body and the sky, help to amplify the dynamic feeling of the image. The yellow bubbles around the woman, the silhouette of the ship and the spiral at the center of the wind rose give a touch of modernity and grace to the set. The rounded features of the woman and her disproportion in relation to the boat she holds with her fingertips make one think of a mermaid, a metaphor for the attraction/seduction by the sea or for the force of nature. The text highlights how audacity, dream and desire for new challenges, combined with the incipient technique, lead men to conquer the secrets of the waters, to widen the horizons of their adventures and their conscience. Some moments of the evolution of this technique are highlighted, such as the primitive rafts made of trunks and branches, the advance in the use of the sail, taking advantage of the wind as a force to replace the human effort of traction by rowing, even the great contribution of the Phoenicians to future odysseys. Renau, like Childe, brings the ship: "the ship and the tools employed for its production symbolize a whole economic and social system"⁴⁰.

³⁹ Josep Renau, "La lucha por la vida: VII – la conquista del mar," *Estudios* 156 (1936): n.p.

⁴⁰ Childe, 13.

Conclusion

The images that open each section have a realistic character, with an illustrative and didactic function complemented with the texts. The use of montage provokes displacements of meanings, strangeness, and re-signification of the parts and the whole. The asymmetrical compositions, collages of different types of engravings, graphics and interventions of colors build a discontinuous and dynamic narrative. The juxtaposition/overlapping of images, of times and materialities enable non-linear paths of reading, new arrangements of fragments and new possibilities of interpretation. The images evidence an appropriation of various techniques and languages, such as photography, engraving, drawing, painting, airbrush, the influence of new graphic processes and repertoires inspired by posters, Russian constructivism, art-deco. These resources implement new formal and ideological characteristics at the service of scientific divulgation.

The themes addressed in the series dialogue with the idea of evolution, focusing more on the dimensions of technique and culture than on the biological dimension, and art and aesthetics are shown as fundamental components of this process. History is marked by artifacts, inventions, records, communication and the 'eternizing of beauty'. The concept of beauty is linked to the Greek ideals, to thinking, to rationality, renewed by the humanist realism of the (Spanish) Renaissance. The montages, figurativism, the concreteness of the visual materiality and the simultaneous, juxtaposed narratives afford glimpses into the achievements of the past, but also evoke scientific discussions about the present and question future challenges. In the same year of the publication of the series, 1936, Childe published his book *Man Makes Himself*,⁴¹ in which he merged evolutionism and trans-cultural diffusion, advocating cultural heterogeneity and the idea that there is not one single path of social development. This view was marked by a political position against nationalism, present in both the debates on the racial biologizing of the human evolutionary process and the nationalist archaeological practices characteristic of fascism, which sought to explain the development of an ethnic group preferably in isolation from cultural contacts with other peoples.⁴² To Childe, social evolution occurred at the confluence of environment, tradition, innovation and the contradictions of a society. This view can be summarized as follows:

"The species *Homo sapiens* was enabled to survive in the same environment by improving his material culture. Both evolution and cultural change may be regarded as adaptations to the environment. Environment, of course, means the whole situation in which a creature has to live: it embraces not only climate (heat, cold, moisture, wind) "and physiographical features like mountains, seas, rivers, and marshes, but also factors such as food supplies, animal enemies, and, in the case of man, even social traditions, customs, and laws, economic status, and religious beliefs."⁴³

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Neil Faulkner, "Gordon Childe and Marxist Archaeology," *International Socialism* 116 (2007) available at: <http://isj.org.uk/gordon-childe-and-marxist-archaeology/>

⁴³ Childe, 24.

Renau seems to reinforce the characteristic eclecticism of journal *Estudios* by dialoguing in an unorthodox way with the Marxist view on social evolution. However, his interpretation distances itself from any mechanist and gradualist approach, coming closer to Marxist interpretations such as the one by Childe, marked by an evolutionist view combined with cultural history. From this perspective, the transformations of material culture in the interaction with the environment as constituted and constituent of the human being are emphasized, "thus the evolutionary changes which contributed to the making of man are very intimately connected one with another and with the cultural changes which man himself has made"⁴⁴.

It is within this context that we may understand the political and ideological interest of Renau in his trend to explain human evolution at the intersection of biological transformation and material culture.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 28.