

## Review Outline

### **Structural Revisions:**

Make transitions more fluid

Make sure order makes sense

Consolidate similar paragraphs

Add transition words

Re-state thesis

Re-state ideas and make big ideas clear

Nicholas Van Kley:

This seems like a really great list of goals, Bella.

### **Content Revisions:**

Add more background about Diego Rivera and the time period

Support claims about historical events

### **Integration of Textual Evidence:**

Add more direct quotes

Make sure citations are accurate

### **Grammar/Sentence Structure:**

Look for ways to make sentences flow together more easily

Use clearer words

Correct punctuation

Separate complicated sentences

← Nicholas Van Kley:

Williams and Bizup describe a trick for this:

Put old information to the left in sentences; put new information to the right.

### **Williams/Bizup Advice:**

Change passive voice to active where possible

Use fewer words where possible

Use “characters”

Start with hook

Make sure motive is clear

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WRIT5 Section 28 – Cultures of Place

Project 1 Conference Draft

### Perspectives on Progress:

#### The Impact of Diego Rivera's work on Cultural Boundaries

Mexican painter Diego Rivera's mural work in America was nothing if not controversial.

In the early 1930s he was commissioned to paint a mural in New York City's Rockefeller Center. It would depict the progress and technological advancements of the human race, and glorify the American industrial revolution. Rivera painted a vibrant fresco pulsing with detail and energy, but there was one small problem. When he added a portrait of Vladimir Lenin, the commissioners halted its progress and soon after tore down the huge unfinished piece, fighting media claims about anti-capitalist propaganda. Rivera's work was a commodity in America, because of his talent and success as an artist but also because of his ability to portray the American progress as symbiotic with the involvement of other races. His success was based on the fact that he reconciled local and universal cultures. This is also one of the goals of *critical regionalism*, an architectural style that attempts to mediate localism and modernism. Critical regionalism employs new building styles that draw on the history and culture of certain regions. It rejects both globalization and intense regionalism, and attempts to give power back to local communities in a contemporary context. The general school of thought that has grown from critical regionalism rests on a belief that both local community and universal culture are

Nicholas Van Kley:  
really elegant  
historical context here.  
Is there a source you  
can point your  
audience to that could  
give them further  
reading about this  
controversy? That will  
give you credibility  
and serve your  
audience's needs.

Nicholas Van  
Kley:  
really nice  
point of  
connection  
here.

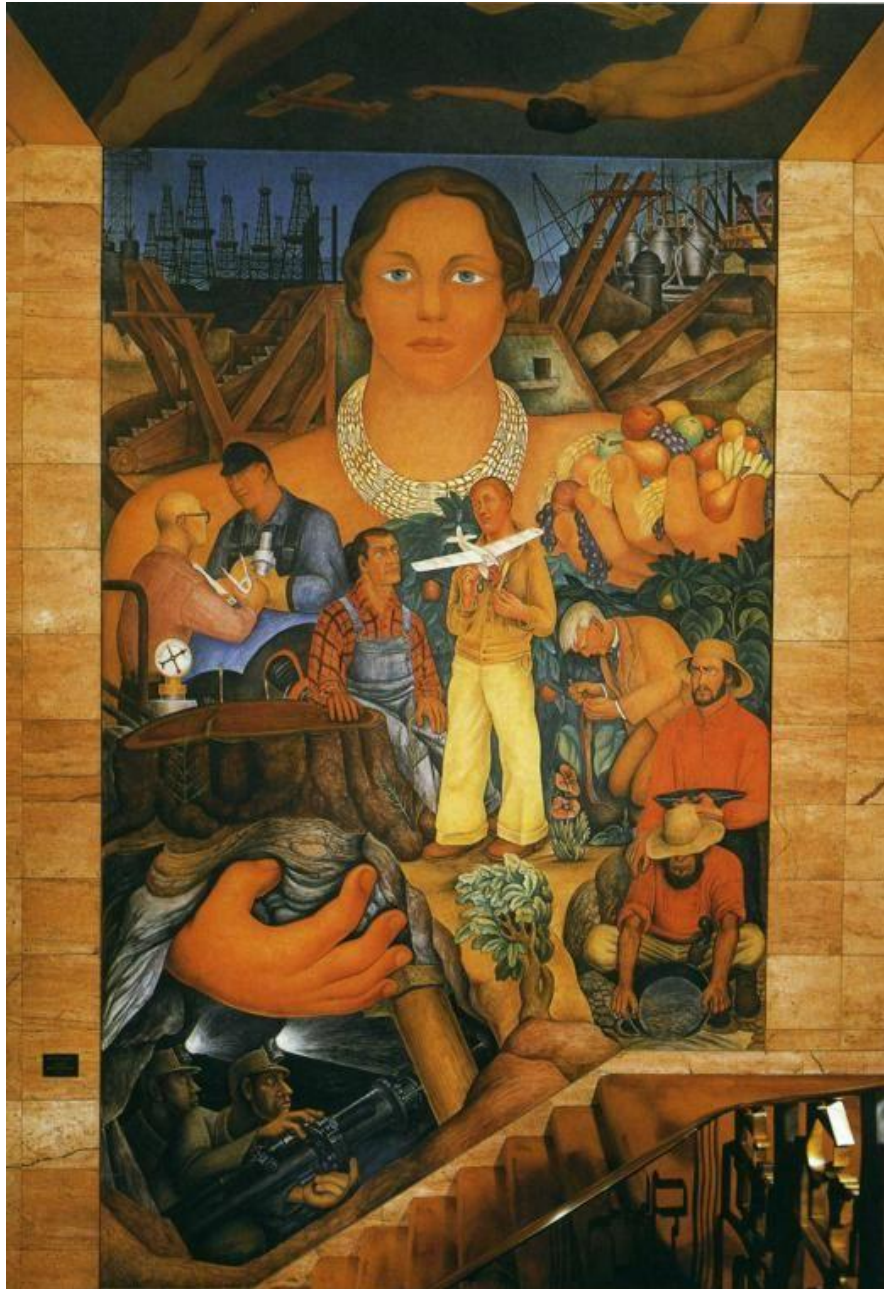
Nicholas Van Kley:  
I think you may want a new paragraph here.

important and relevant. Originally, it would seem as if Rivera supports these ideas. His work includes many cultures shown working together for universal goals. With his 1931 mural *Allegory of California* (included below), he presents a positive view of industrialization and advancement in California alongside themes from Mexican culture. He brings Mexican style and modern American content together, while still maintaining the identities of each place. However, if we view critical regionalism as proof that individual cultures can be modern without modernism, Rivera's work sits in stark contrast. When you consider two facts – that Rivera is a socialist, and that his work in America glorifies the industrial progressive craze – you realize that *Allegory of California* is simply another manifestation of Rivera's dream of a unified and regionless world under socialism.

Nicholas Van Kley:  
Try labeling the image something like "Figure 1: subtitle...."  
You can then name it Figure 1 in parentheses here.

Nicholas Van Kley:  
This sentence could be a bit clearer.

Nicholas Van Kley:  
OK! A really clear motive formula here. You're taking ample time to explain complex ideas, which I think is an important move.



Rivera, Diego. *Allegory of California*. Digital image. *WikiArt*. SocialTalents, n.d. Web.

Discourse on the theories behind critical regionalism is varied and shows many contrasting viewpoints. A few of the subjects brought up in these arguments are useful in discussing where Rivera's mural stands in regard to critical regionalism. In an article about contemporary disregard for regionalism called "What Happened to Regionalism?", author Alison Calder makes reference to what has been called a "Post-Prairie world." This term describes the present world as a place in which small, idyllic communities no longer exist on a relevant scale. She argues against this concept, and claims that the world is still individualized, just changing. She also claims that is actually vital to include small scale and local communities in our interpretation of the world today. (Calder) In another article called "Placing Resistance: A Critique of Critical Regionalism", Keith L. Eggener discusses the various effects of critical regionalism as an architectural genre, using the work of Mexican architect Luis Barragán as an example. Eggener's analysis of Barragán's work is rather critical. He points out that the critical regionalism movement itself became a contradiction. Barragán's attempt to counter modernism actually "depended on, and to some degree sympathized with, universal modernism, even as it worked against it." (Eggener 229) As artists and other people create new genres to depict small cultures, their success often actually depends on universal approval. Eggener also insinuates that it is impossible to portray individual cultures on an international or national level without misrepresentation. He mentions the ability of cultural regionalism to erase the infinite number of cultures that exist within any one community, "flattening" and distorting them. (Eggener 230) Many of these "problems" with critical regionalist theory can be seen in Rivera's fresco.

Nicholas Van Kley:  
You may not need this. Your introduction has already implicitly stated this justification. You could trust us to already know why you're looking at this debate and simply begin.

Nicholas Van Kley:  
try aiming to articulate a logical relationship here.

agreement?  
complication?  
disagreement?  
extension?

For example, *Allegory of California* seems to depict a Post-Prairie World itself, in which a new, integrated world has emerged from a localized one. A new industrial society has come to reap the bounty of this rich, once-pure land of California. Regardless of his opinion on the

Nicholas Van Kley:  
A pretty clear topic sentence!

Nicholas Van Kley:  
OK; three lens ideas in this paragraph:

1. interpreting culture/social systems as they manifest specifically in specific places is important (calder)
2. Critical Regionalism depends on a paradox in that it harnesses modernist progressivism but also rejects the tendency of that progressivism to erase local peculiarity. (Eggener)
3. the desire to retain local peculiarity can lead us to simplify cultures by flattening them. (Eggener)

I think this paragraph could be a bit more clearly structured and each of these three ideas could be more clearly articulated.

matter, this representation does not align with critical regionalist ideas about seeing local cultures as part of a changing world. Like Calder argues, the idea of a "prairie" is an ideological construction that was imported at a particular moment by European colonizers." (Calder) The very idea of considering the world ultimately "universalized" simply because there is now a larger network of culture is unrealistic and silly. Rivera's *Allegory* seems to do just this. The section of earth that's removed in the bottom corner, the remaining stump of a felled tree, and the small bush blowing in the wind all hint at the loss of a natural world. Replacing it is this land of machines and towers that sits in the background. The mural paints a picture of a "Post-Prairie" world in which the pursuit of progress *must* destroy the past. **By making this assertion, Rivera's work loses an element of realism and pragmatism in approaching the growth of world culture.**

Nicholas Van Kley:  
I think I follow your claim here:

the mural is invested in universal culture, apparently at the expense of local peculiarity.

I'm not sure I get why you use "realism and pragmatism" here, though.

Additionally, Rivera's work was so large scale that it quite plainly depended on the approval of cultures outside of the ones he depicted. His success made that so. He spent large amounts of time outside of his home country, socializing with the American and European elite.

**This hypocrisy** makes it impossible to really view his mural work as nationalist or even as bringing pride to his own culture. Rivera's work in America was also part of the muralist movement during that time, which aimed for a wide audience. The goal of the movement was to appeal to both low-income and high-income backgrounds, by providing legible visual content for uneducated people and appealing to the aesthetic tastes of the higher class. *Allegory of California* was the first mural Rivera painted in the U.S., and it was created between two floors of the what was at the time the Pacific Stock Exchange building in San Francisco, California. **However, it was in no sense a normal mural that would appear on the streets for all to see.** It's location in a stock exchange center suggests that it probably wasn't even seen by the lower-class backgrounds

Nicholas Van Kley:

AUDIENCE MATTERS: not appealing to the full range of local diversity

Nicholas Van Kley:  
is it hypocrisy?  
how so?

that the movement aimed for as an audience. Rivera painted this work as an appeal to the spirits of the rich.

While Rivera was mingling with American collectors and businessmen and philanthropists, the people of his home country and those of other foreign, less-developed nations were living much different lives. One of the most direct and very real effects of Westward Expansion in the U.S. was the exploitation of Mexican-Americans and the forced exodus of native people from their land. It was this very expansion that in turn led to the development of California in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The gold rush in the mid-1800s, which is directly depicted in *Allegory of California*, prompted a massive influx of foreign workers. This cheap labor made Western expansion and industrialization economically possible, and enabled the construction of major railroads. Rivera's fresco shows these events on a large time scale, ranging from the expansion of the 1800s to the technological developments of the early 1900s. The innovation that Rivera depicts in California was possible as a direct result of the labor of native and foreign workers. His murals even include this part of the story. In *Allegory*, a man on the right side can be seen squatting, panning for gold with his head down. His dark features and thick beard indicate a non-European, possibly Mexican, ethnicity. However, right above him is another man, this one of lighter complexion, standing with a gold pan but not doing any work. Instead, he simply looks straight ahead with an air of importance and rests his hand on the working man's shoulders, reaping the fruits of this other man's labor. Dark-skinned workers also toil in the mines, underneath the earth in the bottom left corner. Throughout the whole fresco, people of color are seen lower down, doing the manual labor. They are obscured by various other objects, and layered beneath lighter-skinned men who are doing cerebral work like inventing and discovering and planning. Quite clear to any well-informed viewer, though, is the

Nicholas Van Kley:  
I'd like to hear  
more about this  
claim.

So, how does this  
not live up to the  
standards of  
critical  
regionalism?

- it is tainted by a  
need to  
communicate to  
non-local  
audiences?  
- it is tainted  
because diverse  
local communities  
didn't see/interact  
with it regularly?

This summary of  
the reception  
history and of  
Rivera's life and  
position in the  
larger art scene is  
interesting, but we  
may need citations  
to validate the  
evidence you cite.

Nicholas  
Van Kley:  
lots of  
historical  
detail here,  
some of  
which  
should likely  
be sourced.

Nicholas Van  
Kley:  
really nice detail  
here, well  
interpreted

Nicholas Van Kley:  
OK. Interesting.

I see the claim here (this is an extension of the idea in the previous paragraph).

But I do think you could be more explicit about the connection to Crit Regionalism. In this case, I think you're asking if the art's representational strategies did anything to serve diverse local people. YOU conclude that it at least acknowledges some of that diversity and critiques the power structures that shape locals' experiences, but that the mural doesn't do enough to advocate for changing those power structures.

How is that related to CR (I think it is; I just want you to make that connection clearer).

fact that these innovations literally “rest” on top of the manual labor. Every inch of the new civilization in the west was fueled by gold from those mines and that river; by the efforts of foreign railroad workers; by the money from expansion that would never have been possible otherwise. Rivera most likely realized all of this, and included it in his work. But its context did nothing to further that agenda. To his audience at the Pacific Stock Exchange, all of this was part of one story that ended in the advancement of business and technology, and the unstoppable progress of the human spirit.

While Rivera includes this accurate depiction of the work done by non-American cultures, the overall message in *Allegory of California* blatantly counters the importance of these localized cultures - in particular the Mexican and native cultures which he spoke for. Rivera sees beauty in the great whirlwind of the Californian-American rush for progress. His backdrop for *Allegory of California* is a large, sheet-like woman staring ahead at the viewer with a serious gaze. She is the personification of Calafia, a legendary character for whom the state was named. Her hair and complexion are dark, but her eyes are light blue, alluding to a racial mix. She appears to be naked except for a large necklace, and holds a handful of fruit. She seems to symbolize the great vast land of California that is now being developed. This place was bountiful and had existed in a purer state before its settlement by white Americans. Rivera seems to address Eggener's point about the dependency of regional representation on international approval, and he accepts it. (Eggener 231) From his point of view, all of the regions have come together and are mixing to form this one new thing.

Other aspects of *Allegory of California's* style are also distinctly universal, chiefly the chaos of the mural work in general. The entire painting is crowded, teeming with small details and anecdotes relating to different events and phenomena from varying time periods and places.

Nicholas Van Kley:  
OK, so it is too invested in celebrating extra-regional progress.

Nicholas Van Kley:  
hmm, OK.

another way to see this would be to say that the mural chooses big, unspecific progress over the kind of locally articulated, locally empowered progressivism that we see advocated by Eggener and (to a less explicit degree) Calder?



One man kneels down and seems to investigate the flora of the region. A few more look as if they are discussing important technological innovations, such as the invention of the plane. All the background space is filled - in the lower portion by lush bushes, and in the top of the painting by towers in oil rigs and shipyards. The detail of the scene is infinite. The fresco is filled to the brim with vastly different images, and this creates a tone of energy, excitement and chaos. The nature of the mural is almost collage-like, and includes many different facets of life in one place – California. This complexity sharply opposes most modernist works, with their simplified shapes that speak for universal values. However, it is too chaotic and random to identify with regional/folk art, like the patterned tapestries of Latin culture. What Rivera creates with the chaos of his mural work is a unique, new genre associated heavily with large-scale social identity and socialist beliefs.

This paragraph is not as clear as the others, I don't think. Your topic sentence suggests universalism, but the evidence all points to peculiarity and complexity.

Diego Rivera glorified a fantastical, futuristic image of a perfect world in which local cultures and Western cultures formed one thriving society supported by the work of all its members - whether that was manual labor or technological invention. However, while he represents in *Allegory* the fantasy of Californian-American progress, he also includes the fantasy of local, native communities. In his other murals, as well, he always adds an element of regressive fantasy along with this progressive one. This regressive fantasy takes the form of the exotic, folkloric tones of his native land. *Allegory of California* is painted in an unmistakably Mexican style. It's full of bold colors, unapologetic lines, and softly contoured figures. The fantasy of the native people comes through in the dense, dark green of the bushes and their waving leaves. This feeling of magical realism parallels a characteristic seen in much Latin literature and culture. It can be seen in the waving of the earth's rocky cross-section, and the adornment of the large woman with her layered necklace and bountiful basket of fruit. The mural

Nicholas Van Kley: interesting.

Nicholas Van Kley: what do you mean by unapologetic lines?

Nicholas Van Kley: what is fantasy-laden about dark green?

Nicholas Van Kley: OK...I think you're having to do a bit of generalizing yourself to make this argument work.

magical realism is likely not going to be a useful term, given your audience. You could effectively employ it, but you'd need to carefully define.

does not serve as a medium between the modern and the traditional, like critical regionalism strives for. Instead, it takes the modern and traditional as they are and fuses them, wrapping them up in a new style altogether - one that embarks on a journey towards the idealistic future that socialism promises.

Critical regionalists like Barragán held the idea that a balance between traditional styles and modern international style could provide a more realistic view of the world and harmonize the past, present and future. (Eggener 228) While Rivera's work is often seen as a harmonic fusion of industrial development and native, local culture, the core of his expression, as seen in *Allegory of California*, does not actually support this. While he does reconcile these two agendas, what his work fails to do is act as proof that local cultures can be modern on their own, without more developed and global cultures. At the core of critical regionalism is this belief that to be "modern" does not necessarily require being "global". But Rivera dreams of something different. His visions are of an integrated, division-less socialist society that he sees potential for in the industry and innovation America, despite its capitalist agenda. Rivera's ideals show through in the complexity, content, style, and context of his *Allegory of California* mural, as well as in many other elements of his pieces and his life. He does not share the motives or concerns of critical regionalism, but instead presents an image of a separate ideal future in which region is obsolete.

Nicholas Van Kley:  
OK. this is very clear. You're certainly achieving the tone of culmination and final judgement that most of our conclusions strive for.

### Works Cited:

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