UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
IRVINE

The Art of Animating Images

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Spanish

by

Leopoldo Peña

Dissertation Committee:
Professor Viviane Mahieux, Chair
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2019

DEDICATION

To

Cindy, Sebastián Emiliano, Mar Irán

for your love and kindness

To

my father and mother
for your work

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to sincerely thank my committee chair, Dr. Viviane Mahieux, for her patience, diligence and vision. Her enthusiasm for scholarly work and her willingness to push the boundaries of research fields enabled me to pursue my passion for photography and Mexican intellectual thought. Without her respectful support this project will not been possible.

I would like to thank my committee members, Professor Luis Aviles, and Professor Horacio Legras for their support and kind regard towards my academic interests. And Professor Jesse Lerner, whose scholarly work exemplifies a bridge between research and art practice.

In addition, a thank you to Professor Santiago Morales, who shared with me the courage to strive in an academic setting where working-class students struggle to find common ground.

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DISSERTATION

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My dissertation focuses on photography in Mexico during the 1920s and 1930s. It is an interdisciplinary project that analyses the work of Anita Brenner, Salvador Novo and Enrique Gutmann, early twentieth century intellectuals, who employed photography to articulate and question nationalist concerns and ideals. Through photography, Mexico was presented as a modern nation in a context marked by denigration theories and the rise of fascism. My project provides insight into how photography was a technical means for exiles to assimilate into Mexican society as well as a space to question national popular culture.

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PEER-REVIEWED PUBLICATIONS

- Peña, Leopoldo. "La doble mirada del sujeto informal en *Cartas a Crispina* de Lamberto Roque Hernández." *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World,* vol. 7, issue 3, Fall 2018, pp. 58-78.

- Peña, Leopoldo. "Danza de los Superhéroes: Immigrant Tradition in Transnational Transfer. *Boom California,* July 2017.

- Berger, Martin E. and Leopoldo Peña. "Creating Spaces of Transborder Play: Indigenous Mexican Migrants in California and the Game of Pelota Mixteca." *Streetnotes* (2014) 22: 108-118.

ACADEMIC PRESENTATIONS

- Peña, L. "1937: The Progressive Image of Lázaro Cárdenas". Presented at Living History: Understanding the Past Through the Present, HGSA Conference, UC Iirvine. (April 2018).

- Peña, L. "Notes on a Transnational Collaboration." Presented at Culturas de la Prensa 1890-1940, Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, Mexico City. (Nov. 2017).

- Peña, L. "Everyday Forms of Telling Stories in Javier Castellanos' Fiction". Presented at Latin American Studies Association in Lima, Peru. (April 2017).

- Peña, L. " Zapotec Double Gazing: The Surplus National Citizen in Lamberto Roque Hernández's *Cartas a Crispina."* Presented at Fifth Conference on Ehnicity, Race and Indigenous Peoples in Latin America and the Caribbean at Virginia Commonwealth University. (October 2015).

- Peña, L. "Circular Migrations in Lamberto Roque Hernández's *Cartas a Crispina."* Presented at Competitive Edge Graduate Student Symposium at UC, Irvine. (July, 2013).

- Peña, L. "Dualidades y lógicas narrativas en 'La puerta del cielo' de Luis de Lión." Presented at Second Conference on Ethnicity, Race and Indigenous Peoples in Latin America and the Caribbean at San Diego, CA. (November 2011).

- Peña, L. " 'Ser o no ser' en la frontera: Castraciones, masculinidades y sexualidades *otras* en 'Al acecho' de Eduardo Antonio Parra". Presented at the Spanish Graduate Student Association's Symposium on Sex & Sexuality in Hispanic Literature & Film at CSULB. (March 2012).

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Humanities Core Lecturer 2019
Humanities Department, University of California, Irvine
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Teaching Assistant 2014-2018
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- Designed and graded formative and summative assessments.
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Spanish Adjunct Faculty spring 2017
Orange Coast Community College

- Semester-length introduction to Spanish. Class was a combination of heritage speakers and non-Spanish speakers. Utilized individualized teaching methodology for heritage speakers parallel to teaching second language learners using communicative techniques.

Teaching Practicum spring 2016

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Teaching Assistant
RGRLL Department, Cal State University, Long Beach Spring 2012 & Fall 2011
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- Utilized textbook materials, self-developed exercises thought multimedia equipment to promote student learning

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Course Design Certificate Program 2018
- Intensive workshop on how to design course syllabi, student-learning outcomes and translate learning outcomes into assignments.

How to Prepare for an Academic Job 2018
- Six-week workshop on drafting materials for academic job applications.

Photogrammetry Workshop 2018
- Five-day workshop on photogrammetry techniques at Archaeological Research Center in University of California, Santa Cruz

UCHRI MetaData 2.0 2018
- Workshop on developing Digital Humanities projects. Initial phase of a year-long research project on early twenty century Mexican press with assistance from Zoe Borovsky, digital humanities librarian at UCLA.

Seasons of Mentoring 2015
- A certificate granting mentoring program facilitated by Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate Division, Frances Leslie. Sessions included overviews on mentoring across differences, interpersonal communications, conflict resolution, wellness and resilience, and ethics.

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Competitive Edge Summer Program 2013
- Summer Research Program to support and prepare new graduate students for an academic career. Participants are provided with an opportunity to work on exciting research projects during an eight-week summer research program.

Coming to Focus 2013
- Three-day seminar with Californian independent documentary photographer Matt Black in Fresno, CA.

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CERTIFICATES
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Humanities Out There Public Engagement Fellow 2017

Laguna Art Museum

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California Community College Internship 2016-2017

Orange Coast Community College

- Worked with mentor, Jocelyn Sherman, a Spanish instructor at the college, who advised me on teaching and developing a lesson plans, exams and syllabi for community college students. And taught one semester of introductory-level Spanish.

Photojournalist

Daily Pilot, Costa Mesa 2008

- Photographed news and featured stories for publication on the daily newspaper

Photographer

AlBorde Magazine 2002- 2003

- Photographed music related events and artists for illustration of the publication

MEMBERSHIPS

- Latin American Studies Association
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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Art of Animating Images

By

Leopoldo Peña

Doctor of Philosophy in Spanish

University of California, Irvine, 2019

Professor Viviane Mahieux, Chair

The Art of Animating Images investigates photography during Mexico's reconstruction years: 1920s -1930s. During this period, photography was essential to illustrate nationalist projects through which a progressive image of the nation was projected locally and abroad. In this function, photography was a visual medium in its objective, expressive and technical capacity. Yet, photography also nourished discursive variants that promoted Mexico as a modern, liberal and socialist nation. Taking these discourses into consideration, this dissertation focuses on the role photography played in expressing nationalist ideals, informing nationalist imperatives by lending its own aesthetic and theoretical values: modern, objective and, foremost, unlimited reproducibility. In doing so, this dissertation engages a scholarly conversation on how photography was more than a visual and technical device at the service of nationalist ideals. The dissertation rethinks photography as an essential discursive apparatus that complemented, rewrote and magnified different nationalist currents at work during the reconstruction years of the Mexican Revolution.

Analyzing how photographic theory and discourse were employed by early twentieth century intellectuals in Mexico, it is possible to understand how in the 1920s, a time when the

nation needed to project an integral and progressive image, Anita Brenner, a self-made writer, represented the rise of the modern Mexican nation as a religious-autochthonous phenomenon while Salvador Novo approached photography to question nationalist ideas; and in the 1930s, Enrique Gutmann, a Jewish journalist and photographer, promoted a socialist conception of Mexico, in a decade in which socialism was perceived as the last refuge from European fascism and totalitarian regimes.[1] In the hands of these two lesser-known figures, photography was a system that provided a modernist discourse to promote the nation as modern, socialist, and yet autochthonous.

[1] Anita Brenner was born in Mexico. During the early year of the Mexican Revolution, her family migrated to the United States. In 1923, she returned to Mexico and became a professional writer and editor. Salvador Novo was a prominent Mexican chronicler, poet and cultural critic. Enrique Gutmann was a German antifascist exile that arrived in Mexico in 1934. He worked as an editor, journalist and photographer. He worked in diverse editorial projects through which he promoted antifascist and proletariat literature.

To truly live with the past is to experience it face-to-face…. Using media like photography, painting, sculpture, architecture, and authentic objects… The legitimate sensibility of emotions of that period are vigorously and naturally awakened in us, and not artificially and weakly as would happen if we only knew them theoretically.[2]

- Manuel Gamio

Introduction

In the epigraph above Manuel Gamio, the founding father of 20th century Mexican anthropology, enthusiastically embraced representational media when he published F*orjando Patria Pro-Nacionalismo,* an influential collection of essays tackling national issues. In his support for representational media, the anthropologist discloses a creed holding photography on equal footing with the desire to relive the past. In his view, photography is to reveal the past and instantiate an emotional awaking previously unattainable via theoretical formulations. Representational media are thus to provide a novel means to sense experience. Likewise, in his quest, the desire to "live with the past" is set as a common objective for media that respond to distinct pictorial values and require different aesthetic judgments. In the search for former experiences, dissimilar artistic genres are mobilized towards a single end, which confines style and form to manifesting the past in variegated ways. How the anthropologist managed to enlist such an amalgam of means of expression towards a common goal is difficult to ascertain. Clearly, his passion to relive the past paralleled his enthusiasm for representational technologies.

In 1916, when Manuel Gamio published *Forjando Patria* and advocated for representational media, the desire to "truly live with the past" was resounding theme contingent on legitimizing the centrality of Mexico City in a network of political power. Symbolically, "living with the past" was also a way of maintaining alive an imperialist longing and validating nationalist claims of origin via a direct association to the fallen Mexica Empire. For the greater part of the twentieth century, such claims of origin turned the resurrection of the past into a

[2] Gamio, Manuel. *Forjando Patria Pro-Nacionalismo*. Translated by Fernando Armstrong-Fumero, University Press of Colorado, 2010, pp. 78-79.

political trope for national anthropology and the Institutional Revolutionary Party. For anthropology, that trope enabled endless archeological research projects leading to appropriations of cultural artifacts that supplied the vaults of national museums. For the ruling party, the claim was reaffirmation of its devotion to pre-Columbian heritage and confirmation of its revolutionary credentials. As a matter of fact, at the center of Mexico City resides the Zocalo Square, the main stage of political performances. And nearby, just below the Manuel Gamio Plaza, the Temple Mayor is partially accessible to millions of visitors, who can glance in amazement at a relic of nationalist longings and former seat of Mexica power. As a form of speaking, the idea of reliving the past contains an unmistakable kernel of nationalist thinking. It holds the tenet for staking a claim to the right of autochthonous belonging.

In Mexico, staking claims of origin has been a driving force bringing representational media in close relation to nationalism. It was so in the early twentieth century when the nation was recovering from the ravages of a civil strife and the need for social reconciliation sought out the promises of technical developments. The confidence given to technical developments led to a trusting media and imaging processes as enablers of cultural connections with past experiences. That confidence is underwritten in Gamio's unmeasured trust on representational media, which highlights the importance afforded to the image as a cohesive device. On this regard, it must be stressed that Mexican nationalism is an ideology locked-in on the idea of a rupture with the past (pre-Columbian) and always alert to the present threat of the Other (United States).[3] Due to this twofold sense of disconnection, of which the northern political border stands as a material incision, nationalism often relies on images for their capacity to transfer meaning across spatial domains. At the same time, the sense of a cultural interruption hurls nationalism into a perpetual

[3] Bartra, Roger. *Blood, Ink, and Culture: Miseries and Splendors of the Post-Mexican Condition.* Translated by Mark Alan Healey, Duke University Press, 2002, pp. 11-12.

and paradoxical project: the always-pressing need to defend its borders, and suture the rupture with the past in order to validate a territorial claim.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the nationalist and revolutionary desire to bring forth the sensibilities of the past ran parallel to consolidating an ideological and social cohesion. In those decades, between the urban and rural worlds, there was a perceived incision that needed suture and for this task the photographic image was mobilized. During the educational campaigns of the 1920s promoted by José Vasconcelos, Minister of Education, photography was an essential tool to carry out pedagogical instruction. A mayor organ for the dissemination of pedagogical information was *El maestro rural*, a magazine that solicited the work of canonical figures of Mexican photography. The photograph was a viable means to circulate ideas in a country with high illiteracy rates.

In other words, during the educational campaigns, rural teachers would observe daily life activities in peasant community and send reports to the Secretaría de Educación Publica in Mexico City, where intellectuals would interpret the information, draft and illustrate articles that would then circulate among the peasantry. In this process, through photographs, and guided by "rural teachers", illiterate peasants were led to reflect on how their communal practices and modes of organization were linked to the past: cultural logics of pre-Hispanic societies.[4] In a way, peasants would see representations of their practices and thereby derive an understanding of how the cultural processes they were enacting were linked to their ancestors. Through instruction and photographs, peasants were thus led into a process of communal reflection. This process of reflecting on the traditions inherited from the past was a response to pedagogical thesis installed at the Secretaría de Educación Pública in México City, where a variant of Manuel Gamio's

[4] Castellanos, Alejandro. "Miradas al futuro: La fotografía en México, 1920-1940." *Mexico (1920-1960)*, Huesca imagen, 30 abril / 30 mayo 2004, pp.20.

theory on the past held that in peasant communities resided the cultural residue of pre-Columbian practices. The search for the past in rural communities was thus an enterprise that deployed photography as practice, material image and abstract thought: photography as a system by which a referent was constantly pursued.

Against the context of the educational campaigns, and with more than a century of distance from 1916 when Gamio enthusiastically commented on representational media, the anthropologist comment is striking for multiple reasons. On the one hand, the confidence posited on photography's potential to deliver "the past" sustains itself on a problematic equation whereby scientific method legitimizes emotional need. On the other, the correlation of scientific inquiry to sensibility deems theoretical assessment the "artificial" and "weak" means to derive a conception of the past. In the equation, the problem is not that the intertwining of *affect* and *rationality* fails to facture the emotion-reason binary of western thinking. That structure remains in place because it was not intended to be undone. What is most striking about the faith allocated to representational media is that technologies; such as, photography, painting, sculpture and architecture are endowed a high degree of veracity to the extent that they are purported to verify an affective link between modern individuals and their past. The problem in such formulation resides in purporting to awake, reveal, and prove as matter what it deems affective capital. It is as if modern technologies were regarded as harbingers of a sensibility that has been ever present, but lacking a means to emerge. It is as if the social scientist had finally found the means to deliver proof of a long-standing hypothesis seeking to verify an unbroken affective connection between modern subjects and presumed ancestors, rather than empirically confirm material relations. That is, in Gamio's quest to relive the past, objectivity, which was aimed at impeding

the introduction of affect into representational media is turned onto what it is not intended to reveal: sensibility.[5]

For a highly regarded social scientist, who in the 1910s was ahead of his time and who still dons the status of founding father of Mexican anthropology, the legitimation of emotions through photography, a presumably objective representational medium, might have been less the result of an erroneous formulation than the end product of participating in a cultural vogue extolling photography as viable to recover cultural logics and effective at reenacting modern expressions. Even so, Gamio's support for photography begs some questions: how could a scientist, an avant-garde anthropologist, think of photography as medium to extract "legitimate sensibility"? What ideological gambit persuaded the scientist to place a higher value on photography's *affective* power than on the medium's purported *objectivity*? There are, of course, no readily available answers to these questions because, aside from the epigraph above, in the texts this project analyzes Gamio makes no other explicit comment about photography. Thus, what photography actually meant for him remains a mystery. Yet, there is substantial evidence to explore how Gamio and his contemporaries engaged with photography.

One way to understand how Gamio and his contemporaries interacted with photography is to ask: what theoretical input did photography provide to pursue a "legitimate sensibility" while demeaning theory and empirical inquiry as "artificial"? Here, it is worth underscoring that the anthropologist's support for representational media follows a nationalist end at a moment when in the intellectual sphere there is a growing pushback on materialism and empiricism. This

[5] For a detailed explanation of objectivity's rise in the nineteenth and twentieth century, see: Daston, Lorraine. Objectivity. The MIT Press, 2007. According to Daston, throughout the nineteenth century, the rise of objectivity as a scientific discourse prioritized rational images. The images illustrating scientific publications were thus understood as exempt of the artist's affective input, despite being produced by artists. In a way, objectivity pushed the artist aside in the production of rational images, which in order to be rational had to be exempt of traces of human intervention.

is a moment when historical materialism, empiricism, and to a larger degree positivism and its denigration theories, are losing traction in the wake of the First World War, the Mexican Revolution and the crisis leading up to the financial crash of the 1920s. This was a moment when Mexican intellectuals also had to respond to the denigrating rhetoric of the American extreme right, such as the extremism of the Ku Klux Klan, which was parading the United States as the seat of imperial racial purity and Mexico as a primitive state, a racially mixed nation incompatible with modern democracy and progress. As a response to such adenigrating view, Mexico was presented as a modern nation and democratic country in a process of re-grounding its symbolic capital, via anthropology and photography, onto the cultural logics of pre-Columbian cultures. This presentation of the country was buttressed on a legitimate theory burrowed in the higher echelons of the intellectual sphere in post-revolutionary Mexico.

In a sense, the idea that Mexicans were intricately linked to pre-Columbian cultural heritage comprised a reaction to denigration theories and nourished the philosophical, political and scientific drive of indigenismo: a complex enterprise that for Gamio's anthropology was a means to "incorporate" indigenous people into the modern nation. Most significantly, the idea of a modern nation grounding its symbolic capital on pre-Hispanic logics paralleled the basic theoretical formulation purporting that photography was an unhindered means to reveal and reproduce latent referents. Like photography, Gamio's brand of indigenismo was proposing a referential connection hinging latent symbolic capital to visible manifestations. As such, photography as theory and discourse was a means for the past to be made available as an image, symbol and object, a material sign condensing former and current sensibilities.

Hence, to the question above regarding photography's contributions to the pursuit of a "legitimate sensibility", let's keep in mind that in Gamio's time, photography was following two

main tracks. For photographers following a socialist ethos, the medium was a means to craft verifiable documents that would denounce the maladies of industrial development. For others, photography was a medium capable of delivering a "straight" and non-manipulated image: a material proof of the photographer's innate sensibility and capacity to translate the visible world. This last argument was as much intended to edify photography as an art form as it was bent on pushing against the idea of photography as a mechanical means of reproduction. The main tenet of this argument sustained that photography was enabling a new sensibility, one by which the photographer could attain artist status. Two mayor exponents of this trend were the American photographers, Ansel Adams and Edward Weston. The former advocated for photographs of translucent pictorial clarity; visual impressions resulting from the photographer's "pre-visualization process", a process by which an image that begins in the photographer's mind finds its way onto a supporting platform: silver gelatin emulsion.[6] The latter spoke of the photographic image as a direct manifestation of the artist's vision. In this way, the photograph was a print, a visible object supported via the mediating function of the photographic camera. In a sense, for the advocates of the "straight" photograph, the camera was merely a medium allowing for the transition of an image from the artists mind to a material supporting surface: the photographic paper.

Quite likely, then, Manuel Gamio's interest in photography as a means to deliver past emotions was responding to photography's potential to translate and link symbolic capital via a referential system wherein modern technology –camera- was enabling direct relations between the past and the inherent emotions of modern subjects. In his on way, what for the 'straight' photographers was the possibility of crafting a reproduction of a cognitive image; for Gamio,

[6] For further details on the theoretical principles of Ansel Adam's work, see the trilogy: *The Negative*, *The Print*, *The Camera*, a three-volume series that methodologically explains the elements of the Zone System, a process of producing wide-spectrum tonalities in monochromatic photographs.

photography was offering the possibility of reestablishing a referential link between the sensibility of past civilizations and that of modern subjects. That Gamio might have perceived photography in such away is factual in as much as his interest in reliving the past found its way into the work of other intellectuals, who took up photography to amplify and/or refute the anthropologist's tenets on the cultural connection between pre-Columbian sensibilities and modern Mexico.

In order to understand what photography meant for Gamio and his contemporaries, the following chapters provide a purview of how photography and nationalism parleyed one and other during the two-decade reconstruction phase of the Mexican Revolution (1920s and 1930s).

The specific task is not to cover the ample terrain photography navigated in a two-decade period, any attempt at revealing such complex relation would require many more years of scholarly research. Rather, this project focuses on three prominent figures: Anita Brenner, Salvador Novo and Enrique Gutmann; all of whom, thought, perceived and lived the reconstruction phase of the revolution and were closely acquainted with early twentieth century photographic theories as well as with Manuel Gamio's nationalist ideas. This is not to say that Brenner, Novo and Gutmann upheld Gamio's views, nor that all three had a similar relation to photography. In fact, despite being immersed in the nationalist context where Gamio was a prominent figure and exponent of indigenismo's policies; Brenner, Gutmann and Novo had very different and even opposing ideas about the medium and its relation to Gamio's brand of nationalism.

Brenner was Mexican by birth and sought a hospitable territory in her native homeland. In the early 1920s, she returned to Mexico from the United States, where her family exiled to escape the violence of the Mexican Revolution. Her identity was split between perspectives:

American, Mexican and Jewish. She valued Mexico through comparisons thereby deriving binaries that remain problematic. Her work shows, Brenner had a tendency to construe "otherness", as when in order to exalt Aztec culture, she defined coetaneous indigenous societies as a primitive others. Moreover, it is said she had a camera but her own photographic work is unknown even though portraits of her are canonical exemplars of modernist photography and she promoted the medium arduously in her publications. Gutmann, like Brenner was Jewish and looked at Mexico from the perspective of an exile who saw in the receiving country the possibility for a socialist and democratic nation, perhaps the nation he left behind in Europe. In his appreciation of Mexico, the longings for the Weimar Republic are palpable as is the disgust towards the Third Reich's national socialism, which sent him into exile and led him to take up an anti-fascism creed. Unlike Brenner, Gutmann had a practical relation with the medium. He was a working photographer, an accomplished writer, editor and photojournalist whose work coalesced, nourished and drew influence from the diverse aesthetic trends of the1930s: Constructivism, New Vision, Socialist Realism.

Whereas Brenner and Gutmann saw Mexico from a transnational perspective, Novo was a highly recognized Mexican, who gazed at his country of birth from what Porfirio Diaz called: "the balcony of the republic" or Mexico City. Novo's view was a vantage point and a critical perspective often in defense of national culture but reluctant to extoll the populist and nationalist rhetoric that Brenner and Gutmann embraced while defending and promoting the country. Throughout the 1920s, Novo mordantly commented on photography and did not value it as an art form. From his elitist perspective, photography was a practice of blue-collar and uneducated people lacking artistic sensibility. In the 1930s, however, he extolled the medium for its "sublimating capacity", an idea that hankers on a surrealist take of psychoanalysis. In his view,

photography had moved from a senseless amateur pastime to a means by which the common folk could reach the public sphere and thereby gain political representation, or at least serve as a referent for the pleasure of the glance in memorial recollection. Being a prominent writer, Novo stood more in front of the lens than behind the camera. It is unknown whether he took any photographs. His image was thus merely a pose that allowed him to circulate the public sphere but that failed to contain his self. His writing, however, traces the variegated paths photography followed in the 1920s and 1930s.

Despite their distinct relation to photography and the nationalist imaginings of the 1920s and 1930s, Brenner, Novo and Gutmann's work contains representative notions of the medium's relation to the politics at play in the reconstruction phase of the Mexican revolution. To understand how their work registers photography's relation to predominant ideas, the chapters' titles highlight a key concept at stake. With exception of the chapter on Gutmann, the analysis of Brenner and Novo's work, respectively, the terms "abstraction" and "sublimation" withhold particular significance to derive an understanding of how Brenner and Novo approached photography to engage other discursive currents. Likewise, each chapter's title references a specific year of importance for the production of the texts analyzed.

The first chapter, *1926: Reproduction,* analyzes Anita Brenner's influential book, *Idols Behind Altars*, and other journalistic writings in which she translates Manuel Gamio's ideals and theoretical tenets. The chapter's title references 1926, the year Brenner collaborated extensively with Gamio. It is also the year in which the anthropologist went into exile. The chapter details how Brenner employed photographic theory to articulate the logic of cultural continuity, a topic that concerned many nationalist intellectuals. The central argument holds that Brenner drew from photographic reproduction theory to amplify what for Gamio was a referential relation between

pre-Columbian culture and modern Mexico. Brenner articulates Gamio's logic of cultural continuity via "straight" photography's theory of un-manipulated image production. In her interpretation, photography is the means to extract subjacent images and serves as the theory to propose that image production in modern Mexico flows through a timeless channel. Images are thus purported to emerge endlessly and without mechanical or human intervention. In so doing, photography as modern and innovative technology grants legitimacy to another wise political scientific hypothesis seeking to justify a direct connection between two distant temporalities.

The second chapter, *1931: Sublimation*, reviews Salvador Novo's journalistic writings of the 1920s and 1930s to historicize Novo's essay of 1931, "El arte de la fotografía", which he subsequently published as "La *Kodak* ante el arte*"*. In its first version, "El arte de la fotografía" was a speech presented in a gallery opening at the Sala de Arte de Secretaria de Educación in April of 1931. The gallery opening was for Agustin Jimenez, an important early twentieth century photographer whose work has recently received scholarly attention. In the essay, Novo reiterated central ideas on photography he espoused throughout the 1920s. One of these ideas associated photography with art in an interdependent relation in which photography was as subservient medium. In this sense, photography was the offspring of art. It is worth noting that this interdependent relation was the end result of a binary by which Novo correlated traditional art forms to modern media. That is, he proposed that cinema was the offspring of theater, journalism the "prodigal" child of literature, and photography the heiress to painting's capacity to reproduce likeness. In so doing, Novo redeployed a normative interpretation of gender to assign on photography a feminine reproducing ability. Re-gendering photography was way of suggesting that art, and painting particularly, would then move onto its natural "mission", which was to express artistic impulsion. Photography would then pursue a path of reproducing at

infinitum. At its core, "El arte de la fotografía" engages a discussion about copy work and reproduction, a topic that Manuel Gamio and Brenner also took up the previous decade from a nationalist standpoint. In Novo's view, photographic reproduction was synonymous to "bad art". Most significant, while discussing reproduction, Novo spoke of photography's capacity to sublimate, an idea that hankers on surrealism's quest to free up subconscious matter. For Novo, sublimation was the possibility of arriving at representation. It was an idea purporting to return the pleasure of the glance as form of parleying images in the public sphere.

The third chapter, *1937: Retraction* offers a view of photography's relation to institutional politics and proletariat literature by exploring how "revolutionary photography" drew from a materialist dialectic in context of the 1930s. The chapter focuses on the work of Enrique Gutmann, a German anti-fascist activist, propagandist, Jewish journalist, editor, photographer and photomonteur. In the 1930s, Gutmann became a prominent figure for his work with the Liga de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios and Liga-Pro Cultura Alemana en México. In these organizations, Gutmman took up the struggle against fascism by promoting proletariat literature, supporting the Lárazo Cárdenas administration and sponsoring exile petitions. His close association with the president led Gutmann into multiple projects which include: promoting indigenous artisanal production in the state of Michoacan, editing official propaganda magazines and sponsoring leftist publications through Editorial Masas, a publishing house. However, his contributions to photography remain largely unknown in part because his archive has not been located. Thus, this chapter results from limited archival research and follows the threads of some Gutmann's most easily accessible works: *Frente a Frente, Futuro, LIFE, Despertar Lagunero, Chimeneas* and *Lázaro Cardenas Visto por Tres Hombres.* These publications were the product of leftist collaborations and offer an opportunity to glance at a

materialist dialectic in the context of the antifascist fervor that surfaced in 1929 when the crippling liberal economy presented a glimmer of hope for socialist utopias.

In the midst of the crisis, socialism was the bastion of critiques against capitalism and the bulwark for nationalisms to confront rising fascism. Furthermore, Gutmann's collaborative work provides an opportunity to purview the transnational networks the connected the American and Mexican left. It is by exploring such networks that one can glance at what Mexico meant for the early twentieth century exiles, who arrived in the country searching for the means to counteract fascism. Therefore, this chapter builds on the collaborations between Gutmann and Joseph Freeman, editor of the *New Masses*, an American leftist magazine. Their collaboration resulted from a common interest in refuting representations of Mexico and President Lázaro Cardenas. Their projects, many of which did not materialize, sought to shed light on the democratic potential of the Cárdenas regime as well as take a stand against American conservative journalists, who viewed the president as a dictator and promoter of socialism. The Gutmann and Freeman collaborations this chapter explores are nestled in the midst of print media debates that brought conservative and liberal journalists face to face during the rise of fascism. The collaborations are also anchored on the ideals of the international Popular Front that took up the fight against fascism's propaganda by sponsoring progressive governments.

In sum, the following chapters purview photography's relation to anthropology, art and politics in the 1920s and 1930s. Herein, however, photography is not only understood as a medium by which two-dimensional images are produced. Photography in these chapters is also understood as a system with its own discourse and theories intricately related to other disciplines and discursive trends. In this sense, the chapters approach photography as a complex field of

relevance to literary criticism in that by taking photography as an ample space for scholarly research allows for a rethinking of the relationship between literature and visual culture.

In literary criticism, photography continues to be perceived as a medium of primary relevance to visual studies and art history. This is so because photography is mostly understood as a visual technology that produces two-dimensional images and illustrations for textual narratives. At best, from literary criticism, photography is viewed as an aesthetic means or something of artistic value. This interpretation is only a rehashed version of the photography-as-art argument that modernist photographers promulgated early in the twentieth century. The problem such interpretation resides in that it continues to think photography as just a visual medium and neglects that photography is a centuries-old technology that has produced a body of literature in which art theory, philosophy and science dialog. The analysis of such body of literature is not exclusive to visual studies or art history; it should be study matter for literary criticism as well. Therefore, the chapters that follow argue that to understand how early twentieth century intellectuals in Mexico employed photography to construct a modern image of the nation, photography must be explored beyond the work of canonical photographers and be thought as a complex representational technology with its own particular theory and discourse.

Furthermore, by analyzing how photographic theory and discourse were employed in early twentieth century Mexico, it is possible to understand how in the 1920s, a time when the nation needed to project an integral and progressive image, Anita Brenner, a self-made writer, represented the rise of the modern Mexican nation as a religious-autochthonous phenomenon while Salvador Novo approached photography to question populist and nationalist ideas; and in the 1930s, Enrique Gutmann, a Jewish journalist and photographer, promoted a socialist conception of Mexico, in a decade in which socialism was perceived as the last refuge from

European fascism and totalitarian regimes. In the hands of these lesser-known figures, photography was a system that provided both the theoretical content and the innovative modernist discourse to question and promote the nation as modern, socialist, and yet autochthonous.

That is why Mexico cannot be measured by standards other that its own, which are like those of a picture; and why only as artists can Mexicans be intelligible.

– Anita Brenner

From this perspective, creative activities are useful only if they produce new, so far unknown relations. In other words, in specific regard to creation, reproduction (reiteration of already existing relations) can be regarded for the most part as mere virtuosity.

- Moholy Nagy

Chapter 1

1926: Reproduction

This chapter analyzes Anita Brenner's *Idols Behind Altars* and argues that she employed photographic theory as a structuring and narrative device. As a structural component in her text, photographic theory sustains the mystic dialectic by which Brenner derives an aesthetic connection between pre-Columbian art and image production in modern Mexico. In so doing, Brenner's narration integrates photography as an underlying discourse for image reproduction. As such, it is photography's own language and reproducible capacity that allows for a presentation of modern art production as a process exempt of human intervention and endlessly linked to an original referent. Brenner's use of photographic theory is contingent on a reassessment of reproduction and is tantamount to staking a nationalist claim of origin in art production. Therefore, the central hypothesis of *Idols Behind Altars* holds that in modern Mexico, images and forms timelessly reappear because they are inherently linked to a pre-Hispanic origin. The hypothesis of a modern nation grounding its symbolic capital on pre-Hispanic logics paralleled the basic theoretical formulation purporting that photography was an unhindered means to reveal and reproduce latent referents. This was the main tenet of "straight" photography, the trend sponsored by Edward Weston with whom Brenner collaborated in the production of *Idols Behind Altars.* For the advocates of the "straight" photograph, the camera was merely a medium allowing for the transition of an image from the artists mind to a material

supporting surface: the photographic paper. Like photography, Brenner's text was proposing a referential connection hinging latent symbolic capital to visible manifestations.

Idols Behind Altars registers an interaction between photography and nationalism, a complex duet that worked hand-in-hand to amplified official projects and philosophical currents. Therefore, to grasp how photography functions in the text it is worth keeping in mind that for Brenner a major matrix of philosophical and political logic was twentieth century indigenismo, a complex construct from which she drew an appreciation of popular art production as well as the impulse to project Mexican culture abroad. Her text thus bears the imprint of the heightened idealism of the 1920s and represents the perspective of intellectuals who purveyed Mexico from an idealized perspective, and for whom one salient project was the attempt of assimilating Mexican culture while promoting the receiving nation as a society predisposed to democratic progress.

For Brenner, acculturation to Mexican society and cultural promotion were parallel objectives that comprised a reaction to demeaning representations of Mexico that circulated in the Unites States. Her work as journalist emerged in a context marked by the rise of Ku Klux Klan and its media sway through the western United States. At the height of the organization's "second coming", it "owned or controlled about 150 magazines and newspapers," two educational institutions and a film company. As the organization took hold in the north of the U.S. it redesigned its rhetoric of hate to include Jews, Catholics and immigrants. [7] In her time in Texas, Brenner experienced anti-Semitism and it is quite likely she moved to Mexico as direct result of those experiences. In a general sense, it was against the ample range of popular and

[7] Gordon, Linda. *The Second Coming of the KKK*. Liveright, 2018. pp.2. As Gordon notes, a mayor strategic change for the organization's second coming was the adoption of a more ample rhetoric of hate that included Jews, Catholics and immigrants. This change resulted from the absence of African Americans in north of the U.S., where the organization reemerged in the 1920s.

racist media depictions of Mexico that through photography's own language, Brenner promoted an image of the country crafted on a modern and innovative technology. [8]

The fact that *Idols Behind Altars* draws as much from photography as it does from a nationalist ideal makes it relevant to highlight the central dialectic underwriting the text. Its title, for instance, analogizes the ideological tenet by which cultural nationalists proposed aesthetics and education as means to revamp Mexican society. The title reflects a paradigm wherein a visible image sustains the symbolic charge of another subjacent image, a complimentary and latent entity mediated by a liminal border adhering the visible image to its latent counterpart. In Brenner's text, the paradigm holds that an image of an idol lays subdued within another visible Christian religious figure. In the 1920s, that paradigm legitimized anthropological work as an essential enterprise both to recuperate the nation's past and to allegorize the rise of the modern nation as sustained on bedrock of indigenous culture.[9] In Brenner's narrative, therefore, as explained in this chapter, the nation rises as an aesthetic form indissolubly linked to the pre-Columbian era. Allegorically, through photography's cohesiveness, the nation as form reconnects to its historic origins via an unhindered referential logic.

To illustrate how Brenner ingrained photography in her narrative, the following chapter sets her work in conversation with Manuel Gamio, and José Vasconselos, nationalist ideologues from which cultural continuity in post-revolutionary Mexico was a priority. In so doing, the following chapter frames Idols Behind Altars within the rise of professional anthropology, the

[8] The impact of the KKK on Latin America is topic that I will explore in future research. In way, thought, the work of all three intellectuals – Anita Brenner, Salvador Novo, Enrique Gutmann- considered in this dissertation present reactions to American extreme-right nationalism.

[9] According to Ignacio Rodríguez García, throughout the twentieth century the State at the hands of the ruling party (PRI) sponsored national anthropology for ideological and political ends, one of which is to legitimize its control of the pre-Columbian past; see: Rodríguez García, Ignacio. "Recursos ideológicos del estado mexicano: el caso de la arqueologia. In *La historia de la antropología en México: fuentes y transmisión*. Edited by Mechthild Rutsch. Plaza y Valdez Editores, 1996, pp. 83-103. For a critique on Mexican nationalism and its relation to the arts, see: Bartra, Roger. *Blood, Ink, and Culture: Miseries and Splendors of the Post-Mexican Condition.* Translated by Mark Alan Healey, Duke University Press, 2002.

history of modern photography and the early twentieth century cultural promotion enterprises that disseminated a progressive and modern image of the nation.

Looking for Idols in "the far south"

In March of 1926, three years after returning to her country of birth, Anita Brenner travelled throughout the Mexican lowlands – Jalisco, Michoacán-, conducting research, collecting objects and other materials from which she would eventually draw core ideas for her influential book, *Idols Behind Altars: the Story of the Mexican Spirit*, and she noted in her travel journal:

> Monday I went idol hunting…. we came to an old burial ground. There were lots of them around there.... Inside are scraps of bones, pottery, of a fine red clay, small dainty, beautifully shaped, and strange large-nosed idols, gray, or red and sometimes black. The first time I had seen these primitive *Tarascan things*. They are realistic, very much so.[10]

Those "Tarascan things" had been taken as "Aztec" on a first recording, which she then erased to correspond with regional culture.11 There is no clear indication that her correction was due to awareness of regional geopolitics as related to the historical rift between Tarascans and Aztecs; yet, in regards to aesthetic criteria, the correction shows a rising inclination towards cultural relativism and its interpretational model for appreciating aesthetic differences. As a result of evaluating aesthetic qualities through cultural difference, Brenner quickly drew a line between Aztec and Tarascan art as to underscore essential contrasts in terms of cultural progress, and sophistication in art production. In the comparison, she thus reinstated a hierarchy that subdued

[10] Brenner, Anita, Susannah J. Glusker, and Carlos Monsiváis. *Avant-garde Art and Artists in Mexico: Anita Brenner's Journals of the Roaring Twenties*. University of Texas Press, 2010, pp. 87, *(emphasis mine)*.
[11] Padilla, Rangel Yolanda. *México y La Revolución Mexicana bajo la mirada de Anita Brenner.* Universidad Autónoma de Aguascalientes, 2010*,* pp. 33.

Tarascan art to the centrality of Aztec aesthetics. Hence, in exclaiming, "They are realistic…" she highlights that Tarascan art was, unlike Aztec-related art, more "archaic", and more inclined to represent the human form, and thus more confined to the qualities of the material world. This conclusion on Tarascan art was further confirmed in *Idols Behind Altars*: "The descendants of the people who apparently made [such] sculptures seem to have lived always the same lives they lead today…".[12] In other words, Tarascans, like the art they produced, continued to be "primitive"; their art was realistic in that it exhibited the "archaic mood" and mode of existence of its corresponding culture. For Benner, nonetheless, those "Tarascan things" were attractive for genuine reasons: they were "Mexican unmistakably" and "elusive of definition" because their stylistic imprint was different from Aztec art and had a "sympathetic cast of the far south".[13] Thus, being representative of the peripheral artistic styles in the "far south", "Tarascan things" were expressive of a material condition, while Aztec art was monumental and had achieved metaphysical proportions. Brenner's differentiation obscures the fact that both Aztec and Tarascan art were being read through the same lens: indigenismo.

In its early twentieth century version, indigenismo turned a sympathetic eye to pre-Columbian art and the Indian present. In the Mexican scene, indigenismo's momentum came from a nascent professional anthropology invested in a twofold and contradictory mission. As a professionalized field, anthropology sought to break away from the positivist scientific politics of the nineteenth century and it also attempted to rework twentieth century political decrees to integrate indigenous masses into a centralized nation, a project inherited from nineteenth century proto-anthropologists and liberal intellectuals.[14] As a socio-political and aesthetic enterprise in

[12] Brenner, Anita. *Idols Behind Altars: The Story of the Mexican Spirit.* Beacon Press, 1970, pp. 39

[13] Ibid…. *39*

[14] Charles A Hale provides an excellent exegesis on the evolution of liberal thought in Mexico. Hale argues that Manuel Gamio and José Vasconcelos espoused a view on education that is directly linked to the social

twentieth century Mexico, indigenismo proposed an un-fractured cultural link between pre-Columbian logics and present indigenous practices. This nationalist endeavor provided prime conditions for Brenner to travel throughout Mexico gazing at pre-Columbian art from a redemptive standpoint established earlier in 1907 by Manuel Gamio, the father of modern Mexican anthropology and pioneer of stratigraphic methodology.[15]

In "The Redemption of the Indigenous Class", a succinct denunciation to the Porfirian regime, Gamio, partly inclined towards Marxism and anchored on a cultural relativism in opposition to Positivism and degeneration theories, called for a paradigmatic shift so that indigenous culture could be redeemed and recognized. [16] As a political principle, Gamio declared "the Indian" as a political brother, who would not longer be the object of social neglect: "He is our brother and will never again be a pariah."[17] Consequently, Gamio laid out a political and anthropologically based postulate that contained the grains of a perceptual shift: "The Indian", he wrote, "will not awaken spontaneously… It will be essential that friendly hearts work for [his] redemption".[18] Despite the scarcity of professionals in the field, Gamio proposed that "friendly hearts" were those of the anthropologist and ethnologist and upon them fell the task of

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reconstruction ideas of nineteenth century intellectuals like Gabino Barreda and Justo Sierra. Barreda and Sierra were influenced by August Comte, the French philosopher whose brand of positivism promoted an active role for the state, *el estado docente*, "as the inculcator of civic and moral virtues in all citizens." See: Hale, Charles A. *The Transformation of Liberalism in Late Nineteenth-Century Mexico*. Princeton University Press, 1989, pp. 251-251, 260.

[15] Richard E. Adams clarified that it was Gamio who pioneered stratigraphy in the Americas, see: Adams, Richard E. "Manuel Gamio and Stratigraphic Excavation." *American Antiquity*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (Jul., 1960). Guillermo de la Peña also states that Manuel Gamio, in 1911, began employing stratigraphy in the project in the Valley of Mexico. See: "Nacionales y extranjeros en la historia de la antropologia Mexicana." In Rutsch, Mechthild. *La historia de la antropología en México: fuentes y transmission.* Plaza y Valdés, 1996.

16 Gamio explicitly states that the article was not welcome in Mexican publications, but he managed to publish it in *Modern Mexico*.

[17] Gamio, Manuel. *Forjando Patria.* Translated by Fernando Armstrong-Fumero, University Press of Colorado, 2010, pp. 37

[18] *Ibid*...

familiarizing with the Indian's "sensibilities in order to comprehend him and make him comprehend us." The quest therefore was to bridge cultural divides.

For Brenner, an anthropology enthusiast and self-made journalist, this quest meant understanding Mexican culture and writing about it for an international audience, primarily an American readership. Her work in many instances consisted of translating Gamio's writings. While translating the anthropologists work in 1926, Brenner directly engaged the task of acquiring cultural awareness, which in essence was an attempt to formulate of a new sensibility and a new vision exempt of racial prejudices. Gamio presumed that the elimination of prejudice would then lead to a repossession of an autochthonous perception, as a mode of visual analysis and social recognition. On this aspect, and echoing Gamio's unmeasured idealism invested in his work at the Valley of Teotihuacán, Brenner's words are more explicit: "A sympathetic appreciation of him [the Indian], and of *his things*, *from his own point of view*, so far as possible, goes a tremendous way in establishing his self-confidence."[19]

Taken at face value, Brenner's words suggest that Mexican twentieth century indigenismo was grounded on a humanist ideal – sympathy- that would lead to an appreciation of indigenous art from an autochthonous perspective. However, as evidenced in her "idol hunting" adventure, indigenismo also maintained a structuring western logic by which empire (Aztec) was valued over other parallel cultures (Tarascan). In that sense, the difference Brenner draws between Aztec and Tarascan art is primarily the result of evaluating art from a centralist perspective, and of reproducing aesthetic criteria through which Aztec art is held as the zenith of pre-Hispanic cultural achievement, while those on the periphery are deemed less developed. Differently stated, Brenner looked at cultural expressions, tried to understand them in proper

[19] Brenner, Anita. "Romance and Realism in a Modern Aztec Theater." *Art and Archeology,* 1925, pp. 69, *(emphasis mine).*

terms, and inevitably reproduced an ethnocentric structure and reiterated the allegorical scheme for a centralist nation. More significantly, her method of drawing the difference suggests a paradigm by which Brenner evaluates art and the production of images. On the one hand, Aztec art as the apogee of human expression is thought to transcend its own materiality; it is thus understood to contain the "spirit" of its own creative process. On the other, Tarascan art, by being tied to material conditions, is measured as objective and material proof of its own culture. The end result of this comparison echoes the dispute of art's role and association to realism. Should art manifest reality or the creative impulse of the artist? Brenner's mode of interpretation parlays the question of what is art's dual function: creative expression or realistic representation.

Her method of interpretation, as it defines one type of art as expressive and the other as material proof, parallels the twofold discourse ascribed to photography at the turn of the twentieth century. From then on, at the rise of modernist photography, the medium traverses a double discursive current that holds it as a material document of evidentiary character and as visible proof of the expressive "genius" of its creator.[20] Considering the presence of this double discourse in *Idols Behind Altars* and given that Brenner thought of Mexico as a "picture", it is photography that lends theoretical input to the interpretation of the image production by the Mexican artists whose work Brenner evaluates throughout her narrative. In doing so, photography is enmeshed in an anthropologically based discourse that is then enveloped in a religious veneer and engages the question of what is art's relation to reproduction.

[20] Allan Sekula called these discourses the chattering ghosts of photography. See: "The Traffic in Photographs." *Art Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 41, Photography and the Scholar/Critic (Spring, 1981), pp. 15-25.

Shifting Reproduction

Brenner's "idol hunting" adventure presents a succinct analogy of her theoretical and interpretational mode of reading and writing about pre-Hispanic and modern Mexican art. In her journal entry, for instance, just as one can sense the effects of interpreting art through "denial of coevalness", several other analytical tropes that she employs in *Idols Behind Altars* come to the surface.[21] First and foremost, as Aztec art is held as a standard of measure, religion and art are immediately correlated. Subsequently, art itself is valued within a paradigm of continuity and is perceived as coming-to-being through a constant process of reappearance, as in archeological excavation work and popular prophetic revelations. Art production is understood as a phenomenon of material and metaphysical proportions. Such tropes are significant in that they hint at a general theoretical reformulation. On one level, Brenner takes Gamio's hypothesis of an interrupted cultural connection between pre-Columbian logics and present artistic practices, but reinterprets it in religious discourse thus circumventing the anthropologist's empiricist method. Secondly, she employs a binary based on photography theory to rearticulate the logic of cultural continuity. Where she understands art as "primitive" and "archaic" she draws from the idea of photography as document; when she sees art as transcendental cultural achievement: creation of artistic genius, photography as mediated spiritual expression in employed. Explicitly at stake in this deployment of photography is a re-evaluation of modern Mexican art production; implicitly, however, *reproduction* was reevaluated. To understand this reevaluation it is imperative to highlight what Gamio understood as reproduction.

[21] Fabian, Johannes. *Time and the Other. How Anthropology Makes its Object*. Columbia University, Press, 1983. In employing Johannes Fabian's term, I want to underscore that Brenner values Tarascan culture as primitive; in part, because her interpretation seeks to highlight Aztec art as modern. To that, she employs the interpretational scheme of the modern anthropologist for whom the object of study inhabits a different temporality. Furthermore, Brenner does not consider or question the power relations of the pre-Hispanic cultures. In her evaluation, Aztec art is posited above Tarascan art without taking into account the historical conflict between Tarascan state and the Aztec empire. Her interpretation reaffirms the epistemological claims of Mexican nationalism, which grounds itself on the political might and symbolic power of the Aztec empire.

From his "pro-nationalist" perspective, Gamio somewhat dismissively discussed *reproduction* in "The Work of Art in Mexico," a provisional classification for the diverse manifestations of art in the nation. In one main category of the classification, "D. The Work of Art of Reappearance", he associates *reproduction* to "older styles of art that are reproduced and faithfully copied in our day, including reproductions of pre-Hispanic art and copies of foreign art."[22]. In this sense, copy work or that which is created through reproduction is antithetical to autochthonous production. As such *reproduction* is thought to be the process of importing "foreign artistic forms" and copying pre-Hispanic art. In this function, reproduction was valued as problematic because it enabled predominant European forms and contributed to the disregard of present "traditional works of art", the indigenous production that Gamio saw as "repository" of pre-Hispanic art elements and of the seeds for a national art.

In his classification, while production is thought to be a process of creating something new, *reproduction* is a conscious and premeditated process by which artists suppress their own creative genius to enable an external cultural manifestation to emerge elsewhere. As such, *reproduction* is ineffective for a national art because its mimetic properties have led to a predominance of European styles "slightly influenced by environmental conditions of Mexico, but not by indigenous art."[23] In his brief engagement with what reproduction means for national art, Gamio implicitly advances the theory of cultural continuity that Brenner reiterates in *Idols Behind Altars*. Gamio suggests, for instance, that despite the predominance of works of art done via reproduction or "by-copy", indigenous art has remained undeterred and constant through a process of production. He thus classified indigenous production as "work of reappearance"; however, the unique process accounting for how indigenous production had remained a constant

22 Gamio, Manuel. *Forjando Patria*. Translator Fernando Armstrong-Fumero, University Press of Colorado, 2011, pp. 50.
[23] Ibid… 49.

eluded a definition. He only ventured to call the process "spontaneous", and predicted that as mode of production it was "the result of a little known and obscure phenomenon" last noted just before the Conquest.[24] Presumably, that "obscure phenomenon" was visibly at work in the 1920s, and it was the factor at play in modern Mexican production, particularly in the production of the muralists.

Within Gamio's objective methodology, the "obscure phenomenon" defied a verifiable definition and it seems that empirical means reached a threshold. But, where his objective method found a limit, his materialist logic and ideology complemented the analysis. Thus, in conjuring up "spontaneous", Gamio hankers back onto a "Marxist aesthetic idea" by which it is understood that artistic production springs from a "natural" inclination to intervene nature and create aesthetic objects out of raw elements. According to this idea, the relation of man and nature is mediated on a laboring aesthetic principle that consists of creating a "world of human objects" as part of the socio-historical process by which man constantly transforms nature.[25] Therefore, as it relates to art production, for Gamio, *reproduction* was a process that exacted no creative ingenuity, as it relied on former creations and enabled these to supplant autochthonous production. This understanding of *reproduction* as exacting no creative agency begs the question: if the muralists were in essence redeploying the pre-Columbian fresco technique, why wasn't the use of the technique understood as *reproduction*? One possible answer is: like the anthropologists, the muralists were considered "friendly hearts" at work redeeming indigenous cultural logics. In other words, *reproduction* when employed in favor of a nationalist enterprise was also production; it was producing a new national culture and enabling another modern form to emerge: the nation.

[24] Ibid… 50.
[25] Sánchez Vázquez, Adolfo. *Las ideas estéticas de Marx.* Era, 1974, pp. 48-52.

There is, however, another dimension to Gamio's take on *reproduction* and it is not unrelated to the emergence of the nation. When "The Work of Art in Mexico" was published in 1916, Gamio was an established avant-garde anthropologist. His consolidation as an anthropologists occurred in 1911, a year after Franz Boas inaugurated the School of American Anthropology, and Gamio returned to Mexico from Columbia University to pioneer stratigraphic methodology in Atzcapotzalco, Mexico.[26] In this project Gamio set out to confirm his mentor's- Franz Boas- theory of a three tier "cultural sequence for the Valley of Mexico".[27] Not accidentally, this tripartite sequence is analogized in *Idols Behind Altars* and its importance resides in that it emerged from a revalorization of culture. Specifically, the sequence was the result of interpreting cultural continuity from an empiricist standpoint that values "independent invention" as opposed to diffused manifestation. A diffusionist interpretation of cultural innovation does not account for "individual innovation". Diffusionist theory only accounts for the end result of evolution and processes of borrowing or reproduction in migration. The basic premise of diffusionist theory held that "some people were culturally creative while others could only copy."[28] Hence, Gamio's take on *reproduction* and his insistence on a national art production based on "spontaneous" method, not only underwrites an evaluation of national art production but marks a shift away from interpreting *reproduction* through the language of diffusionist theory, a paradigm that would not uphold cultural innovation. Understanding *reproduction* in a new language would then legitimize the emergence of the modern Mexican nation, as a form directly linked to pre-Hispanic culture. For Gamio, and Brenner, the legitimization of such cultural link undercuts a diffussionist interpretation through which the

[26] In 1910, Franz Boas was a mayor figure in the foundation of the School American Anthropology.
[27] Adams, Richard E. "Manuel Gamio and Stratigraphic Excavation." *American Antiquity*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (Jul., 1960), pp. 99.
[28] Erickson, Paul A. and Liam D. Murphy. *A History of Anthropological Theory*. Broadview Press, 2001, pp. 52-53.

modern nation would only be linked to the pre-Hispanic states via a process of copying or reproduction. As suggested before, copy and reproduction were antithetical to autochthonous production and could not stand as the processes delivering the modern nation. This concern with *reproduction* as related to the reemergence of the nation is shared by Gamio and Brenner and is inscribed in *Idols Behind Altars.*

Explicitly, Brenner's take on *reproduction* is comprised in her evaluation of modern art production in Mexico. For instance, images are thought to flow through "one great channel" from the pre-Hispanic artists to the modern contemporary Mexican painters.[29] Understood as such, images are *fixed* figures that transcend spatial and temporal dimensions. In this logic, images are not reproduced but simply emerge continuously. Underlying the idea of a "channel" is Gamio's thesis on the continuance of pre-Columbian cultural logics and his endorsement of modern artists - muralists- as bearers of indigenous aesthetic knowledge. It is not a coincidence, therefore, that while Gamio drew no definite conclusion when he pondered on the "obscure phenomenon" and associated *reproduction* to a form of doing copy work, Brenner approached image production in a new evaluative light. In her interpretation, as she interposes a religious discourse, her mention of "channel" draws a semantic parallel with medium, photography, a technology and means of reproduction.

It is less of a coincidence, also, that when Brenner arrived in Mexico in 1923, photography was the lauded medium for its innovative method of delivering a novel process of reproduction. That year, for instance, the introduction of the 35mm camera instantiated not only the possibility of mobile image taking but awakened a new sense of spontaneity, which reinforced photography's " symbolic role as the totem of modernity" and confirmed "the

[29] Brenner understood religion as "one great channel that carried inter-American thought and custom and style," which "served as the one-real bridge with the Old-World…" *Idols Behind Altars… 36.* She also uses the term "channel" again on pp.127

medium as the main carrier of visual information to the masses."[30] Photography for the masses and photography as narration was then a new reality. And just as the advent of the 35mm camera renovated visual culture with the photo-essay as a new narrative technique, photography also aided the establishment of a new profession: the journalist.[31] On this regard, Brenner's case is exemplary as she epitomizes the self-made writer who found in journalism an economic refuge.

In the 1920s, as well, the creative potential of the photographic medium elicited reflections on *reproduction* that in many respects echoed Gamio's and Brenner's engagement with the concept. For example, "Produktion-Reproduktion" a manifesto by the Constructivist Moholy-Nagy proposed that "*creative activities are useful only if they produce new, so far unknown relations…* reproduction (reiteration of already existing relations) can be regarded for the most part as mere virtuosity" [*emphasis in original*].[32]

In essence, photography brought the possibility to rethink and reevaluate *reproduction.* For Gamio and Brenner, both concepts were intricately linked to the production of the modern nation and its arts; yet Brenner, unlike Gamio, approached the concept through photography. Brenner's use of photographic theory thus exposes the referential logic in the nationalist claim of origin that permeates her narrative. In that sense, it is also worth explaining how the articulation of nationalist claim of origin paralleled a reformulation of a standing twentieth century modernist thesis on art production.

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[30] Parr, Martin and Gerry Badger. *The Photobook: A History volume I.* Phaidon Press, 2005, pp. 86

[31] The photo essay arose in Weimar Germany. According to Daniel H. Migalow, the photo essay was an innovative narrative form employed by Jewish writers and photographers. In Germany the photo essay "blossomed as a distinctly modern, technologically inflected vehicle used by writers and photographers to participate in crucial aesthetic, political and cultural debates." Migalow, Daniel H. *The Photography of Crisis: The Photo Essays of Weimar Germany*. The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012, pp. 6.

[32] Passuth, Krisztina, and László Moholy-Nagy. *Moholy-Nagy*. Thames and Hudson, 1982, pp.289.

Art at a Standstill

From a modernist perspective, image production had reached a standstill. Imagination was exhausted and so was the possibility of new aesthetic forms. In the Mexican context, the thesis was firmly held by one of Brenner's friends, the philosopher Samuel Ramos, who believed that indigenous art production, was characterized as a cyclical repetition of the same forms and that indigenous influence on culture was primarily of biological nature. [33] Contrary to Gamio and Brenner's understanding of indigenous cultural production and influence, in Ramos's view, indigenous culture "repeats' itself due to lack of imaginative agency and has little to no cultural influence. Another Mexican intellectual, Marius De Zayas, also expressed a similar idea. From his American perspective, while pushing against photographic pictorialism by extolling photography's expressive potential and its capacity to deliver the "material truth of Form", De Zayas understood that:

> There is no doubt that, while the human brain has been developing, the imaginative element has been eliminated from Art. There is no doubt also, that all the elements for creative imagination have been exhausted.[34]

For De Zayas, like for Brenner, photography was liberating art forms and imagination. Unlike Ramos, and De Zayas, however, Brenner's take on creative exhaustion was underwritten by a revaluation of indigenous art production as a modern art practice. In other words, where an exhausted imagination was though to be leading to a repetition of forms, in Brenner' view, the repetition of indigenous forms was understood as renovated cultural continuity. In her words, it was a "Mexican Renaissance."

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[33] Ramos, Samuel. *El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México. Espasa Calpe Argentina, 1952, pp. 36.* (1951).

[34] De Zayas, Marius. "Photography and Photography and Artistic Photography." In *Classic Essays on Photography*, Edited by Alan Trachtenberg, Leete's Island Books, 1980, pp. 127.

As Brenner's reformulation deviates from evolutionism as an interpretative framework, her reformulation must be understood as part of a larger theoretical shift occurring in anthropology when the discipline moved into cultural relativism and consolidated itself as a professional field in the 1920s.[35] It is thus not surprising that Brenner's thought is centered on cultural manifestations and that her interpretation of art and aesthetics is based on a theory purporting cultural continuity. The methodological side of her interpretation, however, is in fact a practice of amateur ethnography guided by a primitivistic interest.

In hindsight, then, Brenner's encounter with the burial ground in the Tarascan region reads as a treasure hunt that in the 1920s was singular only in that it was a cultural vogue for pre-Colombian figures and symbols. In a general sense, the "idol hunting" adventure and her evaluation of the "Tarascan things" is a concise manifestation of a hemispheric ethos: the ethnographic interest in the past, and the inclination to make the past a veneer to speak of the present.

In her reading of the burial contents, for instance, an ethnographic gazing manifests a nationalist longing and the search to ascertain art expressions as modern. In her interpretation of "Tarascan things" as "realistic" and "Mexican unmistakably", it is presumed that in pre-Hispanic figures reside not only the traces of past civilizations, but a continual cultural influence and the values greatly needed in the present: a communal, transcendental and modern art, and a free-standing modern nation. In this quasi-ethnological enterprise that sought to formulate a

35 For a rigorous exposition of the development of cultural relativism and the consolidation of anthropology, see: George W. Stocking, Jr. *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology*. New York: The Free Press, 1968. "The Ethnographic Sensibility of the 1920s and the Dualism of The Anthropological Tradition." In *Romantic Motives: Essays on Anthropological Sensibility.* U.S.A: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989.

communal sense of belonging, Anita Brenner was not the single laborer or the only "wondering pilgrim", as she once referred to herself.[36]

In a transnational context, Brenner was part of a larger exodus of intellectuals who came to Mexico with the intent to formulate a new image of the nation. In that context, mainstream representations of Mexico were infused with positivism and denigration theories. Those representations, when circulated through the yellow journalism of the Hearst era, presented Mexicans as an economically and culturally stagnated people. Yet, as such intellectuals were drawn to enact a project favorable to Mexico, the country was seen as a reservoir of non-modern precepts. For that reason, it can be said that Brenner's appreciation of pre-Columbian art is closely tied to what Robert Goldwater defined as an inherent characteristic of primitivism: an aesthetic interest in peripheral art that coincides with the shrinking of imperial domains, and the rising disillusionment with rationalist modernization projects. [37] All of which, manifested itself in an unrelenting quest to collect artifacts and led to the consolidation of the ethnological museum as a site for the exploration of foreign "antiquities". As exemplified in Brenner "idol hunting" adventure, embedded in this interest for "primitive" art was an assumption that supported anthropological practices. At its core, that assumption contains the idea that reaching underneath the surface one goes back further - historically, psychologically, or aesthetically- and things become simpler, and that because they are simpler, they are more profound, more important, and more valuable.[38] In the European context, the assumption was concisely expressed in Carl Einstein's manifesto, *On Primitive Art:*

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[36] Brenner, Anita. "The Petate, A National Symbol". *Mexican Folkways*, Vol. 1, June-July, 1926, pp. 14-15. Brenner this article refers to herself as a "pilgrim".

[37] James Clifford also discusses the ethnographic interest of avant-gardists. See: "On Ethnographic Surrealism. *Comparative Studies in Society and History.* 23.4 (1981): 539-564.

[38] Goldwater, Robert. *Primitivism in Modern Art*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1986.

> If we explode the ideology of capitalism, we will find beneath it the sole valuable remnant of this shatter continent, the preconditioned for everything new, the masses of simple people, today still burden by suffering. It is they who are the artist.[39]

And although the socialist underpinnings of Einstein's manifesto were incompatible with the liberal and centralist disposition of Mexican revolutionary politics, the humanist pathos was a resounding echo. Just as Einstein, proposed "simple people" as artist, Gamio and Brenner also understood the indigenous masses and the popular artists as genuine kernel of aesthetic agency. Likewise, for Gamio and Brenner, reaching "beneath" the visible surface was equivalent to finding the conditions for something new: a new nation and a new national expression. On this, Brenner wrote more clearly: Mexican artists "rediscovered the secret of the colonial missionary friars, who taught with images, and the pre- and post –Hispanic pivot of emotion and tradition, which was images…"[40] Those images as it was generally understood had been buried underground when "Native religion was sheared, pared, abstracted, driven back… to the core; earth level. Nascent, dormant, centuries passed."[41] But the time came, when the "dormant" corpus of images would emerge through an innovative interpretational technique. In method, therefore, her mode of interpretation is relational to imaging practices, like photography and stratigraphy, of the early twentieth century.

In other words, in Brenner' text an anthropologically driven and religious interpretation upholds images as recurring phenomena.[42] As a mode of interpretation, it is the result of

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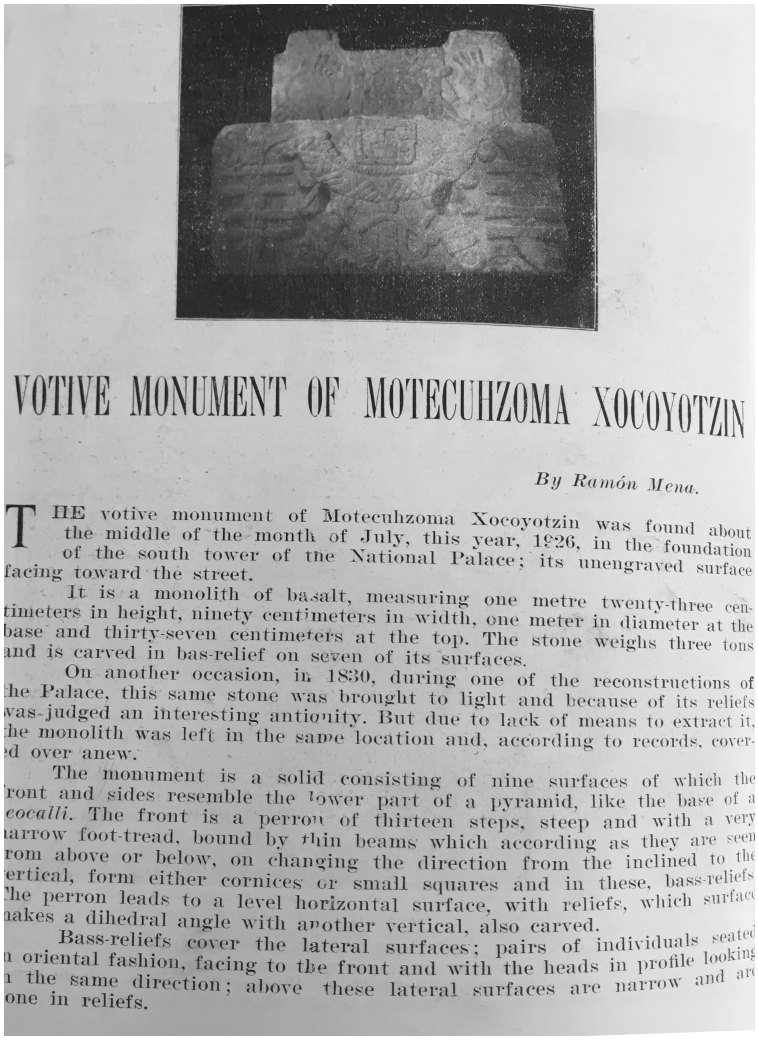
[39] Einstein, Carl. "On Primitive Art." Translated by Charles W. Haxthausen. *October*, 2003, pp. 124.

[40] Brenner, *Idols Behind Altars* 236

[41] Ibid… 137

[42] My understanding of phenomena draws from Enrique Dussel's definition, as when he writes: "Things appear in the world as phenomena. A phenomenon is a being with a certain sense… That being was there already, before, *a priori*. It is not newly constituted; it is only discovered… Interpretation, in some way, discovers what was

reevaluating *reproduction* in a quest to go beyond materialism and empiricism. In Brenner's method, like in photographic theory, images are "dormant" awaiting the intervention of technical or computational processes. Her method is best expounded in her reading of a monument of religious value brought to light by an archeological excavation that Brenner conjured up as introduction to *Idols Behind Altars*.



VOTIVE MONUMENT OF MOTECUHZOMA XOCOYOTZIN

By Ramón Mena.

THE votive monument of Motecuhzoma Xocoyotzin was found about the middle of the month of July, this year, 1926, in the foundation of the south tower of the National Palace; its unengraved surface facing toward the street.

It is a monolith of basalt, measuring one metre twenty-three centimeters in height, ninety centimeters in width, one meter in diameter at the base and thirty-seven centimeters at the top. The stone weighs three tons and is carved in bas-relief on seven of its surfaces.

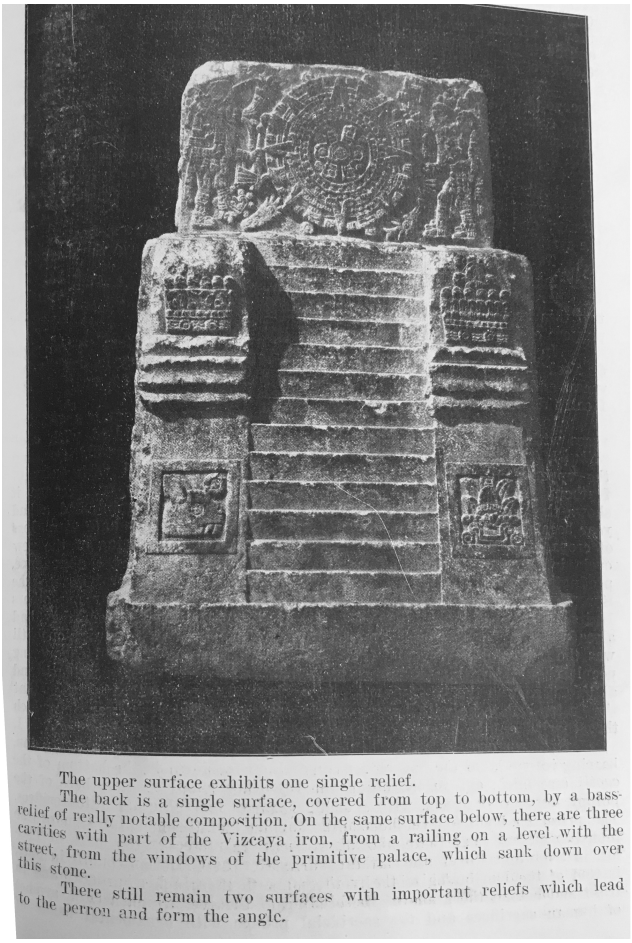
On another occasion, in 1830, during one of the reconstructions of the Palace, this same stone was brought to light and because of its reliefs was judged an interesting antiquity. But due to lack of means to extract it, the monolith was left in the same location and, according to records, covered over anew.

The monument is a solid consisting of nine surfaces of which the front and sides resemble the lower part of a pyramid, like the base of a *cocalli*. The front is a perron of thirteen steps, steep and with a very narrow foot-tread, bound by thin beams which according as they are seen from above or below, on changing the direction from the inclined to the vertical, form either cornices or small squares and in these, bass-reliefs. The perron leads to a level horizontal surface, with reliefs, which surface makes a dihedral angle with another vertical, also carved.

Bass-reliefs cover the lateral surfaces; pairs of individuals seated in oriental fashion, facing to the front and with the heads in profile looking in the same direction; above these lateral surfaces are narrow and are one in reliefs.

Figure 1: Raul Mena's article, Votive Monument of Motecuhzoma Xocoyotzin, published in Mexican Folkways.

previously concealed: the real." It should be noted, however, that *indigenistas* like Gamio and Brenner did not discovered "the real" but merely engaged in an articulation of what was perceived as a "concealed" other. See: Dussel, Enrique. *Philosophy of Liberation.* Translated by Aquilina Martinez. *Orbis, 1985, pp.* 33.



The upper surface exhibits one single relief.

The back is a single surface, covered from top to bottom, by a bass-relief of really notable composition. On the same surface below, there are three cavities with part of the Vizcaya iron, from a railing on a level with the street, from the windows of the primitive palace, which sank down over this stone.

There still remain two surfaces with important reliefs which lead to the perron and form the angle.

Figure 2: José María Lupercio's photographs detail the Votive Monument of Motecuhzoma Xocoyotzin. The monument's discovery became a central event in Anita Brenner's *Idols Behind Altars.*

The Recurring Image

In 1926, a few months after Brenner's "idols hunting" adventure in the Mexican lowlands, the nationalist epistemology was shaken to its core. A reconstruction project at the "south tower of the National Palace" in Mexico City yielded a three-ton pre-Columbian monument, its shape analogous to the great temple in Tenochtitlan. The monument had been buried at the foundation of the National Palace since the sixteenth century when the Mexica Empire came to end. In modern Mexican history, however, the monument was unearthed initially in 1830, but was left to rest underneath the national edifice due to technological limitations. In 1926, with advanced excavation technology and modern anthropological interpretation, the

monolith's recovery was hailed as a foreseen reaffirmation of cultural continuity. In *Mexican Folkways*, Francis Toor and Diego Rivera, the editors of the magazine, granted several pages of the issue to illustrate the magnitude of the event. And in "Votive Monument of Motecuhzuma Xocoyotzin", an article by Raul Mena, a prominent anthropologist, and with photographs by José María Luperio, a founding figure of Mexican photography, the magazine presented an archeological and visual exegesis of the monolith's nine surfaces.

Mena's article explained that the monumental stone had been of religious importance in the great Teocalli in Tenochtitlan during the reign of "Motecuhzoma Xocoyotzin." According to the anthropologist, early in the sixteenth century, "Motecuhzoma" had requested the piece as a votive to the sun, but after the destruction of the great temple, the monumental stone was interred to serve as the foundation for the Palace of Cortes, which at the turn of the nineteenth century became the National Palace in Mexico City.[43]

In a succinct recount of the monolith's historical trajectory, the anthropologist confirms that the monument was not an entirely unknown artwork. Its history was well documented and the stone only needed to emerge to be redefined in more precise archeological terms and revalued under a sensible gaze. Quite possibly, for the pre-Columbian history enthusiast, Mena's explanation in *Mexican Folkways* was a confirmation of anthropology's modern interpretational methodology, and thus provided insight into the two historical periods and the two mayor semantic fields that the monument occupied. Anthropology confirmed the non-referential logic of the Aztec belief system, and suggested that in the pre-Columbian city, the monument served a religious purpose as a visible image and object. In colonial Mexico, physically present, yet invisible, the monument served a utilitarian function as a stone in the foundation of the palace.

[43] Mena, Raúl. "Votive Monument of Motecuhzuma Xocoyotzin." *Mexican Folkways*, Vol. 2 No.3, August-September, 1926, pp. 34

But *Mexican Folkways* being a magazine "devoted to make known the thousand mysterious and fantastic paths through which flow the ideas" of Mexicans, quite directly affirmed that as submerged object and image, the monument also remained functional beyond the confines of the two palaces it sustained for centuries.[44]

Clearly, as an image, the force of Motecuhzoma's votive monument had a direct impact on the entourage of *Mexican Folkways.*[45] Such was the enthusiasm the stone received during its second coming to light in 1926, that Anita Brenner visited the monument and noted in her travel journal on Monday, August 16: "Saw also the monolith just dug up. It is a stone *"estilización"* of the great temple of the Aztecs. Quite perfect."[46] And upon looking at the monument, she recalled the prophecy of redemption she would then articulate at the introduction of *Idols Behind Altars:* upon the emergence of a temple bearing the inscription of sun, the reign of indigenous people resumes. In her narrative, though, the Aztec monolith acquired a larger significance. It became not only a rhetorical cornerstone of her exploration into the "Mexican spirit', but a foundational material and abstract image valued more than a simple sign. In its abstract and material form, the monolith was spiritual and aesthetic deliverance. Hence, correlating popular beliefs and the function of scientific enterprise, Brenner's story of the Mexican spirit opens by retelling a "current" yet "old prophecy in Mexico" directly related to the excavation of the monolith.

The prophecy, says Brenner, foretells the moral and political redemption of the "ancient people", at the moment when an emblem of "the chief temple of the Aztecs" appears at the center of the ancient city, Tenochtitlan. Therefore, by geographic coincidence, the excavation project and the votive monument at the National Palace are the realizations of the ancient

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[44] Gamio, Manuel. "The Utilitarian Aspect of Folklore." *Mexican Folkways*, Vol 1, No. 1, June-July 1925, pp. 7.

[45] Brenner began working for *Mexican Folkways* in 1926. She noted in her journal that when she visited the monument she had seen José María Lupercio, the photographer who produced the photographs of the monument for *Mexican Folkways.*

[46] *Anita Brenner's Journals of the Roaring Twenties* 224

prophetic announcement. A prophetic announcement that has trickled down through history embedded in an oral narrative whose abstract images are no less real that the objects they embody. In her thinking, images are visual as manifestations of subdued entities. And by implication, the excavation process at the National Place is relational to artistic practices that are delivering already-exiting configurations, previously visual images of autochthonous style and character.

On one level, the correlation of the prophecy to the archeological piece bespeaks the underpinnings of a redemptive and religious-aesthetic tenet, which is succinctly, comprised in one of Brenner's phrases: "Pre-Hispanic Mexican divinity, like pre-Hispanic Mexican art, was an abstract thing."[47] In this sense, abstract is a condition and a sphere in which religion and art are one and the same: abstract symbols and visual objects, all visible manifestations of a creative spirit. This cohesion between religion and art, content and form, is derived from the conception that pre-Hispanic thought, as related to religion and art, was not a binary and referential system. Ostensibly, therefore, there was not a definite separation between religious symbolism of ritual practices and the material quality of art. Abstract is thus meant to suggest a shared intellectual and religious cultural dimension in which art, as material object and symbol, serves a religious and utilitarian function and is always accessible through religion. Within this religious sphere, art's dual function is all "dynamic" in the sense that images are entities in which the "gods" manifest themselves, so as to offer a plethora of figurative projections; worn as "masks" worshipers could thus acquire divine attributes by referencing divinity, or by claiming a figurative attribute previously revealed by divine manifestations. The basic logic here is that in images like in material and abstract art forms, there is a divine quality continually activating a

[47] Brenner, *Idols Behind Altars* 155

mystic, religious interconnection, which is in turn a medium of access to the persisting symbolic properties of religious images.

This image logic can also be explained as consisting of a twofold idea. One idea maintains that in pre-Hispanic times, art was primarily religious and operated with no clear categorical demarcation between visible referent and abstract signified. The other ideas sustains that in pre-Hispanic times, the human form was seldom a figurative and symbolic element. The human form, when it entered the religious image dialect, was as an enactment of a previous divine manifestation. The human was thus an agent and became an art form only with the advent of Christianity, which also responds to a similar referential logic. Then, pre-Hispanic art, since it was abstract and responding to a referential logic, entered the material forms and symbolic dimension of Western divinity. The fusion between Old World and New World, at least within the realm of art, was harmonious, according Brenner. Art thus became both aesthetic and religious, and the human form, the predominant figure in Christian art, became the symbol of divine representation and the epitome of "realistic" art production. In other words, with the advent of Christian art, indigenous art took on the morphological qualities of Western religious art, and through this "realistic" system of representation, art became the communicative platform for indigenous worshippers and pre-Hispanic divinity.

In the association between Christianity and indigenous religions, the correlation of images as abstract and material entities, and the understanding of religion as a vessel for the transference of images must be underscored. Likewise, in the association, the human becomes a passive, non-intervening vessel for the harmonious fusion and the image is both a symbol and an object, and religion a primary channel. This conception strikes a discursive parallel with "straight" photographic theory. Namely: the notion that images are inherently objects and signs

produced through a process in which no human intervention occurs and the camera is the primary channel. In Brenner's thinking, as will be explained later, religion as a sphere of creation renders the artist as the medium for the circulation and reproduction of images. Therefore, the artist, like the photographic camera, is a medium for the transferring of images and is purported as having no human effect on the image itself.

Most importantly, the theory of religious fusion comprises a double attempt. One the one hand, by postulating the human as the hinging element in religious sphere in which abstraction is a permanent condition; artists don the ability to abstract. By extension, "pre-Hispanic Mexican art" was modern, it was produced by artists capable of comprehending abstract line and understand form, an ability that primitive men lacked because primitive men are primarily emotional, according to evolutionist principles. On other hand, the theory of religious fusion attempts to reinstitute the presumably referential logic of pre-Hispanic religious art. This latter notion is the corresponding component of an enduring conclusion: upon the arrival of Christianity, pre-Hispanic art practices and religious objects were taken down and ceased to be visual material referents and in being taken down, religious objects became subdue referents for a visible object of Christian qualities. According to Brenner: "They [the Indians] hid the gods in habitual private places. They shifted them back to the original sources: pushed them into caves, dropped them in lakes… They buried them deep…".[48] In all its complexity, the idea that "Indians hid the gods" or the notions that "idols are buried" as in Motecuhzoma's votive monument, is as much a rhetorical trope as it is a historical fact. As a fact, pre-Hispanic religious effigies were indeed taken to "habitual private" and non-habitual private places in order to spare them from the iconoclastic enterprise of military and religious Conquest. It is known, for instance, that upon the arrival of the Spaniards to Tenochtitlan, in 1519, the emperor Moctezoma

[48] Ibid… 136

ordered his son, Axayácatl, to move main deities, Huitzilopochtli, Tezcatlipoca y Topiltzin, to a safer location in the outskirts of the city. In a similar fashion, throughout the early decades of the Conquest, religious figures were spared and when not spared, popular artisans reproduced vanquished religious icons in order to maintain religious practices.[49] The fate of the votive monument in Brenner's *Idols Behind Altars* quite possibly followed as similar path. In the hands of Spaniards, the monument was hidden to interfere indigenous cults. In Indian hands, the monument could have been hidden to protect it from the wrath of Christians. And very possibly, as religious figure, it was also reproduced both in physical and abstract form by those seeking to maintain the monument's symbolic function. Certainly, this form of reproduction by popular artists allowed some figures to remain physically present and symbolically viable through the centuries.

However, with the advent of twentieth century indigenismo, such form of reproduction was deemed as a type of "copying" and aesthetically ineffective for a national art. For Gamio, if we recall his provisional evaluation of art, such type reproduction, when it required "copying", also implied aesthetic stagnation; deterred artistic innovation and resulted in a proliferation of the same image. Yet, Gamio, like Brenner, exalted the popular artist as the repository of artistic creation. This promotion of the popular artist manifests another contradictory dimension of their evaluative method; where popular art reproduction "by copy" is deemed undesirable; the popular artist is also held as the repository of artistic genius. To derive such evaluation, the popular artist's method of production needed to be defined as creative and innovative process. In the midst of this paradoxical reevaluation of reproduction, Brenner's reading of the Motecuhzoma's

[49] Gruzinski, Serge. *La Guerra de las imagines: De Cristóbal Colón a "Blade Runner" (1942-2019). Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2010, pp.* 63-65.

votive monument provides insight into how autochthonous artistic forms were judged and how reproduction was deemed an acceptable process for image production.

In Brenner's narrative, as a rhetorical trope, the monument therefore comes to embody an object of religious resistance. The monument is perceived as a material image that has come to verify a persisting abstract signified nestled in the popular imaginary. As object, then, the monument comes to join its abstract referent and to do so the popular folk, the bearers of the prophecy were reevaluated as the mediums and not as carriers or reproducers of a timeless persistent image. Similarly, in her account, the monument stands as the analogy of the befallen idol, taken down by the wrath of the conquistador, preserved in folk legend and recuperated by a redemptive anthropological excavation. Hence, the interpretation of art production within a religious language is as much determined by the imperative to "redeem" the aesthetic logics of pre-Hispanic art as it is by the imperative to redefine reproduction, as process inherent to an aesthetic continuum. It is for this reason that upon visiting the votive monument at the Museo Nacional de Antropología, Historía y Etnología, Brenner concluded that the unearthing of the monument signaled not the emergence of an already exhausted aesthetic form but the deliverance of the prophetic announcement; according to which, when of "the chief temple of the Aztecs" appears at the center of the ancient city, Tenochtitlan, the Indian's cultural logics would again reign as a dominant knowledge system

Within its metaphorical scope, Brenner's relation of prophecy and excavation echoes the general thesis promoted by Gamio, who proposed that indigenous cultural and religious logics had survived throughout the centuries as embedded everyday practices within a cultural structure of superimpositions. This is perhaps no more explicit than in Brenner's title, *Idols Behind Altars,*

which derives from one of Gamio's phrases. [50] Most significantly, therefore, ingrained in that phrase, and inherited in the title, is the dynamic twofold notion of substitution and concealment. Meaning, the process of religious Conquest developed in a material exchange where in lieu of a native effigy, a western figure was erected; and consequently, natives embedded (concealed) "behind" that second figure, the religious values of the first. The basic theoretical implication of "idols behind altars" supposes that material and visual representations, religious effigies, were dethroned during the Conquest, and remain symbolically continuous through the guise of western images. Based on such notion, it follows that as a material effigy is recuperated, excavated, it is also restored to its symbolic logic, which basically means that when returning anew the former referent of a persisting image, its proper image dialectic is restored. In that sense, then, the most salient quality of Brenner's reading of the votive monument is its synthesis of an overriding quest to re-establish a referential and symbolic order. This in fact was the goal in attempting to re-establish an autochthonous perspective as articulated by Brenner when she wrote that a sympathetic appreciation of the Indian's "*things*, *from his own point of view*, so far as possible, goes a tremendous way in establishing the Indian's self-confidence."[51]

To that end, the quest to restore a referential order reconstructs a projection of western symbolic logics onto indigenous religious praxis and symbolism. Take for instance the sole idea of the "idol" as medium enabling a mystic relation between a metaphysical realm and the material reality of religious praxis. As such, the "idol" itself corresponds to an epistemological scheme in which, native religious images entered the Christian imaginary not as morally abiding entities, but as objects deemed as 'non-beings', or elements of a particular symbolic order

[50] According to Alicia Azuela, Brenner takes the title from a phrase in Gamio's *La poblacion del valle de Teotihuacán*. Alicia Azuela, "Idolos tras los altares, piedra angular del renacimiento artístico mexicano." En *Anita Brenner: Visión de una época.* Conaculta, 2007, pp. 77-79.

[51] Brenner, *Romance and Realism in a Modern Aztec Theater 69. (emphasis mine)*

unsanctioned by Christian ethics. On this, Serge Gruzinski has noted that the "idol" arose out of a paradigmatic shift from ethnographic observation to a semiotic interpretation based on a non-relenting religious theory that posited in idolism the figurative, symbolic and material qualities of all that in a Western imaginary represented demonic characters. Constituted as such, the idol was the product of the conquistador's gaze. It emerged out of a Western perception that "discovered it", "found it unmoral" and thus justified the destruction of the idol by the mere fact of being able to constitute it. The end result was that the idol became a "devalued equivalent" to the western religious image. Aesthetically, it became a false figure, condemned to the negative and opposing end of the image world instantiated by the Conquest.

Consequently, and in the best scenario, the idol, if spared for the complexity of its aesthetic attributes, was deemed to be an "exotic" relic in modern museum economy. [52]The return to the idol, in Brenner's narrative is thus a return of the referential logic in which the idol was inscribed. In this case, the idol is taken in is pure symbolic dimension, as a positive non-demonic being. Although, as a material object, it does not cease to be contained by the exotic and use-value qualities assigned by the modern museum, and appreciated by the gaze of modern anthropology enthusiast. The relation of the prophecy and excavation analogizes the restitution of a negative conceptualization; such is the basic leitmotiv that runs across *Idols Behind Altars.* Its immediate political intention sought to offer a positive representation of the Mexico and its arts.

The Cultural Bridge

Initially, Brenner intended to publish two photobooks: "Mexican Decorative Art" and "The Mexican Renascence", a twofold venture sponsored by the University of Mexico in 1924 and sough to include several hundred photographs by Edward Weston and Tina Modotti. When

[52] Gruzinski, *La guerra de las imágenes* 52-57.

the double photobook project was halted for its editorial expenses, Brenner edited and fused both manuscripts and used a handful of photographic images to illustrate the chapters.[53] Editorial exigencies notwithstanding, the central and original idea of the project remained: Mexico would be presented to an international audience; most particularly, the country's arts, artists and autochthonous ways of crafting images would be revealed to an American public. This enterprise, in the 1920s, was a response to a dual situation, in which recognition for Mexico was a highly-esteemed necessity both abroad and at the national level.

Alvaro Obregón came to power with a firm promise to "reconstruct" Mexican society while seeking to turn the nation into a stable territory and engage the global economy. To do so, the administration needed to rebuild the national image and strengthen international relations with the American government, for which, Article 27 of the constitution of 1917 posed a threat and signaled the ever-present possibility of losing mineral concessions obtained by foreigners before the constitution was drafted.[54] The newly installed regime of Alvaro Obregon was seeking thus to gain political recognition from the U.S. government to establish itself as working revolutionary and liberal democracy. And it needed to portray itself internationally as a capitalist-friendly regime; yet, congruent with nationalist revolutionary ideas, of which communal land tenure was a salient promise. At the same time, American intellectuals, who became aware of negative representation of Mexicans in the U.S., also saw in Obregon's regime a revolutionary and cultural appeal that was not sufficiently valued and understood in American popular culture. In American mainstream, Mexican society was portrayed along the economic imperatives of capitalist barons who consistently represented Mexico as economically incompatible and culturally inferior. For instance, a prevalent notion at that time was the idea

[53] Glusker 98; Padilla Rangel 128.
[54] Keen, Benjamin and Keith Hayes. *A History of Latin America.* Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000, pp. 289.

that Mexicans were peons, a term that implied a person of child-like mind, susceptible to social vices and suffering from the "mañana syndrome": the practice of putting work till the next day. [55]

Obregon's regime also created a political atmosphere amiable to political and intellectual exiles of diverse political inclinations. Such atmosphere was further consolidated with the inauguration, in 1921, of the Summer School for Foreigners at the National University. This school, under the direction of one of the members of the Ateneo de la Juventud, Pedro Henríquez Ureña, was a university extension developed to comply with José Vasconcelos' vision to make of the university a " crucible of political ideas," all as part of a continent-wide University Reform Movement.[56]

In its specific function, the summer school became an entry point for foreigners into Mexican knowledge and culture, and attracted many "cultural and political pilgrims," disillusioned intellectuals seeking a last refuge from ravages of western industrialization. [57] In that sense, the school was a "cultural vehicle for increasing American understanding of the revolutionary processes" in Mexico and established an academic program that screened positive images of Mexicans for a U.S. audience. As late as 1930, for instance, a former student of the SSFF advised prospective undergraduates that while the "Mexican custom" of taking *siestas* would "probably embarrass" Americans, "no student who visits Mexico City will fail to visit the National Museum with its wonderful Aztec relics, the Education Building with the famous

55 Gonzalez, Gilbert G. "Mexican Labor Migration". In *Beyond la Frontera: The History of Mexico-U.S. Migration*. Editor Mark Overmyer-Velázquez, Oxford University Press, 2011. Pp. 36-39.

56 Michael E. Burke. *The University of Mexico and the Revolution: 1910-1940.* pp. 260.

57 Helen Delpar employs the terms "political pilgrims' and 'cultural pilgrims'. The first denotes those intellectuals directly involved in politics; the second term, indicates those who came to Mexico in the1920s and were more interested in the promotion of culture. Also, Delpar indicates that from the beginning the school was seen with suspicion by Consul-General Claude I. Dawson, who insisted that Alvaro Obregón was merely trying to sway American public opinion to gain U.S. recognition. See: Delpar, Helen. *The Enormous Vogue of Things Mexican: Cultural Relations between the United States and Mexico, 1920-1935*. University of Alabama Press, 2015, pp. 18-19.

frescoes by Diego Rivera, the San Carlos Gallery, the Cathedral, and other well know places."[58] The mission of the summer school was thus to consolidate an appreciation of national monuments and project a more positive image of the nation, and certainly to promote the national patrimony as cultural capital for intellectual and tourists' interests.

Consequentially, the school was a crossroad of intellectual ideas and most definitely an avenue to go from cultural enthusiast to avid ethnologist, from unknown writer to published journalist, and from provincial intellectual to international cultural expert. Such was the case of Francis Toor, who became the main editor of *Mexican Folkways*; and indirectly, Anita Brenner, who, as the liaison between Mexican and American intellectuals, established contact with Francis Toor and became a contributor to the magazine. Their project consisted of a complex translation of Mexico's cultural wonders and political potential for an international audience. This was an enterprise by which exiled intellectuals crafted a "positive view of the revolution, defended Mexico from what they perceived to be the malign intentions of American investors and diplomats, and defined the nature of the revolution for a generation of sympathetic readers."[59] Sympathy was thus the working principle in a political enterprise that in Mexico was "redeeming" indigenous culture while steering foreign readers towards an appreciation of the country as a modern nation. What this enterprise presented as a positive of view of the Mexican socio-political landscape, nonetheless, comprised a projection of indigenista thought and its core theory of cultural development. In that case, *Idols Behind Altars* echoed the predominant anthropological thesis that insisted on a tripartite and sequential and teleological paradigm: Ancient Teotihuacan/Tenochtitlan, Colonial and modern Mexico City.

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[58] Wm. Marion Miller. "Summer School in Mexico." *The Modern Language Journal, vol. 14, No.5 (Feb., 1930), pp.* 359, 36.
[59] Delpar 25

Correspondently, the first section of *Idols Behind Altars* concerns Pre-Hispanic cultural principles such as communal land tenure and non-authorial conception of art production. It specifically focuses on explaining the continuance of such principles and suggests them as a persistent indigenous "system of transmitting codes of behavior and ethics from generation to generation."[60] The second section of the book centers on analyzing the interaction and juxtaposition of indigenous and Spanish art, while adhering to the notion that Spanish art and Catholicism is a veneer for the religious effigies of indigenous manufacture. The third and last section of the book offers a compilation of individualized artists profiles, all who would fall under the rubric of the "Mexican Renaissance" and were the vestiges of the Sindicato de Obreros Técnicos, Pintores y Escultores. The text opens thus by explaining presumably indigenous conceptions and philosophies towards and around art production, and analyzes the continuance of indigenous moral, religious and aesthetic values into the art produced beyond the Conquest and in modern revolutionary Mexico.

As suggested before, this basic structure of the text echoes Gamio's main conception towards indigenous abstract culture: indigenous art and intellectual culture has survived uninterrupted through the centuries and should be the 'base' of a national art forms.[61] It echoes too, Gamio's notion that while indigenous intellectual culture has remained constant, material indigenous culture has followed a descending course since the arrival of the predominant, foreign and imposed structures. In Brenner words, the descendants of pre-Columbian civilizations were no longer building magnificent architectural pieces, yet "they are still artists, but their work, while beautiful, is, like themselves, generally far below the pre-Hispanic standard. This is not

[60] Susannah Joel Glusker 101-103. The included artists are David Alfaro Siqueiros, Jose Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera, Francisco Goitia, and Jean Charlot.
[61] Alicia Azuela 76

their fault."[62] It follows therefore that in order for indigenous abstract knowledge to emerge onto the visible surface of the national aesthetic forms, "friendly hearts' that work for its 'redemption' must guide it.[63]

This theme of "redemption" is then the basic premise of the book as it offers in its introduction a resounding leitmotiv with parallels in oral narrative and material culture. To this end, the recollection of Moctecuhzoma's votive monument is a foundational trope through it a concise allegorical return of past is pronounced as if to legitimize the quest of scientific inquiry.

The importance of the tripartite format of the text resides in that it lays out a teleological map in which the three stages of development of national history: "pre-colonial, colonial and contemporary," are set in a lineal evolutionary scheme as to culminate in the solidification of a unitary figure.[64] For Gamio, as current criticism indicates, that unitary figure was the Nation-state; for Brenner, correspondently, as it related to the arts, unity was in the totemic figure of the popular artist.[65] It is worth noting, that in the last section of the text, postulating the syndicate as dissolved matrix of the profiled artists, interrupts the sequential and progressive order towards a unitary figure. In doing so, I argue that a reversal paradigmatic shift is introduced, which consists of evolution from single organism to a complex heterogeneous profusion.[66] This last structural change bespeaks a deviation from Gamio's confluence of cultural relativism and evolutionism

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[62] Brenner, *A Mexican Renascence* 130

[63] *Forjando Patria* 37

[64] Manuel Gamio established the chronological order as basic anthropological criteria. See: Gamio, Manuel. *Forjando Patria*. Translator Fernando Armstrong-Fumero, University Press of Colorado, 2011, pp. 35.

[65] Claudio Lomnitz points out that Manuel Gamio in an attempt to distance himself form Porfirian ethnohistorians 'elevated traditional culture for the consumption of the elite classes" and established an anthropology that made viable the implementation of governmental policies and the solidification of an authoritarian state. Lomnitz-Adler, Claudio. *Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico: An Anthropology of Nationalism*. Minneapolis, Minn. University of Minnesota Press, 2006, pp. 250, 252.

[66] In 1924, Manuel Gamio critiqued archeological research that had neglected to study the mother cultures by focusing on their complex derivatives. He proposed a reversal and change of course by studying culture from the single to the complex. See: Gamio, Manuel. "The Sequence of Cultures in Mexico." *American Anthropologist, New Series*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Jul. - Sep., 1924), pp. 307-322.

and points to the general underpinnings of the prophetic sense afforded to Moctecuhzoma's votive monument. In it, both as abstract image and material object, the symbolic politico-religious centrality of the *teocalli* is reintroduced as to comprise in it a traversing symbol/object that links by its own centrality the three tier sequential paradigm. Thus, as a conjoining symbol and all traversing object, the votive monument becomes the axis of the three partite structure of the narrative and the grounding symbolic matter of the image theory practiced by modern artists.

In other words, the importance assigned to the votive monument resides in its metonymic function. It embodies what has never ceased to be the center of creative intentions: the *teocalli*, the temple. In pre-Columbian times, "The temple", writes Brenner, "was the pivot of the nation." In it, "was the complete and accurate symbol of the nation, and of its history and method of life."[67] In Colonial times too the temple returned in different and multiple forms but with the same symbolic and social binding force: "Again, life pivoted around the temple. The temple contained all that was dearest, and was itself the beginning and end of the day." Moreover, as the temple regained its material and religious centrality, the construction of temples occupied every creative effort of missionary monks who "went out to the rest of the teocallis… developing a style… artistic and religious personality that by reason of its wide extension… settled into the dominant and dearest image of the land."[68] On the one hand, this recognition of the temple as ever-expansive entity exhibits a romantic undercurrent in Brenner's interpretation of the religious conquest. Whereas the temple itself is the ever-invasive devise for religious imposition, it is interpreted and valued in regards to its resonance and flexibility to incorporate visual and aesthetic qualities of the land. On other hand, the insistence of the temple as the denouement of an artistic and religious enterprise advances a central tenet in Brenner's image logic. That is, the

[67] Brenner, *Idols Behind Altars* 40
[68] Ibid… 86-87

central postulate of artistic production upholds that religion was the central and undisturbed channel of aesthetic interaction between missionaries and Indian artists. Within religious practices, so goes her theory, "the Indians elaborated their concealed rites with new and pretty ideas of the monks." This was the overall result of a "great coincidence" comprised of similar processes for erecting religious images: "the system adopted by the friars was the same as the native process of religious development, an exchange and transformation of dramatic plastic forms."[69]

The exchange, of course, was one in which monks, drawing from memorial impressions, reconstituted images and installed them in places of religious importance to native people, thus substituting a native image with a Christian symbol. Natives, in turn, invested the Christian symbol with a proper sense as to recodify it and thus enacted a genuine "Mexican conquest" by projecting native significations on European forms. Out of this exchange of abstract images, a new image was produced, which was symbolically functional both for natives and monks. The Conquest, then, in its aesthetic form was a process of constant reversals. The central idea is that within a religious sphere images traversed cultural and religious differences and were entities enabling a free flow of communication and aesthetic influence.

From this aesthetic exchange follows an image production logic consistent with the notion that pre-Columbian art modalities remained continuous and that the revolutionary artist, like the anthropologists, are only re-animating those practices and revealing pre-existing images. Hence, in her exposé of revolutionary Mexican artists, *The Mexican Renascence,* Brenner explained: "… the Mexican revolutionary artists give themselves into a new religion of people." A religion in which "the emotion of religion, with its object, the people in a wanted order of things, found its intellectual object in symbol, a process exactly analogous to that of the first

[69] Ibid… 144-145

Mexican artists, the idol-worshippers."[70] In its most simple synthesis, image production is non-referential logic as it was in pre-Columbian times. And it argues that art production in Mexico is an undeterred process, in which, the artist is not so much a cultural producer as a common subject embedded in a larger visual and religious economy of national character. By implication, images are transcendental recurring symbols imbedded in a religious and cultural continuum that withstands temporal interruptions. On one level, then, the inherent logic of Brenner's juxtaposition instantiated in her reading of the votive monument as abstract image and material object analogizes the lineal correspondence between Pre-Columbian art practices and modern art production in the post-revolutionary period. On another, the logic is constructed by drawing on the modernist discourse on photography. Hence, photography as material and symbolic medium becomes the rhetorical substrate for the argumentation of Mexican art production.

The Logic of Reappearance

The *teocalli* in *Idols Behind Altars* traces a tripartite evolutionist sequence - Ancient Teotihuacan/Tenochtitlan, Colonial and modern Mexico-, which in itself, is a teleological structure proposed by nationalist anthropology.[71] The text registers that interpretational scheme to value art within a lineal correspondence between Pre-Columbian art practices and modern art production in the post-revolutionary period. The underlying assumption of this paradigm holds that pre-Columbian art modalities are continuous and that images are pre-existing elements brought to light by the revolutionary artist, and in equal measure by the philosopher and

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[70] Brenner, *A Mexican Renascence* 138-139

71 Current research on Brenner has mentioned her role in the formation and diffusion a Mexican national culture. See: the essays included in *Anita Brenner: visión de una época*. Mexico: CONACULTA, 2006. Also, Richard D. Woods. "Anita Brenner: Cultural Mediator for Mexico." *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture,* 9, 1990, pp. 209-214. Yolanda Padilla Rangel, referencing the work of Alicia Azuela, notes that like Manuel Gamio, Anita Brenner employed a twofold mode of interpretation: one is evolutionist and progressive and the other circular and synchronic. Gamio's greatest influence on Brenner was on the importance of popular art. See: Padilla, Rangel Yolanda. *México y La Revolución Mexicana bajo la mirada de Anita Brenner.* Universidad Autónoma de Aguascalientes, 2010

anthropologist. And, like the *teocalli*, the nation is also reemerging like an artistic form, undeterred and unchanged from pre-Columbian times. Such logic, although sustained by a teleological scheme, upholds image reappearance without adhering to an evolutionist paradigm. That is, while image production in modern Mexico is thought to be an avant-gardist practice, the reproduction of pre-existing images is not understood within the principles of inheritance or evolution. In fact, the understanding of images as a phenomenon of reappearance attempts to move away from understanding cultural production along the lines of developmentalist degeneration theories and certainly from an external aesthetic interest as primitivism.

This reformulation, in a sense, illustrates an evaluation of images, and artistic forms in general, as elements invested with their own agency and resulting from within a proper autochthonous poiesis and image dialectic. To this end, Brenner explains, "That is why Mexico cannot be measured by standards other that its own, which are like those of a picture; and why only as artists can Mexicans be intelligible."[72] Evaluating Mexico thus requires to think of the nation as "picture" which demands the abandonment of an external perspective, and from an internalized point of view, images and forms should be recognized as elements of life; and the artist is the agent of life's continuance: "From Aztec times to date," writes Brenner; "the human hand—an artist's symbol of creative life," appears… holding the still significant flower: the synonym of abstract beauty." Therefore, the artist is more an instrument in this process of image creation than a cultural producer. It is through the artist as medium that images enter a new temporal dimension and life itself continues not in an evolutionist paradigm but in an uninterrupted plane, exempt of empiricist logic. Exempt of the logic of inheritance, images, and artistic forms exhibit the original aesthetic characteristics and rather than presenting the effects of temporal and evolutionary progress, they remain vehicles to return to an original source. In

[72] Brenner, *Idols Behind Altars* 31

pottery, for instance, "old pots, which are sometimes taken from caves [are] old in the sense that it is the same form repeated, made today."[73] It follows from such statement, that pots, like other objects and forms, exemplify a process of repetition through which art motifs transverse temporal domains withstanding historical and cultural fractures. Repetition in the statement, however, does not equate aesthetic exhaustion.

Like pots, too, another exemplary motif in Mexican art production is death, and "As a motif in art [death] springs from before the Conquest, cuts though the colonial period and appears over and over today."[74] The logic of reappearance that characterizes art forms is one that binds art to death and life and fuses temporal and aesthetic discontinuities. Or better yet, in Brenner's image theory, art is the terrain upon which the forces of death and life exert indelible inscriptions through the hand of the artist, who operates trans-historically as a vehicle through which "forms" flow timelessly. The overall theory accounting for such process of reappearance is more explicitly stated as:

> For whatever the superstructure, whatever the epoch, the charted course of deepest Mexican thought comes back to this significant source. The habits of thought and objects index to them, on the theme of continuing life, incorporate backwash forms of all the passing official abstracted and monumentalized creeds. The beliefs include fundamental roots of creeds, and folklore version of what was once still is, official dogma."[75]

Images and artistic forms are thus never disconnected from a cultural origin and never outside the parameters of "official" political projects. Brenner is translating the twentieth quest to anchor

[73] Ibid... 104
[74] Ibid... *21*
[75] Ibid... 37

nationalism in the "fundamental roots" of folkloric practices. In a political sense, then, postulating images as a phenomenon of reappearance that pertains to a culturally specific continuum not only intends to validate a nationalist project on an always-available and redeemable past, but also to formulate a non-empiricist, yet nationalist understanding of aesthetic reproduction. That is, from an empiricist standpoint, reproduction has a very close proximity with process of imitation, which from a nationalist ideal is aesthetically invaluable. Imitation, then, in a nationalist enterprise that seeks to solidify a national aesthetic is at best the most effective way of suppressing the national aesthetic genius, yet, imitation is also the effective way of enabling a justifiable deployment of nationalist exclusionary impetus.[76] It is thus that if reproduction runs into imitation, it produces "inconsistencies," which are "the things that Mexico rejects… the false things, artificial transplantations."[77] Here, one could think that Brenner, despites introducing photographic discourse to reinterpret reproduction, does not draw any distance from Gamio's pro-nationalist views on art production. For her, the development of a national art is contingent on the "rejection" of other creative means and artistic styles.

Beyond the nationalist objective behind the formulation of the logic of reappearance, at stake is a theoretical move, a shift away from confining art production to an evolutionist and materialist paradigm. This move amounts to a rejection of primitivism and an exaltation of indigenismo, or a denial of the parallel qualities between primitivism as a Western aesthetic interest and indigenismo. The end result is therefore to argue for a "natural" cultural continuity between twentieth century art production and pre-Hispanic art production, and thus render foreign aesthetic interests and other modes of production as "artificial" modalities and interests.

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[76] I am alluding here to the idea presented by Manuel Gamio and echoed by Brenner. Basically, Gamio understood that imitation was not a process through which a national art could emerge. A national art was only possible through a process of reappearance of pre-Columbian art forms. The idea was underwritten by a critique on dominant art trends, which continued to regard Europe as source of creativity.

[77] Brenner, *Idols Behind Altars* 30

At the same time, in proposing a cultural continuity exempt of the developmentalism inherent to evolutionist thought, Brenner undercuts the idea of a lineal progress towards a stage of civilization that evolutionist thought projects into the future for marginal cultures and reserves, from a European perspective, as its own present privilege. In other words, the pre-Hispanic past is valued for having reached the zenith of cultural progress and for having established the aesthetic forms, techniques, values, and criteria that are anew in motion. By inversion, then, the present reconnects to the past in a direct line of cultural relatedness that in its foremost political intention re-evaluates positively what from an empiricist and external perspective is aesthetically interesting as primeval matter, or as the surviving cultural remnants of the un-fittest; the complementary element, and theoretically undervalued component of the evolutionist concept: the fittest.

To deviate from an understanding of art production through a materialist dialectic, Brenner explicitly employs a concept that best surmises her image theory and the logic of reappearance: abstraction. For her, abstraction is the process through which abstract ideas take physical and figurative form. She writes:

> It is the thought of painters and sculptors, which travels from the eye and hand into abstraction. Thus the abstraction is in terms of movable, touchable, makable things… The human mind itself is fitted into an image, or into several, each of which may serve to symbolize some other thing… The most intangible affairs of the mind are shifted about likewise into different forms…[78]

In Marxist terms, material production is always contingent upon it being a priori realized in thought. Marx wrote, for instance:

[78] Ibid... 26-27

> At the end of very labour-process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement. He not only affects a change of form in the material on which he works, but he also realizes a purpose of his own that gives the law to his modus operandi, and to which he must subordinate his will." [79]

Therefore, what Brenner terms "abstraction" is commonly understood as material production, the resulting phase of a process of visualization: the process of conceiving of an image a priori to making it a visible form. Her shift of "abstraction" from a cognitive stage to a physical state is thus an inversion of the materialist sequence of production. In her thinking, abstraction does not mean a cognitive process by which an image is conceived. Rather, it means an exiting cultural condition by which images are determined. Here, one must note that her reversal is congruent with the religious understanding of art production that it is set as to make the artist a medium for the transmission of pre-existing forms. Consequently, the artist remains actively embedded in the processes of a cultural continuum, in which artist neither inherits forms nor makes forms anew, but simply allows the ever-present manifestations of a cultural matrix. By extension, then, forms are not shaped anew, but merely revealed without exhibiting traces of evolutionary progress. The larger underwritten claim of the inversion defines the pre-Colombian artists, as well as the contemporary Mexican artists, as modern, not savages nor primitive, as modernist discourse would have it.[80] The claim amounts to indicating that Mexican artists were beyond capable of abstracting; they were already immersed it in, figuratively and analytically. Abstraction was

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[79] Carl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. Editor, Frederick Engels, International Publishers, 1967, pp. 178.

[80] For instance, Marius de Zayas wrote: "In the savage, analysis and discrimination does not exist… they appreciate abstract form, the abstract line is to them incomprehensible… Therefore what they try to reproduce is not form itself, but the expression of the sentiment of the impression, represented by a geometrical combination." See: De Zayas, Marius. "Photography and Photography and Artistic Photography." In *Classic Essays on Photography*, Edited by Alan Trachtenberg, Leete's Island Books, 1980, pp.127.

precisely how pre-Columbian and modern artists remained connected. Furthermore, in the inversion, Brenner also undercuts and advances Gamio's understanding of indigenous production as "spontaneous". As noted earlier, where Gamio's called up Marxism to interpret art production as an "spontaneous" process, Brenner, through an intertwining of photographic and religious discourse, proposes "abstraction" as a permanent condition and process of production.

In a much more concise manner, Brenner's logic of reappearance draws from an unresolved question proposed by Gamio in the already mentioned essay, "The Work of Art in Mexico". In the essay, as Gamio sought to define a persisting "little known and obscure phenomenon" in art production, he explicitly offered a central question to further unravel the complexity of the phenomenon: "Do two identical artistic forms that appear in the same place but are separated by an interval of more that a thousand years develop for distinct reasons?"[81]

The ends of this question are complex, but it is evident that the anthropologist was pondering on material relations that remained to be scientifically verified, but that discursively could only be hypothesized as matter of reappearance. His question, particularly, focuses on how "two artistic forms", despite a visible temporal difference, come to share the same geographic space, and through material proximity substantially act upon each other. From Gamio's perspective, as an anthropologist invested in cultural relativism and stratigraphic excavations, the mutual interaction and correspondence between the "two forms" was sufficient indicator to presuppose a material and cultural link. [82] Structurally, then, the question sustains both the core the logic of reappearance elaborated by Brenner. Gamio, though, approaches the relation of artistic forms as a question of the continuity and image reproduction, from a scientific

[81] Gamio, *Forjando Patria* 51.

[82] Guillermo de la Peña argues that Manuel Gamio, in 1911, began employing stratigraphy in the project in the Valley of Mexico. See: "Nacionales y extranjeros en la historia de la antropologia Mexicana." In *La historia de la antropología en México: fuentes y transmission.*

perspective. He looks at continuity and insists that it is an unverifiable phenomenon and thus can only venture to say "spontaneous"; whereas Brenner, in religious rhetoric postulated continuity as a given process enabled by the workings of religious dynamics. That is, for Brenner, as suggested earlier, by time the Spaniards arrived, "the processes which made groups live and grow as integrated groups were… still going" and survived through religion, the "one great channel that carried inter-American thought and custom and style," which "served as the one-real bridge with the Old-World…"[83]

The idea of cultural survival, of course, was not unknown to Gamio. In fact, it is his very conception of cultural logics that Brenner dresses up in religious language.[84] Yet, in lieu of a specific theory, "spontaneous" is proposed to account for what empiricist theory would otherwise hold to be the effects of evolutionary laws. In other words, where cultural relativism would hold two temporally distant art forms as indicators of the same cultural development of two groups, by the simple fact of appearing on the same space, in Brenner' thought as in Gamio, continuance is immediately understood. The very logic of relativism, its flexibility towards cultural diversity, is thus posited onto a plane leading up to a homogeneous cultural center. It seems as if Brenner's idea of "abstraction" and Gamio's notion of "spontaneous" are indeed in close association in regards to cultural production and to the possibility of creating singular cultural and political matrix.

Elsewhere in Gamio's work, the anthropologist explicitly echoes Marxist thought when he relates spontaneous to the transmission of abstract thought and material production or to indicate the process by which man interacts with the natural environment as to produce an object

[83] Brenner, *Idols Behind Altars* 26-27

[84] The following phrase summarizes Gamio's thesis: "El indio continua… cultivando la cultura prehispánica más o menos reformada y continuará así mientras no se procure gradual, lógica y sensatamente, incorporarlo a la civilización contemporánea." *Antologia 105*

of cultural utility. In this sense, "spontaneous" is the definitive characteristic of what Gamio understood as the process by which art is produced:

> "El arte no obedece a reglas ni cánones, no puede ser objeto de enseñanza o educación, si no es en lo relativo a la técnica, so pena de que se desvirtúe y deje de ser arte; un expresión espontánea, desinteresada con la que el hombre interpreta lo que percibe en la naturaleza y el medio social en que se desarrolla…"[85]

Hence, as art does not respond to rules, it is "spontaneous expression" because the "natural world" reflects itself on art; engages the viewer directly and thus enables a process of mutual recognition. The viewer sees him/herself in art and art instantiates a consciousness for man to recognize himself as part of the natural environment. The central idea is that art links man to its environment and that link occurs with the realm of knowledge, or abstract thought. Spontaneous and abstraction are therefore concepts inherently related to art production and aesthetic recognition.

In Brenner's thought, much like in Gamio's, spontaneity and abstraction were directly related to an understanding of pre-Hispanic cultural production as sustained within "natural religious" order. Or, in Gamio's words: "native art was not art for art's sake, nor did it awaken in the observer aesthetic emotions only, it was a thing symbolic and aesthetic, for with the pleasure of the beautiful, it associated mentally the objects and active divinities of personal, social and cosmic life." [86] The basic underlying argument was that due to economic isolation, the 'Indian' has remained close enough to the "natural environment" to the point that Indian's aesthetic expression is a spontaneous direct reflection of the natural environment, just it was in pre-

[85] Manuel Gamio, *Antología 126*
[86] Manuel Gamio, *Aspectos…* 114

Columbian times when in the absence of science and due to the intense love for natural phenomena, the Indian crafted deities out of natural elements. [87] Unlike Gamio who was reflecting and advocating for a return to this idyllic era of natural art production, Brenner wrote *Idols Behind Altars* as if the era had arrived; abstraction was already a process in motion revealing the nation picture of natural elements.

A Narrated Cartography

Via a process of reappearance, as explicitly articulated in *Idols Behind Altars*, the nation is an image or "aesthetic form" recurring from the pre-Columbian past into the contemporary present. On this, Brenner was explicit: "Trace the story," she wrote, "and you find the channel in which, through the four muffled centuries since Cortes, the nation, disintegrated, lived as a unit still." Furthermore, the nation, as a leitmotiv in art has signified unity; thus: "in Mexico art being so organically a part of life, at one with the national ends and the national longings, fully the possession of each human unit, always the prime channel for the nation and for the unit." The nation is a symbol of unity and it repeats itself across time through the channel that art is, just as religion is the channel for aesthetic forms to endlessly repeat themselves.

As a visual metaphor, the nation was a recurring form and rhetorical trope employed in many discussions, its articulation was often represented as a sequential structure. In 1926, for instance, José Vasconcelos, as the former Minister of Education of Mexico, delivered a lecture at the University of Chicago and presented an image of the country as a nation of contrasts:

> A glance at our physical structure will only add to the puzzle of the Mexican problem. A sort of elongated, immensely vast pyramid, cut at the top end, then sloping towards two seas. On the top a temperate climate fit for the

[87] Manuel Gamio, *Antología* 130

> pine, the wheat, and the corn, as you go down, all the varieties of plants and of animals, together with the unexplored unlimited wealth of the tropical jungle.[88]

The problem was of course the precarious economic development. And following the logic of environmental determinism, which was the underwriting theory of his presentation, Vasconcelos further suggested that just as "all the climates and all resources… you will find all sorts of faces… the white man's face… the ascending indigenous wave of the mestizo and the Indian. "[89] The visual image of the nation is thus one construed in a parallel between geographic and racial difference and corresponds to a three-tier model, in which the vitality of the middle layer is nourished by a subjacent layer, the Indian; and in geological terms, by the "unlimited wealth" of the unknown jungle. A decade earlier, Gamio also sketched out a similar image, albeit not so vividly construed along racial lines:

> In our country, one observes an ample geographic scale that comprises that alpine climate, the dry and cold of the highlands, and the humid and hot weather of the coasts; geologically there exist the most ancient igneous formations, and the stratification of recent sediments; and the variety of fauna and flora that correspond to those soils and climates." [90]

The general premise of these metaphorical landscapes, in Vasconcelos and Gamio, is to illustrate the geographic diversity of the national territory. In this latter, pronouncing the geographic scale is underwritten by the argument that national education programs need to correspond in variety of method to the diversity of the geography. In the former, the same geographic model is presented as to formulate an explanation of the natural and unfavorable condition of the nation

[88] Vasconcelos, José, and Manuel Gamio. *Aspects of Mexican Civilization: [lectures on the Harris Foundation 1926]*. University Microfilms International, 1980, pp. 4-6.
[89] Ibid…
[90] Manuel Gamio, *Antología.* Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1975, pp. 130

for historical and material progress. In both, though, what is succinctly manifested is a vision that comprises the nation as an image containing a heterogeneous geography and demography. What is envisioned, then, is a unit comprised of diverse elements, and a project that needs to resolve its heterogeneous and conflicting nature, in order to be a single unified entity.

In a similar fashion, yet more inclined to aesthetics than scientific discourse, Brenner presented Mexico as an image, but her underwriting theory, as it abandons a materialist interpretational framework, parallels an equally material process: photography. The threads of such theory are clearly stated in her retelling of Moctecuhzoma's votive monument as a "coming to light" event that makes archeological excavation a process of making-visible a previous image, which has emerged after a state of latency. And also, when she states: " Mexico is made up of three planes… The land seems unfinished, and at the same time forever fixed" and "Mexico resolves itself harmoniously and powerfully as great symphony or a great mural painting… but as picture, [Mexico] is always in the present".[91] The land as "unfinished", yet "fixed", is a direct rhetorical echo of the inclination to illustrate the geographic contradictory nature of the country. On a deeper level, both adjectives –unfinished and fixed- build on the previous two geographic descriptions presented above; but, whereas in Gamio's and Vasconcelos' phrases, the nation is a rational image, in Brenner, the nation is an image, a visual medium: "painting' and "picture".

This conception in a significant way departs from the all-encompassing purviews that seek to illustrate the nation as a heterogeneous landscape, and unequivocally sketch it as clearly outlined by its political borders. In other words, while in the words of the anthropologist and philosopher, the nation, through the workings of empiricist theory, is suggested as an enclosed rational image comprised of diverse elements; in Brenner's version, that image is suggested to be

[91] Brenner, *Idols Behind Altars* 13-15

an unresolved figure, a fragment of a totality still susceptible to the general laws of natural elements. As when a "painting" or "picture" is further affected by the agency of ecological and chemical processes that are at play while it is being executed and continue to affect the image after it has been deemed from a rational perspective as 'completed' view. The nation thus, even when seen as "finished" is recognized to be subjected to natural laws, which it cannot define nor contain, but that nonetheless give it its particular form.

Furthermore, by sheer rhetorical implication, conceiving the nation in visual language, just as the terms *unfinished* and *fixed* reconstruct and work against the strictly rational conception of the nation as a contrasting terrain; upon the terms "forever fixed" and "always in the present" a further analogy is developed. The nation is imagined as a reproducible image aligned to particular proprieties of photographic images. On this, it is worth noting that photographs, in as much as they are material objects, are always in the present by the fact that they form part of a visual economy. That is, photographs circulate in the present as embedded cultural artifacts of a larger visual economy, in which the exchange and reproduction potential of the images enables images to flow in a cultural circuit. And, as André Bazin noted, because the "photographic image is the object itself, the object freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it…" its quality of being 'forever fixed' and in the present, resides in the fact that it always serves as the model of the object it inscribed.[92] As an inscription, and in analog form, the photographic image's symbolic dimension is contingent on its material constitution. The photographic image thus in its material form exists in the present and remains a 'fixed' object in as far its chemical constitution was provided be the fixing agent of the chemical process, and the valued assigned to it in the visual economy in which it circulates. Or, as Hubert Damisch understood it, the paradoxical quality of the photographic images is in that as an object produced by light, even

[92] Bazin, André. *What is cinema?* Translated by Hugh Gray, University of California Press, 1967, pp. 14.

"without thickness and substance…it retains something of the reality from which it was somehow released through its physiochemical make-up."[93]

By theoretical extension, then, it possible to see how Brenner's metaphor of the nation as picture echoes the theoretical properties understood to be unique of photographic images. In other words, when Brenner thought of Mexico as picture, her underlying logic was aligned to the sequential photographic process of development. The image is taken as an existing and optical entity. It is then inscribed onto a sensitive surface, which is then developed, and fixed as to retain it as a two dimensional image. As a two-dimensional image, it is always an incomplete entity. As a fragment, nonetheless, the image retains something of the real and initial vision, as to create the illusion that in the photographic image there are elements that directly related the first image seen. This is, then, the same logic employed in the correlation of prophecy and excavation. As an image in oral prophecy, the monolith remained a trace of an already seen object; upon the excavation, that object attested the idexical quality of the abstract image. Photography, then, entered Brenner's messianic interpretation as discourse and theory. As discourse, it offered rhetoric for the evaluation of pre-Columbian art. Such evaluation was also extended onto the contemporary Mexican artists, for whom, through the double discourse of photography, art production was defined as a material and abstract expression of transcendental values. As discourse, too, photography's promise as mechanical medium lent its rhetoric of promise not only to consider the Mexican artists in a new light, but also offered its logic of unlimited reproduction capacity for the hypothesis of cultural continuity. Photography introduced the notion of direct connection to an indexical referent, which in Brenner's interpretation of national

[93] Damisch, Hubert. "Five Notes for a Phenomenology of the Photographic Image". *October, Vol. 5 (Summer, 1978), pp.* 71.

art production was posited as the origin from which forms repeat endlessly. One of those forms was the *teocalli*, the ancient and present symbol of the recurring nation.

The Visualizing Prophet

Brenner, like most of her colleagues of the "Mexican Renaissance", had a natural inclination towards images, and most distinctively on her part, towards prophecies and spiritual narratives. Before departing on her first Mexican adventure, for instance, Brenner began a 'fictional autobiography" in which she narrated a mystical experience she had at a séance in Texas: '… you should go to a strange land, and there many men will want you, and you shall see many things that only lofty spirits know… Through your hand you will tell to the world many radiant things…", this vision, of course, was the foreshadowing announcement of her work experience in Mexico.[94] It is thus as if impending reality was often predisposed in prophecy.

The conjuring up of prophecies particularly summons an ever-present oral register that from which writing nourishes itself and reconnects to a historical past. As it relates to *Idols Behind Altars,* the past comes into writing as persistent voices, resonating echoes emanating from distant, yet presently viable, colonial chronicles and popular oral narratives. On the one hand, these surpluses of narrations offer a discursive nexus so that the past in its textual and oral manifestation can again be revived. On the other hand, the past as a discursive dimension is no less susceptible to exploration than if it was material and historical strata. Thus the past is recovered through a process that intersects religious, aesthetic and scientific practices, a sort of methodological amalgamation invested in revealing the past as material and metaphysical source. This inclination to interpret the past and translate the present in a language with strong spiritual undertones, according to contemporary critics, is a particular manifestation of Brenner' own search of self and fluid identity. To this regard, Susannah Glusker noted that: "The book subtitle,

[94] qtd. in Glusker 31.

Idols Behind Altars: The Story of the Mexican Spirit, can also be seen as a symbolic coming of age for Anita's spirit. Anita, the underdog, must struggle for independence from the foreign landowner-her father."[95] It has been noted also that Brenner's synthesis of millenarian popular indigenous aesthetic and religious motives, "reflects the convergence of forces" that Brenner confronted as an 'assimilated Jew in modern Mexico."[96] And, as Yolanda Rangel Padilla notes, although Brenner was not a practicing Jew, she was very religious; and thus saw no distinction between religion and magic. And in fact, Brenner believed that art, religion and science were means to the same end.[97] In all, recent research has pointed out Brenner's strong predisposition to religious questions and esoteric philosophical trends. It is suggested, therefore, that such interest in religion, drew her to Gamio's hypothesis on the persistence of religious popular practices and led her to postulate that art production, particularly art produced by muralists was directly linked to pre-Hispanic art.

Yet, Brenner's understanding of the *Mexican Renascence* movement was framed through the lens of historical particularism. In "Part Three" of *Idols Behind Altars,* for example, as she begins to introduce the general characteristics of the revolutionary art movement, it is clearly indicated that the art movement was but a particular instance of global phenomena: "The return to native values, spiritual and artistic, which is a simplified description of a modern Mexican art… might be seen as derivations in Mexico, as also in Europe, of a mood more than local."[98] This comment goes as far as showing that Brenner's interpretational framework was grounded on cultural relativism, and also demonstrates that her predominantly 'spiritual' evaluation of the art movement was in part an individual projection, as it was also more than personal experience.

[95] Gulsker 99
[96] Ana Indych 48
[97] Padilla Rangel 68.
[98] Brenner, *Idols Behind Altars* 231

Her interpretation of the spiritual dimension of the movement, can thus be understood not only as an echo Gamio' ideas, but also as reverberation of German Max Weber's theories on *The Sociology of Religion* (1922).

Central in Weber's thought is human agency, an operative characteristic amongst urban artisan and merchant classes for whom social inequality is best "expressed through an explicitly religious framework." Religion, thus, is the overriding interpretative scheme and conceptual matrix for the formulation of social change initiatives that require a "restructuring" of social beliefs systems. In Weber' model, not unlike Brenner's, the tendency to enact social, political and aesthetic reformulation was derived from the capacity of charismatic prophets to enact an 'inner-worldly asceticism', a sort of self-alienation. For Weber, the epitome of such "charismatic prophets" were the sixteenth century Calvinists, to whom he assigned a "higher ethical superiority" for having, during the Renaissance, set a blueprint to the modern world by achieving a larger relation to a "cosmological order."[99]

In Brenner's interpretation of modern Mexicans artisans, the foundational artist was Guadalupe Posada, who "anonymously laughed and wept and created an art by himself" at the margin of dominant art schools of the nineteenth century.[100] This interpretation was further extended to the modern painters, who were not necessarily "cultural messiahs" but who nonetheless "Like the artists of the renaissance, [were] illogical above logic, irrational beyond reason…" and were producing "genuine American art, representative ultimately, not only… of the artists south of the Rio Grande, but of the entire Western Continent."[101] Brenner understood that "the Mexican revolutionary artists [were giving] themselves into a new religion of

[99] Erickson and Murphy 109 -111
[100] Brenner, *Idols Behind Altars* 98
[101] qtd. in Glusker 93-94

people."[102] Such conception of art practice as a religious industry certainly strikes a conceptual chord with Weber, and most certainly distances from Gamio's empirically based understanding of indigenous religious praxis as pure "religious fanatism."[103]

Yet, if in any other degree of Brenner's interpretation parallels Weber's, it might be less as a matter of direct influence and more so as theoretical coincidence. In that sense, the insistence on religion, as an interpretation and mode of cultural production, points to an overarching interpretational shift. Weber's turn to religion's organizational principles, for instance, was a move away from materialist and strictly empirical definitions of human social participation. In Brenner's case, the emphasis placed on religion as a theoretical means was a product of a twofold coincidence. That is, just as predominant anthropological theories were veering away from empiricism at a hemispheric scale: in the local sphere, revolutionary Mexico, the same interpretational shift was revaluing persisting indigenous cultural production presumed to have survived centuries of oppression. The basic premise held that pre-Hispanic religious and aesthetic logics remained encapsulated in a purely spiritual and abstract dimension, accessible only through the religious veneer of material Christian images.

More specifically, the theory of religious concealment was a reproduction of a common interpretation of twentieth century anthropology, which to a large extent sought to understand the utopic and messianic symbolism with which indigenous people have kept alive an ever-present desire for political, cultural and sovereign rebirth. On this topic, as Stefano Varese indicates, for indigenous people, "dismemberment of civilization, utopia and secrecy" have been the characteristic traces of their "thoughts and historic memory" and constitute the ideological and spiritual structure of secular forms of their cultural resistance and of the cyclical manifestation of

[102] Brenner, *A Mexican Renascence* 138-139

[103] In *Romance and Realism in Modern Aztec Theater*, Brenner echoes and the quotes Gamio explaining the need to objectively re-conceptualize religious practices as to detach them from the prevailing 'religious fanatism'.

their ethnic nationalism."[104] Even if merely tropes, the idea of dismembered cultures that survived through the secrecy of the religious practices, has been a consistent leitmotif in nationalist thought and it is from such perspective that Brenner' religious-scientific interpretational scheme coincides with Gamio's and runs into the general coordinates of Weber's interpretation of religion.

As more than a matter of coincidence, Brenner's insistence on prophetic returns and her understanding of the Mexican art movement as a "renascence" is suggestive of a process of reincorporation of indigenous forms of cultural resistance. In other words, what Brenner pronounces as prophetic, is a transcription of the messianic symbolism engrained in indigenous ideologies of resistance, which are then taken as a grounding cultural base for a process of resistance of global scale. Yet, in its most simple symbolic dimension, Brenner's turn to prophetic announcement is a figurative assertion of the cyclical aspect of Mexican nationalist thought on history and its ever constant conjuring up of its prophetic and mythic past to understand socio-political processes of the present.[105] For Brenner, it was the return of Moctecuhzuma's votive monument, which in itself was the remainder of prophetic downfall and prophetic cultural awaking within the modern era.

104 Varese, Stefano, and Alberto Chirif. *Witness to Sovereignty: Essays on the Indian Movement in Latin America*. IWGIA, 2006, pp. 112-113.

105 Brading, D.A. *Prophecy and myth in Mexican History.* University of Cambridge, 1984, pp. 4.

Figure 3: Front face of Teocalli de la guerra sagrada. The teocalli was an important monument for Anita Brenner's interpretation of prophecies in *Idols Behind Altars.*

Figure 4: Back of face of Teocalli de la guerra sagrada. The stone etchings present an eagle perched on a cactus, central symbolism for Mexican nationalism.

Reading Nationalism

Still physically and symbolically referencing a pre-Colombian idea of the nation, the monolith or *teocalli* that Brenner recalls at the onset of *Idols Behind Altars,* sits in the Sala Mexica at the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City. At the museum, it still remains an astonishing archeological piece for its carved and etched surfaces, which display iconography that celebrates the military might of the Mexicas as founders of Tenochtitlan. On the monument's foremost surface, it bears mayor figures of the Mexica pantheon: Huitzilopochtli; and the principal ruler, Motecuhzoma II, both represented as guardians of the Fifth Sun. On its posterior face there is a rendition of an eagle perched on a cactus devouring a snake, which still

stands as a sculpted confirmation of the myth and origin of Mexican nationalism. [106] As it stands, the monument, above all, is tangible evidence of nationalism's penchant to forge a consciousness by drawing symbolic capital from the nearest Indian past. Thus, as D.A. Brading suggests, twentieth century Mexican nationalism inherited from nineteenth century Creole patriotism a predisposition to expropriate the past in search of political liberation. [107]

Unlike Creole patriotism, the twentieth century brand of Mexican nationalism that Brenner underscores was a particular manifestation of larger global ideological imaginings, and subjected its inherent figures to sensorial and optical readings. The monument in Brenner's narrative, for instance; its cactus-eagle-snake triad, as it was as a symbol inherited from nineteenth century Creole patriotism; in Mexican nationalism, it was not solely a sign of nativist belonging but a tangible inscription valued for its aesthetic properties. It was an inscription, an etching, clearly, of symbolic and material significance. It was taken as symbol and object, form and content through a gaze, for which form and content were no longer separate entities. The past stood, then, as present and as an entry point to the future. As figures: cactus-eagle and snake, nonetheless, remained confined to a mythic realm and did not entirely emerge out of the politico-religious dimension in which they were inscribed by earlier patriotic and religious theories of autochthonous provenance. Furthermore, in patriotism and nationalism, for its mythic character, the eagle-cactus-snake triad retained its former basic and immediate function: to incite social cohesion. The ends of the mythic figures did not change. What changed was the mode of reading.

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[106] The National Museum of Anthropology currently lists the monument as "*Teocalli* de la guerra sagrada." See: http://www.mna.inah.gob.mx/coleccion/pieza-293/ficha-basica.html

107 For a discussion on how the myths of Creole patriotism were formulated, see: Brading, D A. *The Origins of Mexican Nationalism*. University of Cambridge, Centre of Latin American Studies, 1985

Whereas in Creole Patriotism, for much of the nineteenth century, the eagle and serpent stood as singular marks of cultural difference in relation to the failing Spanish Empire, and were symbols of a permanent and motionless past; through the lens of nationalism, in *Idols Behind Altars,* they were emerging signs of a culture presumed to be continuous and indicator of an emerging sensibility.

The rise of a common sensibility was a permeating leitmotif amongst diverse intellectual fields in the twentieth century as exemplified by Brenner and Gamio. From philosophy to politics, from sciences to the arts, and in all, but particularly in anthropology, the call for a common sensibility was the resolution of a conceptual reformulation, which linked the past directly to the present and assigned to the past, certain vitality that was not previously considered. To a certain degree, then, Brenner's evaluation of Moctecuhzoma's votive monument as an emerging image is a concise echo of the overall response to Gamio's overarching call for a new aesthetic sensibility.

However, the idea that the past was an immediate inheritance came from nineteenth century ethnographic and anthropological discourse. In the late nineteenth century, two mayor factors contributed to the revival of the past. One: U.S. expansionism led the Mexican elite to an awareness of the need to counteract negative perceptions- the effect of denigration theories- of Mexicans by foreign travelers. Two: the need to participate in the global exposition of cultural capital at the worlds fairs, in which the nation was presented as a harmonious reconciliation of past, present and future, and amply compatible with the exigencies of technical progress.[108] These factors incited a a mayor reconsideration and the scientific-inclined gaze was turned to the

[108] For an explanation on how Mexico was exhibited at the World Fairs, see: Tenorio-Trillo, Mauricio. *Mexico at the World's Fairs: Crafting a Modern Nation*. University of California Press, 1996.

pre-Columbian past, a source of cultural heritage and as a source to craft a more lenient image of the past and its relationship to the modern present.

In the eighteen century, the epitome of this turn to the past is *Mexico a través de los siglos*, a multi-volume book in which diverse patriotic intellectuals and proto-anthropologists collaborated to formulate a comprehensive and "patriotic" image of Mexico, for Mexicans and foreigners. The book was considered to be "a monument" to exemplify the achievements of evolutionist technologies and presented an image of the country so as to resolve internal strives and promote nationalism.[109] As it related to the pre-Columbian past, Alfredo Chavero, a contributing author of *Mexico a través de los siglos*, summarized the book's essential objective: "our ancient history…. that could have perished in oblivion shall today rise to our hands. Even if these hands be guided more by daring than by knowledge, they are also moved by love of country….".[110]

Patriots, like Chavero, certainly had more "daring" than "theoretical tools" to regard indigenous values, history and people in equal terms with liberal ideas of a homogenous republic.[111] In other words, despite the lack of theoretical frameworks and conceptual tools, early anthropologists such Alfredo Chavero managed to consider foreign theories and formulated a concept for the past as to integrate it within the universal flow of historical developments and within predominant evolutionary scheme emanating from Europe.[112] In essence, as Claudio Lomnitz points out, late 1800s anthropologists devised, through a combination of politics, science and patriotic desire, "a certain isomorphism between the past and the present".

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109 " a monument' is a phrase by Vicente Rivas Palacios, the leading contributor to the book. qted. in Tenorio Trillo 71.

110 qtd. in Lomnitz, Claudio. *Bordering on Anthropology,* 180.

111 D.A Brading suggests that throughout the nineteenth century and well into the early twentieth century, Mexican patriotics were flowing a course marked by classical republicanism or liberalism. From these political traditions, ideas on nation/patria excluded any real participation of the popular classes. See: Brading, D A. *The Origins of Mexican Nationalism*. University of Cambridge, Centre of Latin American Studies, 1985, pp. 90-101

112 Tenorio Trillo. *Mexico at the World's Fairs* 95.

Furthermore, by installing a "single racial narrative for the whole country," they also shaped "the internal frontiers of modernization while upholding a teleology that made progress and evolution an integral aspect of Mexican civilization."[113] What they achieved was a precedent. They took a foreign theory, applied it to the national reality to derive from it, a concept that complied with their vision of a modern nation, and in doing so, established a teleological paradigm that remained in place even when denigration theories receded to the background.

Hence, the logic through which Brenner read the votive monument was thus already constructed by the time of her arrival in 1923. In 1926, when Moctecuhzuma's votive monument was excavated, that very same logic, impregnated with cultural relativism, yet still pushing to make "anthropology the basic form of knowledge for good government," as Gamio ambitioned, had already established itself as an autochthonous system of interpretation. This achievement was not a simple development. It legitimized the notion of a subjacent pre-Columbian religiosity, which in a messianic present the "guiding hand" of anthropology was reviving by fracturing the superimposed religious veneer as to allow the past to resurface. In that process, Anita Brenner's reading of the monument as an emerging omen is a synthesis not so much of the enduring prophecy, but of the overarching vision to abridge cultural and temporal divides via the reformulation of empiricist logic and the restitution of nationalist mythic elements. She took that vision, underwrote it with photographic theory, religious language and proposed image production as a spiritual dialectic. For that reason, when she faced Motecuhzuma's votive monument for the first time, upon noticing the etched reproduction of the "Aztec Sun" on the monument, she exclaimed: "there is a prophecy: *Cuando saldrá el Templo de la plaza mayor de México, con el sol encima los indios reinarán. Ya salió-sol y todo."*[114]

[113] Lomnitz, Claudio. *Bordering on Anthropology 181.*

[114] *Anita Brenner's Journals of the Roaring Twenties* 224.

Cuando, alborotado el cotarro, entraron unos revolucionarios, empezaron a "catear" las casas y las familias a enterrar sus tesoros… Imagínate – me decía mi novia después que se fueron los villistas- que, como sabrás, saquearon la casa. No dejaron nada dentro más que unos fusiles. Y al ir por el mercado, ayer, reconocí entre las baratijas de venta, algunas cosas de mi casa. Entre ellas un retrato de mi mamá… Estaba con su mejor sonrisa. Tenía puesto el precio, veinticinco centavos… ¡Imagínate! ¡Qué golpe más terrible para mi orgullo! ¡Encontrarme con que el retrato de mi mama estaba de venta, en veinticinco centavos… y nadie lo compraba![115] - Salvador Novo

Each photograph is read as the private appearance of its referent: the age of Photography corresponds precisely to the explosion of the private into the public, or rather into the creation of a new social value, which is the publicity of the private…[116] – Roland Barthes

Chapter 2

1931: Sublimation

In the 1920s, Mexico established a tourism industry and an export economy based on indigenous and popular cultural production. Within this context, national and cultural promotion fell on the hands of foreigners, Americans in great part, and Mexicans officials, who donning the robes of cultural nationalism mapped out the Mexican lowlands and other regions looking for "authentic" expressions of the national soul. Often, the search for cultural manifestations consisted of ethnographic expeditions that made visible regional expressions for national and international audiences. As a result, regional expressions integrated into the larger national cultural sphere. And once a regional expression gained national character, it proceeded to form part of a global cultural configuration. Within international networks, Mexico was presented as a modern nation, a country embellished with an autochthonous aura projecting a harmonious consonance between ruling elite and popular sectors. For such presentation, photography was an essential tool. It not only projected nationalist ideals onto international arenas through print media, but allowed intellectuals to emerge in the public sphere. In the latter function, particularly, photography was a discursive space and platform for the articulation of personal desires and concerns thus allowing diverse intellectuals: exiles, social outcasts and emerging

[115] Novo, Salvador. *De profundis revolucionario,* pp. 99.

[116] Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida.* Translated by Richard Howard, Hill and Wang, 2010, pp. 98.

writers to assimilate into receiving nations, as the case of Anita Brenner exemplifies in the previous chapter.

Just as photography amplified the emergence of the national onto the international sphere and promulgated the incursion of the private into the public sphere, the medium also permitted local intellectuals to synchronize and question global ideas and technological advances. In this exchange of ideas, photography like many other modern technologies of the period - radio, locomotive, asphalt and mass print media- worked both as means to measure up to the possibilities of modernization and attest the degree to which progress was a viable option. Yet, unlike other technologies, photography was a contested terrain tilled in variegated tracks. In terms of aesthetic currents, at the onset of 1930s, photography in Mexico experienced a key shift: Pictorialism ceded its relentless experimentation, its mimicry of painterly qualities, its obsession to exact representations of premodern themes, but passed on its quest to value the photographic image as an art object to a new cohort of image makers. This novel generation of photographers steered away from picturesque aesthetics and onto the monumentality of industrial architecture and mass-produced objects.[117] A major event behind this change of aesthetic direction was an art contest organized in 1931 by a cement factory, *La Tolteca*, and a mayor newspaper, *Excélsior*. The contest's results positioned Agustín Jimenez, Aurora Augenia Latapí, Manuel and Lola Alvarez Bravo as prominent avant-garde visionaries, whose work contained the pictorial values for a modern and national photographic tradition.

In retrospect, the contest reflects a joint effort that ushered a new photographic sensibility while promulgating pre-Colombian symbolism (*La Tolteca)* as an imprint of industrial branding. The merging of pre-Colombian symbolism and industrial branding was the end result of a

[117] For a detail exposition of pictorialism in Mexico, see: Córdova, Carlos A. *Triptico de sombras.* CONACULTA, 2012. For Córdova, pictorialism was more than a stagnated aesthetic style that sough to imitate painting. He argues that pictorialism was a movement, a philosophy, and an avant-garde tendency in its own right.

prolonged "campaign to aestheticize cement" conducted by Federico Sánchez Fogarty, a mayor promoter of cement and the mastermind and juror of the art contest.[118] In a sense, the contest help overcome a prolonged commercial challenge imposed on the cement industry in a country where traditionalists erected aesthetic prerogative against technological advances. As Ruben Gallo notes, in Mexico, cement, much like photography, was an "underappreciated" medium that required a genius marketing strategy to have its aesthetic values accepted as art in a culture where "Architecture was art" and cement was anything but "a cheap, generic product incapable of constructing anything memorable or remarkable."[119] Therefore, that photography would come to aid cement in the valorization of modern constructions not only bespeaks of the practical application of both media but of the power of art status as a viable means to percolate cultural precepts and achieve commercial success.

In its day, though, the contest and its resulting exhibition at the Galeria de Arte del Museo Cívico (Palacio de Bellas Artes) was applauded and contested. From a conservative perspective, pictorialist photographers - whose work did not merit awards nor praise from the content's jury: Diego Rivera, Federico Sánchez Fogarty, Mariano Moctezuma and Manuel Ortiz Monasterio- attacked the contest's winners by singling out the naiveté of the first prize recipient, Manuel Alvarez Bravo, and the nepotism by which Diego Rivera awarded the second prize to an old friend, Agustín Jimenez.[120] From a different angle, Anita Brenner as art critic lamented that one of Tina Modotti's photographs did not receive the first prize. Nonetheless, Brenner valued

[118] Rubén Gallo provides a detailed account of Fogarty's campaign to popularized cement in Mexico, see: Gallo, Rubén. *Mexican Modernity: The Avant-Garde and the Technological Revolution*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2005, pp. 193.
[119] Ibid...180.
[120] The outlet for this critique was the magazine Helios, a magazine of the Asociasión de Fotógrafos de México. For more details on the contest, see: Rodríguez, José Antonio. " Una moderna dialectica: la vanguardia fotográfica mexicana (1930-1950). In *Huesca Imagen: Mexico (1920-1960)*, Diputacion de Huesca e ibercaja, 2004, pp. 33-48.

the contest as a watershed moment in the history of Mexican art. According to her, the exhibit was a compilation and synthesis of the thought and process of Mexican artists in 1931.[121]

Brenner's evaluation of the contest exemplifies her continual insistence on abstracting a national essence from collective material art production and her penchant towards disregarding the actual mode of production of Mexican art. Her comments on the contest, above all, suggest that it represented one event in the rise of avant-gardist photography in Mexico. The contest marks thus the moment when photography, as art object, found its way onto the gallery wall. Most significantly, therefore, Brenner's comments signal the awaking of a criticism that came to evaluate photography with same tools employed to measure up the aesthetic values of other art forms. Such criticism spoke about the medium from distinct points of view, but all within the framework of a rising nation. Carlos A. Córdova points out, that photography's early criticism in Mexico was often an "improvised" exercise, an open space for artists, painters, poets, writers, photographers, editors, cultural entrepreneurs, and journalists to enter, have a say and/or dispute someone else's opinion. Nowadays, however, most of those opinions remain obscure evaluations on the medium despite the fact some of the critics are prominent canonical figures. Among these, some remain outstanding luminaries: Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros, Anita Brenner, Francis Toor, Carlos Merida, José Emilio Pacheco, José Gorostiza, Javier Villaurrutia and Salvador Novo.[122] Of these "improvised" critics, it was Novo, who sparsely but more rigorously commented on photography throughout the 1920s and 1930s. His remarks on the medium punctuate a consisting questioning of nationalism and its unmeasured enthusiasm posited in cultural production. Likewise, he viewed photography as an intrusive but practical device

[121] Ibid… 40.
[122] Córdova, Carlos A. *Triptico de sombras.* CONACULTA, 2012, pp. 54.

traversing the frontier between private and public space. His most well known remarks on the medium are in "El arte de la fotografia", an essay read and reprinted in several in occasions.

Initially, the essay was a speech presented in a gallery opening in April of 1931 at the Sala de Arte de Secretaria de Educación. The gallery opening was for Agustin Jimenez. [123] That same year, the essay was published as "La *Kodak* ante el arte." Over four decades later, in 1972, in its original form the essay was read and reprinted for an exhibition of Mexico's most celebrated portrait photographer, Hector Herrera, for whom Novo posed in several occasions.[124] In the essay, Novo reiterated central elements of the conception of photography he espoused throughout the 1920s. First, deploying a normative understanding of gender, he labeled the medium as the "prodigal daughter" of art. It is worth noting that this interdependent relation was a variation and the end result of a paradigm by which Novo understood the relation of traditional art forms to modern media. That is, just as he proposed that cinema was the offspring of theater, journalism the "prodigal" child of literature, photography was the heiress to painting's capacity to reproduce likeness. As such, photography's reproducibility derived from a feminine predisposition, a capacity to reproduce ad infinitum, if and when another complementary apparatus (the camera) contributes to the process of reproduction. Second, Novo referenced the medium metonymically and thus *Kodak* stands in for photographic camera, image and process. With this rhetorical figure, photography is an overarching system, a commercial signifier and a popularly appealing brand of global potential. Third, from photography's mimetic reproduction capacity, Novo underscored the *sublimating* capacity of the photographic image. Of all these elements, the latter contains a politically charged notion accounting for the possibility of

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[123] ---. *Agustín Jimenez y la vanguardia fotográfica mexicana.* Editorial RM, 2005, pp. 23-25.

[124] Novo, Salvador. "El arte de la fotográfia." CEHM, Fondo, DCXX-1, LopezMancera, 8.3, Fojas 73, México. 11 de abril - 30 de agosto de 1972, http://www.archivo.cehmcarso.com.mx/janium-bin/janium_zui.pl?jzd=/janium/JZD/DCXX-1/LopezMancera/8/3/DCXX-1.LopezMancera.8.3.jzd&fn=290332

achieving representation and transcendence through the photographic image. How photography delivered transcendence remains one of Novo's subtle but central arguments and this chapter aims to provide some insight into the development of such idea.

For now, thought, it is worth noting that Novo's commented on photography in a context where modern progress defined memory less as a form of knowledge and more as an act of accumulating and collecting objects. This reinterpretation of human time as a commodity was aided in great part by the introduction of the photographic image into the picture postcard, which enjoyed a moment of intense popular appeal and provided a sense time as a visible and collectable image. In the postcard collection, according to Naomi Schor, time and place were rearranged. Place became a decontextualized location and time a reference to a past experience inserted into a lineal temporality susceptible to the collector's notion of historical progress.[125] In this function, the postcard was for the most part revealing and promoting the urban city as testament of modern progress and excluded from representation the ravages of modernity on the city and on the countryside. This reliance on the postcard and the photographic image as indexical imprint of modern progress ran paralleled to a questioning of ocular centric vision and Cartesian perspectivism; which, as Marin Jay notes, led to a "lose of confidence in the eye."[126]

In Europe, and within the ranks of surrealism, the questioning of the human vision took a sharper turn with blinding experiences of military combat during the First World War. This resulted in disregard towards clarity and disdain toward mediated unclear and blurry images resulting from reflected light. For the surrealists, however, images were acceptable when understood as spontaneous and direct manifestations of unconscious desire; such understanding comprised an inversion of the operating logic in ocularcentrism, which excludes desire from

[125] Schor, Naomi. " Cartes Postales: Representeing Paris 1900". *Critical Inquiry*, 18.2, 1992, pp.188-244.

[126] Martin, Jay. *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*. University of California Press, 1994, pp. 212.

plastic and verbal representation.[127] Likewise, for the surrealists, photography was the process by which plastic images retain the traces of the physical forms and thus photographic reproduction was thought as the process by which desire enters the frame of visual presentation, in a world where everything visible is already representation and photography comes to deliver representation as a material object.[128] As related to Novo's conception of photography, the surrealists' understanding of photography bears on the introduction of desire into the photographic portrait and helps explain his take on sublimation.

Therefore, to better grasp the significance of Novo's take on sublimation in photography, this chapter looks at the *Kodak* in his work of the 1920s and 1930s. The idea is to trace Novo's comments on photography and interpret their development. Doing this, offers an overview of how Novo's take on the medium changed from a condescending attitude to one that recognized photography's inherent capacity as compatible for the introduction of the fleeting glance and voyeuristic pleasure into visual representation. At the core of this chapter, then, is a look at some of Novo's journalistic and travel writing of the 1920s and 1930s. In these texts, Novo projects his own conception about nationalist fixations with the past and the emerging masses thus correlating the democratization of photography and the rise of the nation to the sublation of the private into public life.

[127] Ibid… 241.

[128] For photography and surrealism, see: Krauss, Rosalind E. "The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism." In *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*. The MIT Press, 1986, pp. 87-118.

Figure 5: Salvador Novo's postcard from Jalapa, Veracruz.

A Postcard from *Janitzio*

In March of 1927, Salvador Novo passed through Veracruz and picked up a sepia toned photographic postcard: street view of one of Jalapa's descending avenues with its coarsely rough cobblestoned surface wrapped in the shadow of standing colonial buildings and dissected by the infinite metallic tracks of a trolley car. He wrote "El cuarto del diablo" on the back of the postcard and sent it to his mother in Mexico City letting her know he was well and expediently in route to the United States.[129] For his mother, the exquisitely illustrated postcard spelled with great certainty an unarticulated message: her son spent time in Jalapa, a place where she had come into her son's mind as a fleeting and affective mental image signaling a nostalgic memory. For Novo, the postcard stood as visible proof of the effectiveness of brief and concise writing, the mode of communication instantiated the previous century by the popularization of the picture postcard.[130] Quite possibly, also, the postcard was evidence of how modern progress turned emotional and aesthetic expression into expedient commercial objects, postcards, or visual sites condensing the intricate labor of sight seeing the nation into an act cultural promotion, an

[129] CEHM, Fondo, DCXX-1, LopezMancera, 1.1, Fojas 15, Estado Unidos. 24 de Marzo abril de 1927- 22 de marzo de 1928, http://www.archivo.cehmcarso.com.mx/janiumbin/janium_zui.pl?jzd=/janium/JZD/DCXX-1/LopezMancera/1/1/DCXX-1.LopezMancera.1.1.jzd&fn=290294

[130] For an account of the evolution of the picture postcard, see: Staff, Frank. *The Picture Postcard and Its Origins*. Frederick A. Praeger, 1966, pp. 49.

exercise relaying on the ocularcentrism by promoting visual pleasure only as a protracted experience.

On a second trip later in the month of November, just a year after Anita Brenner went "idol hunting" to the Mexican lowlands; Novo visited the Tarascan region in the state of Michoacán, where he also touched upon some picturesque postcards extolling modern progress in a predominantly indigenous region. From this second trip, he conceived *Janitzio,* a short article published in *El Universal Ilustrado*.[131] The article is one of the only references detailing how the trip to Michoacán was a cultural exploration for American scholar, Dr. I. L. Kandel, state officials, cultural nationalists and other folklore entrepreneurs to experience "the celebration of the death in the island of Janitzio."[132] The article relates that among the retinue of cultural enthusiasts, there was Francis Toor, editor of *Mexican Folkways,* with whom Novo had just started to collaborate as editorial consultant for the magazine, and also mentions other prominent figures in the touring party: the nationalist painters, Carlos González and Roberto Montenegro, and the main organizer of the tour, Moisés Sáenz, who as Undersecretary of Education was promoting and establishing national and international distribution networks to introduce indigenous handcrafts into modernity.[133] As referenced in *Janitzio*, in the history of Tarascan region, Novo's "five day" travel adventure around Morelia, Siragüen, Pátzcuaro, and Janitzio marked the beginning of a transformation by which an "intimate, private ritual was

[131] Tarascan is the term Brenner and Novo employed to refer to the language and the peoples in the region.
[132] Novo, Salvador. "Janitzio". En *Viajes y ensayos II: Crónicas y artículos periodiísticos.* Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999, pp.152-153.
[133] López, Rick A. *Crafting Mexico: Intellectuals, Artisans and the State After the Revolution*, pp. 155-156.

turned "into a public spectacle and patrimony of the nation": the *Night of the Dead*, an internationally recognized celebration.[134]

Novo's visit to Janitzio was as much a consequence of his affiliation to state officials, as it was a response to the request for travelling as an exercise of national civics. In the 1920s, travel fulfilled many multiple objectives. It was not only an indispensable modern activity, a privilege of middle-class and intellectual status but also way of attesting and searching for a sense of self. Therefore, when the expedition party in *Jatnizio* ventured into the Tarascan region, to travel across and throughout the nation was a way to fully realize one's identity as Mexican, particularly if the trip was an immersion into the everydayness of autochthonous cultures. Such was the vogue, that in less that a decade of Novo's visit, Michoacán turned into a groundswell for cultural nationalists to explore the nation's interior, and metonymically, the interior dimension of the modern self. Economically and ideological viable for multiple purposes, the Tarascan region became a major site from which tourism and nationalist discourse bespoke the distinctive "character" and "soul" of the nation. [135] At the crux of tourism and nationalist prerogatives, the idea that the region was source of national values was often projected through imagery that presented Janitzio as a pre-industrialized Eden, a place of noble fishermen engaged in a millenarian form of fishing; their activity, a daily act of survival, was often perceived from afar as a tranquil, peaceful, time-frozen canoe cruise on the mirror-like surface of a lake.

At the time of the Novo's trip, witnessing local fishermen on lake Janitzio was part of a cultural vogue, a nationalist and popular activity that combined a constant search for the nation's soul in the aesthetic imprints of regional cultural expressions. In a primitivistic and proto-

[134] Hellier-Tinoco, Ruth. *Emdodying Mexico: Tourism, Nationalism & Performance*. Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 72. Along with *Night of the Dead*, *The Dance of the Old Men* was another cultural practice that was constructed as an expression of national essence.

[135] For a detailed discussion on tourism in Michoacán see; Jolly, Jennifer. *Creating Pátzcuaro, Creating Mexico: Art, Tourism, and Nation Building Under Lázaro Cárdenas*. Universtiy of Texas Press, 2018, pp. 253.

nationalist sense, travelling to Janitzio was an opportunity to dwell in the continual manifestation of the nation's "primitive" cultures, which remained locked-in a past tense, yet adjacent to modern developments.

Furthermore, Novo and the other cultural enthusiasts represented in *Janitzio* came together because their collaboration was an international affair following the tracks of other nationalist enterprises, which employing photography realism and ethnographic research methodology had brought major achievements for artisanal production. In 1921, for instance, the Exhibition of Popular Art in Mexico City resulted from such methodology and the event presented Mexican artifacts as modern expressions to international audiences. Years later, even Novo in acerbic disdain admitted that the exhibition was a success:

> la primera en dignificar los tradicionales "puestos" de jarros, jícaras, petates… y culpable también de un inocente y pintoresco charrismo que años más tarde habría de involucrarse en el problema de la rendención de nuestras masas.[136]

The exhibition also produced, *Las Artes Populares en México*, a seminal catalog that combined scientific objectivity with photographic realism to present the epistemic threads of nationalist thought on cultural production as a visual exegesis of the artisanal products that fascinated Anita Brenner, Francis Toor and many other indigenista contemporaries.[137] The exhibition was a success due to the work of Novo's nemesis, Dr. Alt, and other more respected friends: Roberto Montenegro and Moisés Sáenz; all of who, like Francis Toor and Dr. Kandel in the expedition in *Janitzio*, were caught up in the enthusiasm to redeem "the masses" and embraced a point of view

[136] Salvador, Novo. "Montengro o el profeta en su tierra." En *Viajes y ensayos II: Crónicas y artículos periodiísticos.* Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999, pp. 585.
[137] Dr. Atl. *Las artes populares en México.* Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 1922.

nestled in romanticism, ethnographic colonial gazing and primitive desiring.[138] From such perspectives, the visited sites were often presented as locations abstracted from modern reality. Francis Toor in the expedition, specifically, perceived Janitzio as a place with "no signs of life" and as "a distant world of fantasy".[139]

In her view, an ocular-centric representation, stripping geography of its proper qualities and transposing it into an oneiric demission enables a projection of personal longings only to convert a present material reality into an attractive, appealing place in the eyes of awaiting readers. In this sense, that Toor viewed in Janitzio a wonderland without human tracks is not surprising since her interpretation was destined for readers of *Mexican Folkway*, many of whom were foreigners interested in deciphering from afar the intricate connections of Mexico's past and present cultures. Her view, of course, exposes the underlying grain of the touristic discourse in which the explorers in *Janitzio* were partaking. Their work was one that relayed on prolonged visual experience and on the aesthetic logic of ocular-centric perspective; its fixed time-frozen gaze and the decontextualizing properties of a rectilinear visual field, all in an attempt to promote folk culture for the construction of a national culture and to challenge dehumanizing views on Mexicans in a context of transnational relations.

As member of the touring party, Novo purveyed the landscape from a similar angle, but through a different lens. Whereas Toor saw a "world of fantasy" in Janitzio, Novo saw the island as "una enorme ballena muerta". This change of tone, or change of image, is significant in that it exposes a dissonance within the touring party's perceptual standpoints. The first relays on an established and readily available cultural imaginary that offers oneiric figures as palpable and

[138] Novo embraced and embodied an elitist notion of culture and Dr. Atl (Gerardo Murillo) was a strong supporter of popular culture and nationalist painting. Thus, when Novo commented on nationalist painting, he often made sardonic references to Dr. Atl, who also a supporter of fascist and nationalist politics.
[139] qtd. in Hellier- Tinoco, Ruth, pp. 74.

popular known elements. The second, Novo's view, relays on the instantaneous, expedient and impromptu transcription of cognitive images. That is, unless the reader happened to be an enthusiast of morbid and macabre surreal imagery, the representation of the island as a dead carcass was hardly an appealing image to an awaiting reader. Thus, the idea might have been a rhetorical effect of Novo's derisive tone and a figurative manifestation of his growing affiliation to surrealism and the principles of imaginist poetry: its conception of language as a visual image that can be hanged on a gallery wall as a representation of an emotional state that fuses spontaneity, intensity and critical intellect.[140] Quiet likely, too, the conception of Janitzio as dead aquatic creature was a flare up of Novo's recalcitrant positivism, which impeded judging underdevelopment as a site of viable culture. Or, it could have been a slip of the pen in reaction to the long hours of horse riding and squatting on "gasoline –powered" boat rides to the island.

Significantly, as an impression of the trip's main objective – to witness the celebration of the death- the image of the dead whale teases the popular conception of the island as paradisiac place and site of valuable cultural expressions. In Novo's view, much like in like the photographic image theorized by André Bazin and Roland Barthes, the dead whale references a past and present – it is death as a referent of a past experience that still remains as a visible present - and both temporalities are equidistant and tangible material dimensions of the same reality.[141] The metaphor of the dead whale thus comprises the logic of a visual exchange and follows the referential purpose of a postcard, a hinging visual element standing in for the experience of *time* spent in a location already seen but that remains available for the visual exploration of awaiting readers.

[140] Sheridan, Guillermo. *Los contemporaneous ayer*. Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1985, pp. 218.
[141] Bazin, André. Wh*at is Cinema?* Translated by Hugh Gray, University of California Press, 1967.

For readers of Novo's work, prior to reading on Michoacán, such narrative relays were proven rhetorical strategies particularly for followers of *Return Ticket*, a column in *El Universal Ilustrado*. Readers of *Janitzio,* then, might have just understood that Novo was relating another account of a leisure trip, an another adventure of a travelling flaneur occupying the privileged position of a Cartesian visualizing subject, this time away from the city, in the countryside and narrating from a position that relates the experience of formal work as an act of natural privilege and pleasure. For this reason, Novo conceded to readers of *Janitzio* that while in Pátzcuaro, he stayed at the hotel "Del Lago", a lodging that he found amenable and recommendable.

At the hotel, presumably the only worthwhile modern facility in the region, he dined and received promotional material in the form of advertisements and letters detailing the experiences of former visitors and "distinguished travellers". One letter by Pascual Ortiz Rubio, an eminent traveller who would endure the presidency from 1930-1932, exclaimed:

> Mi suegro don Librado Ortiz me mandó…unas preciosas fotografías del hotel que tiene usted cerca de la estación. Debe usted estar satisfecho con su hotel Del Lago, pues podría compararse con los que hay en Europa. La ciudad de Berlín está rodeada de bosques de pinos y encinos y de lagos muy parecidos al de Pátzcuaro, pero le faltan las grandes montañas.[142]

As if assuming the position of a reader who faces a text congruent with his/her point of view, Novo read the advertisements and letters, and transcribed them for his own readers. The transcriptions, which in essence are impressions of the past experiences of state dignitaries, praised the hotel and the surrounding natural features in a language laden with romantic and picturesque descriptors: "paraiso michoacano", "tarde en papel azul de la melancholia." At the

[142] Novo, Salvador. "Janitzio". En *Viajes y ensayos II: Crónicas y artículos periodiísticos*. Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999, pp.153.

end of the transcriptions, Novo only added: "Todo lo cual –añado yo - es cierto."[143] This confirmation, on the one hand, conveys an unquestionable relaying of the official discourse promoting the Tarascan region as site for tourist exploration. Likewise, it exposes Novo's inclination to echo nationalist sentiments when such feeling emerge in contrast to a European notion of aesthetic beauty. That was, of course, a position in vogue and as related by Ortiz Rubio and relayed by Novo, that Berlín was lacking the beauty of Patzcuaro was the end result of a common interpretation that comprised the extolment of the national territory's beauty. On the other hand, Novo's assertion of the relayed message as "true" also echoes the combination of objectivity and authority as forms of assigning value to representation. And thus the element of truth in the message, *lo cierto*, amounts to a verification of the transcribed letters as confirmable experiences. In the verification, however, what stands out most visible is the exchange of ready-made visual impressions.

In the end, *Jatnizio* only concedes that the author was relaying massages in a manner consistent with the discourse logic of the picture postcard. In early twenties, this discourse, highly aided by the photographic image, was promulgating urban development as a wonder of modern progress. The postcard, specifically, "invited" viewers "to see places as delighted visitors would see them: to witness, thereby, the successes of modern life, life now fully removed from the primitiveness" that had characterized representations former provincial and rural areas.[144] The article thus showed the author's agreement with the impressions of "former lyrical travellers" as a confirmation of already known facts and the reader was left to wonder how exactly Novo viewed the landscape. Based on detailed critique of the sanitary conditions around the lake, and to fisher men - who catch fish using "long sticks"-, and the image of the "ballena

[143] Ibid… 154.

[144] Jakle A. John and Keith A. Sculle. Introduction. *Picturing Illinois: Twentieth-Century Postcard Art From Chicago to Cairo*. University of Illinois Press, 2012, pp. 2.

muerta", the reader only sensed a contrasting image of Lake Patzcuaro, this was an ironic caricature, and an oppositional representation to the picturesque and romantic visual impressions relayed in the transcribed letters.

Thus, when Ortiz Rubio, as a former guest of the hotel writes in response to some "preciosas fotografías" depicting the hotel Del Lago and Novo refers to such expressions as of those "lyrical guests", one can sense a distancing, a move away from the sentimentalist and pictorialist values that had been a major aesthetic at play in the tourist conception of Mexico as a picturesque country. In time, this disengagement with picturesque aesthetics became a blunt opposition to official nationalism, foreign tourists and national tourism enthusiasts. According to Novo, the frequent promotion of Mexico as picturesque country and the omnipresence of photographic cameras had urged a new social class, a "class b" of citizens, who, lacking the "comfort" that "tempers the spirit in consonance with the outside world", set out to imitate foreign tourists and abandon household obligations in order to venture into the provinces on weekends only to "take photographs".[145] Presumably, then, photography as practice was an activity inherently linked to a depreciated social status, it was the exercise of a social sector wantonly caught up in the allure of modern technologies to the detriment of an internal and harmonious cultural edification. Here, of course, Novo laments not the fracturing of the standing scopic regimen where Cartesian perspective is predominant but its permanence through photography. On the surface, undoubtedly, he bemoans the democratization of visual cultural production, which with the advent of photography ceased to be the exclusive practice of an elitist subject whose "tempered spirit" is hinged to the external world in a harmonious dialectic. In this sense, Novo does indeed speak against the rise of a new-yet-common visualizing subject: the

[145] Novo, Salvador. "Qué hacer los domingos." En *Viajes y ensayos II: Crónicas y artículos periodiísticos.* Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999, pp. 437.

common folk as creators of visual images; men and women, who encouraged by the propaganda of the globalizing photo industry (one should read Kodak) responded to the illusion that photography offers an instantaneous and immediate means of expression. Yet, in such critique, even when expressing anxiety about the incursion of the common folk on the pedestal of authorial privilege, Novo suggests that unbeknownst to this "class b" of cultural visionaries, photography perpetuates a visual malady. On this regard, he implies that photography continues the logic of Cartesian perspectivism, which at its core, values the fixed gaze over the fleeting glance and thus deprives the spectator from indulging in visual representation for the sole purpose of instantaneous visual pleasure.[146] In the picturesque postcard in the 1920s, for instance, its pictorial values are arranged in accordance with gaze of a monocular subject, who gazes from a privileged position upon a field of vision that in representation is render fixed, immobile and thoroughly defined as a permanent composition. Above all, in Novo's reference to the "class b" of citizens speaks of a growing disregard towards the popular confidence posited on optical and ocular-centric representation and illustrates the anxiety that the man-of-letters felt upon recognizing the photography had latched upon the western philosophical precept by which artistic expression is valued as an immediate and instantaneous projection of the human creative impulse.

As a matter of coincidence, Novo's criticism of the popular appeal of photography and his distancing from the romantic expressions of other travellers occurred at a time when his interest in American literature outpaced his affinity towards the literary production of national authors, many of whom were still tracking the exuberant formality and the vestiges of bohemian

[146] For a through discussion of how Cartesian perspectivism excludes the fleeting glance, see: Bryson, Norman. *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze.* Yale University Press, 1983.

and melancholic late nineteenth century modernism. [147] In this sense, the voluntary transcription of romantic vignettes provided in *Janitzio* is a reflection of an attempt to safeguard creativity from the homogenizing and nationalist iconography proliferated by foreign and national tourists. Among this iconography, the postcard in Mexico had already establish a lexicon in which popular types: idyllic colonial towns and architecture, historical monuments, earthen pots and figurines, charros, chinas poblanas, downtrodden indians, pulque-drenched machos and revolutionary soldiers - as heroes and traitors in execution scenes- had circulated abroad as the nation's unique cultural characters. In terms of an appreciation of photography, the "preciosas fotografias" in *Janitzio* hint at the presence of photography as a mass-produced popular object, a visual device coded in pictorial values that instantiate emotionally charged memories but that respond to an aesthetic logic that the author does not hold as his own, but found practical to relay messages.

Exactly how Novo understood himself in the ethnographic enterprise that sought out regional expressions to "authenticate" a nationalist idea for external consumption is thus nuanced in the rhetorical strategies that Novo employed in *Janitzio.* His position is one that bespeaks reticence towards cultural nationalist ideals.[148] Likewise, his approach to representing the visited geography draws and takes some distance from the available language of popular imagery. In other words, *Janitzio* builds and takes some distance from the logic of impromptu visual exchange, wherein fleeting and instant memory is materialize by commercial technologies as as an interchangeable fragment of vision: the postcard. *Janitzio* is thus the product of its visual

[147] Guillermo Sheridan notes that early in 1920s Henríquez Ureña drew Novo towards American authors from whom Novo began developing an interest in irony and humor to manifest a sense of fatigue towards the nationalist rhetoric of former members of the Ateneo as well as to project his work as modernistic. Sheridan, Guillermo. *Los contemporaneous ayer*. Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1985, 117-118.

[148] For another critique on the celebration of the dead in Mexico, see: Lomnitz, Claudio. *Death and the Idea of Mexico*. Zone books, 2005.

economy; it springs from circulating network of visual imprints in which the photographic postcard is both an object and device to relate urban development through the eyes of traveler writer. In this visual economy, the postcard was not only enjoying the "craze" of collectors' attraction towards visual fragments of what Naomi Schor calls the *discourse of the metropolis,* a body of picture postcards in which "what is plundered in the colonies is transformed into a glorifying attribute of metropolitan commerce."[149] In Novo's *Janitzio* the mighty attributes of the metropolis are doubly felt through the presence of the American explorers in expedition and the Mexican readers in the nation's capital who read the article. To this twofold audience already familiar with postcards depicting Mexico as a picturesque and violently revolutionary nation, *Janitzio* distilled the experience of a traveller doubling between writer and critical observer, and between cultural and tourist enthusiast for whom visual impressions are tinged with the uncertainty of strolling along the march of modern progress.

Instantaneous Blurs

Within Novo's oevre, *Jatnizio* is a fragment, an initial expression of his work-related travels and developing interest in sightseeing the Mexican lowlands. The article hints at the visual economy within which postcards are frequent exchangeable objects and sites to transmit traveller's experiences. For Novo, the article also foreshadowed other travel adventures throughout the region and to foreign soils. As such, the text marked an encounter with a national body of water after Novo's return from Hawaii, where he got a first sight of the Pacific Ocean while serving as representative in a multinational conference on education, and recreation.[150] As a piece of travel writing, *Janitzio* anticipates *Jalisco-Michoacán* (1933), a more extended narrative about experiencing the contrasting territory just southwest of Mexico City. In this

[149] Schor, Naomi. " Cartes Postales: Representeing Paris 1900". *Critical Inquiry*, 18.2, 1992, pp.195.
[150] Ibid… pp. 279.

second take on Jalisco and Michoacán, unlike in his earlier impromptu writings on the region, Novo admitted a more serious indulgence in the affordable pleasures of a provincial economy, and even went on to contemplate: "todo es tan barato que un poco de dinero bastaría para cambiarlo todo por una vida quieta!"[151]

Presumably, the change of tone and the appreciation of the region's affordability resulted from a more developed "consciousness" about the geographic and economic make up of the region, and from a more measured understanding on the scope of his readership and of the impact of his earlier writings. Accordingly, Novo recanted a slip of the gaze that *Revista de Revistas* published in 1928 as "Nota de la provincial Guadalajara". In the article, with swift and iniquitous sarcasm, Novo described the towers of the cathedral in Guadalajara as "two *ku-klux-klanes"* who turn their backs to the government palace.[152] In its moment of production, that image was probably joke, but most likely a manifestation of media-induced exhaustion that resulted in an unconscious projection of a cognitive imprint produced by the media sway of the Ku Klux Klan during its second rise in the 1920s. As joke or sarcastic comment, nonetheless, the image was oxymoronic and offensive. The KKK attracted media attention for its entrenched nativism, and a racist terrorism that was zealously demeaning and terrorizing African Americans, Catholics and non-Protestants. Hence, to view a Catholic cathedral as a figuration of klan iconography was certainly distasteful to readers in Jalisco and Michoacán, a region that had not long ago been the seat of the Cristero rebellion, an ultraconservative and anti-secular religious uprising. Therefore, in 1933, half a decade after mocking the Catholic cathedral, as Novo set out to write *Jalisco- Michoacán*, he insisted that the image of KKK was a misperception, less the result of a malevolent sarcasm and more a mistake of his youth, of his journalistic writing and of

[151] Salvador, Novo. "Jalisco-Michoacán" En *Viajes y ensayos I.* Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999, pp. 671.
[152] Salvador, Novo. "Nota de la provincial Guadalajara" En *Viajes y ensayos II: Crónicas,y artículos periodísticos.* Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999, pp. 184.

a vision that was "del todo inconsistente y con solo uno que otro destello de occasional certitumbre."[153] As a way of convincing readers of his genuine interest and sincere regard for the region's culture and landscape, Novo also conceded that his soon-to-be-published travel narratives depicting other national territories were "borrosas instantáneas de un poltrón mal turista… que descubre de pronto su república."[154]

It is quiet ironic that in a moment of self-reflection, becoming aware of an error of his vision, Novo equated himself to a counterpart he had despised: the tourist. In the comparison, Novo might have become aware that he shared with the tourist the common traction of the observer's figurative impulse: the tendency by which psychoanalysis accounts for an unconscious projection of meaning upon a common visual figure; as when the alignment of stars in outer space takes the form of terrestrial or mythical figures. Unlike the tourist he had despised, however, Novo remained skeptical and alert to the inherent fallacies of ocular vision and mechanical optics, as we will see. Significantly, then, like in *Janitzio* (1927), in *Jalisco-Michoacán* (1933*)*, the writer yet again reflects on a past experience but recognizes his incursion into touristic imagery produced from an external perspective. Reflecting on his own work thus brought upon an inevitable conclusion: tourism was an indispensable practice to view the national landscape. In such way, Novo, the traveller after the fact, recognized the limits of his own vision and had to discredit a former visual impression. In the same reflection, therefore, the perspective of the intellectual, who gazes upon the provinces without bequeathing his writer's desk in the lettered city, was judged as a mistake. In this self-critique, the vantage point of ocualar-centric vision, the heightened Cartesian perspective of the travelling flaneur, was set in question and thought of as an erroneous mode of exercising vision.

[153] Salvador, Novo. "Jalisco-Michoacán" En *Viajes y ensayos I.* Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999, pp. 666.
[154] Ibid… 667.

Likewise, he was also forced to understand that outside Mexico City, despite the "comfort" of wandering on national soil, one's citizenship does not afford a native perspective. Outside the city, the urban flâneur turned into an external observer, not much different from the foreign tourist who wonders around a new geography looking to capture an instant with the photographic camera. Surprisingly, or not, becoming aware of the "inconsistencies" in his own work and perhaps to condone his writing, Novo distrusted his vision. In so doing, he impinged more on photography's own language that on his own literary work.

Conjuring up "inconsistent vision" to explain a fault of his own gaze and the act of calling his writing "borrosas instantáneas" bear on photography as both notions single out the erratic, indefinable and representational inaccuracy of the photographic image. With the notion of inconsistency, Novo alludes to the evolution of his sense of sight and expresses the distrust on vision that Martin Jay traces throughout the centuries in French culture. Yet to term, his own gaze as "inconsistent vision", echoes too the unhindered proliferation of photographic production, a ceaseless activation of sight that follows no determined rules or fixed coordinates. Photography, even in the hands disciplinary institutions is always chaotic as Alan Sakula stated in regards to the police archive. [155] At the bequest of the popular masses, photography is a practice wherein unrestrained single points of perspective map out an infinite point cloud with no common center of gravity. For a man of letters, who eschewed tourist-oriented photography and valued culture as a sphere of intellectuals with heighten sense of "spiritual consonance with the external world", photography's rampant mobility among the masses could not have been other than a device for "inconsistent visions." Here again, Novo's comment is double paradoxical. On the one hand, it laments the democratization of vision, the emergence of uncontrolled points of

[155] Sekula, Allan. "The Body and the Archive." In *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography.* The MIT Press, 1999, pp. 343- 389.

view and expresses anxiety about the possible debunking an elitist vantage point of view. On the other, the comments echoes ever-present distrust towards optical vision that has been philosophical constant in Western thought.

As a basis for a criticism on the medium, the allusion to photography as an unpredictable mode of seeing situates Novo's reflection in *Jalisco-Michoacán* within the course of Western philosophical contention towards the inaccurate and irrationality of representational possibilities of human vision. For Plato, Aristotle and Descartes, vision was an unreliable means to produce "truth" and thus images were potentially harbingers of falsity if and when their process of creation excluded a direct relation between rationality, vision and sensibility.[156] In a more immediate sense, Novo's comment on photography aligns with the elitist-oriented disregard towards the medium that Charles Baudelaire exemplified in his 1859 essay, *The Modern Public and Photography.* For the French poet, photography (Daguerreotypes) when viewed as an artistic form, as a means of capturing reality with technical precision, was not only a means of transferring the "stupidity of the masses" into the realm of the arts but a sure way of perpetuating realism and of suppressing the creative genius of naturally born artists.[157] Baudelaire, much like Novo in the 1920s, valued photography more as a viable aid to memory and spoke against the idea of valuing mechanical reproduction as genuine artistic expression and thus disregarded photography's potential to represent the external world in an accurate manner.

At the time of drafting *Janitzio* and *Jalisco-Michoacán*, Novo is distant from the golden age of the Daguerreotype but enveloped in the paper culture that allowed the photographic image a wider circulation through print media and the mobile 35mm camera. Hence, by labeling his

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[156] Monroy Masr, Rebeca. "Etica de la vision: entro lo veraz y lo verosimil en la fotografía documental." En *Etica, poética y prosaica: ensayos sobre fotografía documental*, Siglo veintiuno Editores, pp.187-189.

[157] Baudelaire, Charles. "The Modern Public and Photography." In *Classic Essays on Photography*. Edited by Alan Trachtenberg, Leete's Island Books, 1980, pp. 83-89.

travel writings as "borrosas instantáneas", Novo nuances the faltering appeal of the photographic image as a device to exact empirical precision and artistic truth. The comment brings to the fore the emergence of a writer's consciousness; a developing sense on the general influence of the visual image and also suggests that where writing lacked the means to correct itself, photography had an inherent language, an compilation of erroneous attributes by which visual impressions when turned into writing could withstand correction, and yet retain its aura of artistic expression. In a way, singling out an error of vision via the inconsistent optical qualities of photography presents that error more as the involuntary act of an immature observer, and less as the act of an emerging writer.

Why Novo borrowed photography's erroneous qualities to correct his vision and safeguard his writing might also be due to the fact that writing is lineal and progressive while photographic images signify concepts and are enclosed spaces upon which the observer can perpetually gravitate extracting and projecting meaning in repetitive acts of reading.[158] Perhaps, too, Novo's drawing from photography was act of appropriation, the common avant-gardist practice of borrowing elements and components from other media to create a new work. In either case, one can suppose the main reason resides in photography's own ubiquity, in its decentered proliferation and technical errancy. That is, in terms of rhetoric, by the 1920s and 1930s, the medium had taken some distance from nineteenth century objectivity and its relentless quest to reach measurable representations of the external world. The medium had thus bequeathed its role as the means to visually reproduce what the human eye could not grasp with scientific precision. And in turn, at the demise of its objectivity-ridden promise, photography became the means for a popular creative freedom and at the same time, the reason for the cultured critic to stolidly

[158] Carrillo, Canán, Alberto J.L. "La fotografía y la libertad. La crítica cultural de Flusser." En *Etica, poética y prosaica: ensayos sobre fotografía documental*, Siglo veintiuno Editores, pp. 67-88; p.75.

propose that photography lacked the touch of the creative human spirit and that art was the sole realm of men of genius.

In that sense, that Novo would understand his vision as an instantaneous blurry impression plays on the discrediting conception that held photography less as an art form and more as an ordinary practice, a form of creating fleeting mechanical pictures that preserve memory but fail to withstand the wear and tear of time. Likewise, the very idea of visual impressions as "borrasas instantaneas" advances the twentieth century avant-gardist conception of pictorialism as a failed photographic attempt to imitate the aesthetic qualities of painting. On this regard, Novo's comment circulates upon blurriness, the effect by which photography in its pictorialist form attempted to approach the status of art via painting's pictorial values.

In pictorialist photography, blurriness or the soft focus blur was a common aesthetic value. As an effect, it was produced intentionally both to emulate the unfocused and outer area of human vision and to translate the non-planar and instantaneous impact of light on the human eye, in a similar style as impressionistic painting. As an aesthetic effect in photography, the blur was the basic strategy to stand apart from the clearly defined imagery produced with an emphasis on scientific objectivity. Produced by faulty optical elements and inconsistent chemical processing, the blur was also an error and effect. As such, it was an essential element to claim photography as art and to disclaim photography as the inconsistent exercise by which an amateur error could acquire the guise of artistic expression. This twofold and paradoxical premise is what Novo articulates in the reflection on the blurriness his own visual impression. In the articulation, photography became a means for questioning vision, and by extension, photography as a popular erroneous exercise is the object of the same critique.

Novo's direct critique of pictorialist photographic values were more explicit in one of his earliest comments on photography. This was when he provided a dismissive accolade to *Chapultepec: Its Legend and Its History*, an exemplar of Mexican historical pictorialism and one of the country's earliest attempts at employing the photo book to portray public space as a wonder of the national patrimony. *Chapultepec* was a collaboration between José María Lupercio and Gustavo Silva, two Mexican masters of pictorialism, and Rubén M. Campos, a writer with whom Novo sustained a heated dispute over the definition of intellectual work and the functionality of illustrated publications.[159] In a first occasion, Novo's shrill wittiness referred to *Chapultepec* as an *"*elemental monografía."*[160]* Later, in 1929, Novo referred to the photo book as a "monografía histórica."[161] In both instances, although one cannot fully decipher the implications of the comment, there is a pronounced reluctance to uphold an illustrated text – "monografía"- as a clear, current and accessible representation of a historical space. One can think that Novo's dismissive comment on *Chapultepec* underscored the irrelevance of portraying a public monument in the aesthetics of pictorialism, a pictorial movement that valued the photographic image as artistic object to be preserved in the confines of a museum or private art collection.

In a more explicit way, for Novo, *Chapultepec* embodied a futile attempt to employ photography in a manner consistent with an intellectual ambition that treasures compilation of knowledge and conventional narrative techniques in pursuit of a stable and fixed representation. It is no surprise, therefore, that as Novo exacerbated his criticism towards the interest in collecting and conserving "folkloric" expressions, he would jab again at Rubén M. Campos as

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[159] For more on the dispute with Rubén M. Campos, see: Mahieux, Viviane. *Urban Chroniclers in Modern Latin America: The Shared Intimacy of Everyday Life*. University of Texas Press, 2011.

[160] Córdova, Carlos A. *Triptico de sombras.* CONACULTA, 2012, pp. 51.

[161] Novo, Salvador. "Generación Anecdótica." En *Viajes y ensayos II: Crónicas,y artículos periodísticos.* Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999, pp. 397.

the epitome of the nationalist intellectual whose intellect operates like a "photo album", a traditional form of structuring knowledge and an antiquated archive for private memory.[162] In a time when photography was already a public and unorganized popular practice, commenting on Campos', Lupercio's and Silva's collaboration, Novo insisted that intellectual labor was best effective when seeking out a public domain but cognizant that photography was a malleable, objectively unreliable and less sacrosanct object.

By the time Novo commented on *Chapultepec,* photography was already an established means to reach multiple audiences and a popular device to preserve personal memories. Novo, of course, knew how popular and effective the medium was to capture intimate moments and enhance popularity by making private images appear public. The fact that in 1925 he considered publishing his family photo album, a "series of portraits" his mother had compiled of her only son, speaks non-jokingly to the possibility of promulgating privacy at the request of public recognition. Coincidently, in one occasion, when writing for *El Universal Illustrado* in 1924*,* Novo published his own take on Chapultepec in "Plano de la ciudad de México", a series of vignettes envisioned to function as a traveler's guide. One vignette, "Chapultepec", a very picturesque view of the park included a detailed "romantic" moment he supposedly witnessed while strolling along the more flat and less strenuous trails in park:

> Dos enamorados repiten el dialogo eterno… Ella le proporciona la universal afirmativa. Él le unta una mirada particular también afirmativa… Luego toman una lancha por horas y ella raya el agua y se pone el sombrero de él. *Les sacan una instantánea en un instante*. Ella ha

[162] Ibid…

traído parte de su desayuno y los patos se les acercan. ¡Oh, Alemania romántica de ayer![163]

The public park, a "¡nest of eagles!" for cultural nationalists, was not one of Novo's favorite places to sojourn in the city. For him, the park was a "fatiguing" incline, a "millenarian forest" immersed in a modern setting, where "fordecitos" and "charros" court each other in an improvised and ruthless dance pitting performative masculine power against relentless machine force.[164] Therefore, it is very unlikely that Novo observed "for hours" the courting couple, but instead imagined the whole episode or at least elaborated on a common scene at a park that nowadays attracts visitors for its fusion of pre-Columbian mythology, neo-classical European architecture and economically viable popular culture.

Like in *Janitzcio,* in his "Chapultepec", Novo emulates the position of an objective observer, and working from memory and creative imagination, he constructed the above scene as an irony-tinged comment on the fascination and futile attempt at perpetuating a prolonged and intimate moment through a photograph. As such, the reference to the itinerant photograph as "instantánea en un instante" condenses an evaluation of photography as an expedient and generally accessible form of materializing memory, but also displays reticence towards valuing the visual and material photographic image as a substitute for memory.

For the immediate reader of Novo's "Chapultepec", the playful repetitiveness in "instantánea en un instante" might have sounded like mocking metaphor, or might have read as a circulating rhyme announcing the swift materialization of human time. The reader might have also noted how the text mimics photographic expediency. Its succinct ten-sentence structure analogizing the instantaneous capture, the pocket size practicality of a postcard with its succinct

[163] Novo, Salvador. "Plano de la ciudad de México." En *Viajes y ensayos II: Crónicas,y artículos periodísticos.* Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999, pp. 75. (*emphasis mine*).
[164] Ibid…

pictorial condensation of human time that prolongs a lived experience. As a piece written to promote one of the city popular attractions, the text might have brought to the fore a frequently expressed concerned: in modern progress, memory was becoming a collection of exchangeable objects rather than a system of thoughts, facts and historically relevant ideas. This is a concern that Novo implicitly uttered by taking some distance from the "preciosas fotografias" in *Janitzio,* a text that registers the proliferation of the photographic postcard as a collectible item that combines the brevity of writing with the material accessibility of historical memory. As the next sections shows, this concern was a constant when Novo referenced photography.

The Art Critic in Public Life

When Novo announced the publication of his family album, he did so in the context of promoting a recent publication, *Ensayos.*[165] Presumably, publishing the family album was a strategy to make visible "personal secrets" that the new book of essays "had revealed" and that Novo's status as a public figure could not withhold from public interest.[166] Such claim might have been unwarranted and exaggerated, but displayed a level of honesty in terms of how publicity and mass media had overturned the dividing line between the public and private. And of course, the claim was also honest and consistent with how Novo understood the very meaning of the public life. On this regard, Novo stated the following in publicity material for *Hoy*:

> "La vida pública – y no otra – es la vida privada de los hombres públicos.
>
> El público tiene derecho a conocerla, y halla placer legítimo en ellos.
>
> Nadie, además, es completamente odioso si se le conoce bien.[167]

[165] Novo, Salvador. "Aventuras en librería." En *Viajes y ensayos II: Crónicas,y artículos periodísticos.* Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999, pp. 128.
[166] Ibid… 127.
[167] Novo, Salvador. "Complejo de inferioridad." En *Viajes y ensayos II: Crónicas,y artículos periodísticos.* Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999, pp. 602.

Private life, according to Novo, is an open dimension in the public sphere and the latter is a space in which the public has the "right" to purview private facts. In such definition, there is certainly an intertwining of politics and pleasure, since pleasure is proposed as the "legitimate" base for existing openly in the public sphere. Pleasure, however, has yet to be a recognized political principle. Hence, if Novo's definition of private life is at all consistent with the workings of political democracy, it is on the matter of forecasting the rise of celebrity worship and the spectacle of politics that characterizes the contemporary times. In yet another level, the idea of pleasure being the basis for disclosing private life in order to exist as a public figure displays the interest to introduce pleasure into the realm of representation. This is an idea the Novo included late in 1930 in "El arte de la fotografía" as we will see later.

As a definition related to the publication of his family album, Novo's understanding of public life exhibits the gratuitous push to assimilate the private into the public and an acceptance of the concept of "public" as strictly defined by mass media industry. One could think that *Ensayos,* by announcing the publication of his family album was merely signaling the cultural phenomenon that Roland Barthes associated with the age of photographic reproduction. Namely: the emergence of a "new social value" defined as "the publicity of the private".[168]

In retrospect, then, one can with good reason suspect that Novo, in outright cynicism was disregarding standards of privacy to gain more publicity. Or, one can also suppose that in tune to feeling of the times, a willingness to expose personal images, Novo was merely responding to the exigencies of a cultural phenomenon. Quite possibly, too, as Javier Guerrero notes, the idea of publishing a family album paved the way for Novo's archive, which is part of the national patrimony in Mexico City and attests Novo's fondness for photographic procedures: cropping,

[168] Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida.* Translated by Richard Howard, Hill and Wang, 2010, pp. 98.

hand tinting, and image reproduction, all effective means to reach massive audiences and to turn his body and personal image into material excess. [169]

It is quite likely, however, that turning his personal image into material excess arose from the understanding of private and public life as non-conterminous spaces as well as from the fact that excess was a given material condition. In Novo's case, excess relates to the construction and dissemination of his own image via photography, and it is thus also practical to think of excess as the property that makes an image visible. That is to say, in image production, excess is an inherent modality and an after-effect. In technical terms, in photography, the elimination of unexposed and excessive silver halides reveals the analog photographic image. Once revealed as negative and then as positive, the image requires further excess for its duplicates and surrogates to emerge as a single-yet-reproduced image across distinct media. In this way, excess is the common imprint, a protracted surplus value that capitalism's production logic adheres onto media of representation. Photography has never been exempt of such imprint and neither has the public individual for whom mass media culture and popularity were gyrating conditions or means and ends simultaneously. Hence, that Novo would turn to photography to construct a public image speaks of the medium's functionality to enhance Novo's prominent status as non-normative poet, outspoken and intellectually defiant persona. Likewise, turning in photographic excess speaks of a coming to terms with how the medium had disrupted the public and private spheres and how Novo embraced such disruption and turned it into a strategy to legitimize his idea of sublating private life into public life.

Embracing photography as means to take hold of the public sphere might seem contradictory given that throughout the 1920s, as the previous sections show, Novo was reticent

[169] For a description of the Salvador Novo archive at the Centro de Estudios de Historia de México, and an interpretation of Novo' exhibitionism in photographs, see: Guerrero, Javier. "Tecnologías del cuerpo: Exhibicionismo y visualidad en América Latina. Iberoamericana, 2014, pp. 137.

when it came to valuing the medium as quotidian practice, or as an excuse to travel and see national territory. His disregard towards photography was in large measure due to its popular appeal and to how photography's incursion into the national social fabric was resulting in a degradation of people's taste for art. This concern was made explicit in several instances as Novo exercised an improvised art criticism.

For instance, while reviewing the pedagogical work of the painter, Manuel Rodríguez Lozano, Novo argued that in Mexico, finally, a new generation of artists was being forged. This generation, all students of Lozano, was an opportunity to move away, once and for all, from the "middle class consciousness" that had perpetuated the vogue and tradition of "neoclassical" and "renaissance" aesthetics. The differentiating quality of this new generation of art students was the single fact that: "ellos pueden, a diferencia de sus padres, distinguir una fotografía de una obra de arte y perpetuar una emoción sin ayuda de una *kodak."*[170] Implicitly, therein lays the hope to steer art away from "neoclassical" aesthetics (one should read nationalist and muralist painting as promoted by Diego Rivera) and most certainly away from objectivist and photographic realism. Explicitly, there is also a counterargument advocating for a tradition of art, a tradition distanced from the task of translating national, political and social issues and more inclined to serve as the means to project artistic expression and cohere artistic spirits. In other words, a type of art that would connect "al artista que "crea" con el que admira."[171] In so much as the *kodak* was perpetuating emotions, it was also interfering and subduing an artistic dialectic, a system of expression between creative subjects. According to Novo, therefore, the *kodak* signaled the intromission of a mechanical apparatus into human and transcendental means of expression. Lozano's work was foreshadowing a return and bringing about a new generation of

[170] Novo, Salvador. "La última exposición pictótica jovenil." En *Viajes y ensayos II: Crónicas,y artículos periodísticos.* Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999, pp. 66.
[171] Ibid... 67.

artists directed to extoll an "individual and expressive art", a glimmer of hope in a context where neoclassical and populist realism dominated and "profesores *pompier*... por todos medios querían oponer su fotográfica verdad."[172]

Yet in another instance, while commenting on modern sculpture and the trend of bringing the qualities of other art forms onto poetry, Novo, the art critic, noted another hemispheric malady:

> "Nuestra civilización, por desgracia lamentabilísima, ha sido educada excesivamente en la cultura física y en la fotografía. El peligro griego de humanizar los dioses nos amenaza y acaso en este sentido, para la gente sin remedio, debemos agradecer las *kodaks* y el *make-up.*"[173]

How did photography come to be a cultural menace and a solution for people – including Novo- whose image stood at a disadvantage against the precepts of western beauty? The answer resides in that for Novo, art forms were structured within proper traditions. Painting within the tradition of painting, sculpture within its own tradition and so on. Photography was without a proper tradition and borrowing from all others. It was a type a hybrid platform conflating pictorial values. Worse of all, photography was too realistic and rather than revolutionizing aesthetic trends only perpetuated outdated pictorial values and existing materialist notions of beauty. In that photography was highly reproducible, it was also a viable means for standing aesthetic trends to move along the march of history without registering the effects of change. In a sense, photography was less innovative and revolutionary than it was a process of recycling and amplifying stagnated aesthetic categories and styles.

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[172] Ibid… 68.

[173] Novo, Salvador. "Algunos escultores modernos." En *Viajes y ensayos II: Crónicas,y artículos periodísticos.* Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999, pp. 76.

The medium was thus a collective means to disseminate a material representation of the self, it was a system that when paired to the magic of *make-up* allowed the common subject to acquire and embody a material notion of beauty. This notion of beauty was, of course, the "greek danger". Such notion of beauty was an artificial enactment, a commercially and technically supported performative stance and thus tarnished continuation of a western obsession to think of beauty as a material condition, when beauty was in fact non-material, and indefinable by mechanical means. Novo, of course, was speaking as a poet and in his art criticism, the *kodaks* and *make-up* were at fault for seamlessly enabling a collective fantasy: the common notion that beauty is representable and reproducible through the artifices of modern technology. And there was also the concern that photography was serving as platform for the continuation of a long-standing philosophical error by which art is thought to reflect human reality and yet condense human qualities and metaphysical notions. Novo suggested that the continual tendency to "humanize gods" had found its way into photography wherein common people could simply strike a pose, take on a "godly" or transcendental appearance, and assume an illusion subsequently encapsulated in reproducible images of the self as a material representation and manifestation of creative expression. This conception of beauty is all the more significant when Novo implicitly recants it in "El arte de la fotografía" by underscores photography's subliminating potential.

In some sense, as Novo wrote on sculpture, he took on photography to advocate for the traditional separation of aesthetic regimes but began to embrace the *Kodak* and *make-up* as technical innovation to enable the introduction of the glance and its attending voyeuristic pleasure in visual representation. Therefore, as Novo suggests that photography was an all-intrusive system, he grants that photography is a means for people to gain a position within the

sphere of representation- we will return to this notion in the next sections. It seems that Novo, however paradoxically, disclosed how photography was a practical means to acquire transcendental meaning, and specifically, perpetuate a material sense of beauty and memory.

The Travelling "Weston"

When it came to expressing doubts and questions about popular trends, photography was a readily available object. This was certainly the case when Novo caricatured revolutionary nationalism. In "De profundis revolucionario", an article that epitomizes his highest degree of acerbic cynicism towards the recent history of the 1920s, Novo introduced a family anecdote framed around a satirical pun towards modernist photography. [174] The article is one of the clearest examples of how Novo played with photography. In this case, he played with the medium by interspacing the story of an elderly godmother with an exemplar of American straight photography: Edward Weston, who extolled the medium as the "unique" art " among all the arts…by reason of its instantaneous recording process." In Weston's theory, photography's instantaneity meant the "truthful" and "beautiful" visual translation of the photographer's pre-visualized images or cognitive renderings of material external reality.[175] A photograph produced through such process was art by way of being a direct expression of human creativity. Weston notion of "truth" is undoubtedly a rhetorical device to advocate for photography as art. This is a discursive blot that has marked photography since popularization in the nineteenth century. Interestingly, in the 1930s, as the next chapter on Enrique Gutmann shows, the "truthfulness" of the photographic image masks fascist propaganda and it is the primary rhetorical tool to

[174] Sheridan, Guillermo. *Los contemporaneous ayer*. Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1985, pp. 256.

[175] Straight photography was the 1930s modernist trend of American photography. Main exponents of the trend were Edward Weston, Paul Strand, Ansel Adams, Imogen Cunningham and others. The central objective of these photographers was the production of less manipulated and physically intervened images. Their main theoretical and philosophical premise held that a photograph should result as a translation, or follow from a process of pre-visualization in which the image was conceived before releasing the camera's shutter. Weston, Edward. "Seeing Photographically." In *Classic Essays on Photography*. Edited by Alan Trachtenberg, Leete's Island Books, 1980, pp. 169-175.

counteract fascism while supporting revolutionary photography and a vision of Mexico as democratic and socialist nation.

Now, In "De profundis revolucionario", Novo depicts Weston in a metaphor that renders the revolutionary photographer as an icon of itinerant photography, sign of economic pillage and symbol of cultural sabotage. The anecdote begins in Northern Mexico as follows:

> Mi querida madrina de primera comunión… Guardaba una gran cantidad de joyas que no usaba nunca…. Mas odiaba a tal punto la vanidad de las cosas humanas, que no se había retratado nunca. Cierto día llegó allá un Weston original, con el que todo el mundo se perpetuó en cartón. Mi madrina atendiendo a sabios consejos, fue a visitarle, ornamentada de todas sus joyas, absolutamente de todas. Y puso la amplificación en la sala.[176]

The rest of the anecdote relates how the Weston, the portrait of the dear aunt, was stolen by a troop of villista soldiers, who put it up for sale in a 1920's version of the modern yard sale. Since no one buys the print and because neither the soldiers nor potential buyers seem aware that the portrait is the creation of a master of modernist photography, the jest of the story cuts in multiple directions.

On one end, Weston is characterized as an itinerant image-maker, a throwback of the nineteenth century mobile daguerreotypist or stereograph photographer. Weston, the photographer, is thus human and the only embodiment of the original. A Weston is thus a nascent brand and a material object metonymically charged with modernist myth-making

[176] Novo, Salvador. "De profundis Revolucionario." En *Viajes y ensayos II: Crónicas,y artículos periodísticos.* Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999, pp. 99.

potential through the idea that an art object is no longer a simple object but a manifestation of the artist's genius. Material production is thus a type of progeny and the object is a sign of the subject in a circular dialectic enabled by the logics of a patriarchal system of naming. In Novo's view, however, the photograph as such carries a danger: a false promise of perpetuity. It is a piece of "cardboard" susceptible to material conditions and ideological shortcomings.

On the other, Novo seems to ask: how could a Weston be an art piece if its illegitimate possessors (the revolutionary soldiers) only see exchange value? How could the Weston stand as a revolutionary form of art if it reinforces the longing of perpetual existence and vanity by installing a means for self-veneration? If one recalls Walter Benjamin's praise for the medium: photography's greatest force was the interruption of contemplation as the mediating principle between observer and visual image. With the anecdote, Novo drills through the notions by which photography was claimed as a revolutionary art object, and also exposes the invasion of the private realm as an intrinsic consequence of the revolution and photography; unbaiting phenomena by which private memory promptly turns into material cultural objects, always susceptible to losing their affective and mnemonic meanings, once taken outside a familial context.

By satirizing Weston, Novo as art critic, struck a blow at revolutionary nationalism and jolted the pedestals of modernist photography. The satire not only caricatured the twentieth century photographer but also presented the consecrated straight photograph as manufactured object, a piece of cardboard promising a perpetuity that is always disposable. In the critique, Novo expressed doubt about the qualifications of photography as art but also resented the rise of the modern photographer, as a new celebrity and esteemed cultural producer. From the resentment arose an incessant antipathy towards photography that was often employed as a

weapon to muck the showbiz of revolutionary culture. And the time would come when that same tool was employed to tackle another deity in the pantheon of Mexican revolutionary photography: Tina Modotti.

In 1929, Modotti was caught in the polemic resulting from the assassination of the Cuban journalist, Julio Antonio Mella, her companion and political comrade, who was gunned down in Mexico City. Mella's death was a consequence of Stalinist-Trotskyists feuds. Modotti, then an established photographer and celebrity of sorts within intellectual and leftist circles, became witness and suspect. Despite her double role in the polemic, she had neither material evidence nor any objective proof of her innocence and thus could not to dissipate doubts levied on her public image by acerbic critics. Among these, "El Niño Fidencio", Novo's authorial voice in a column for the *Excélsior,* poked fun at the Mellas's tragic death and at Modotti's luckless situation:

> Y tú, Tina – rompamos el turrón comunista- ¿por que fuiste a olvidar tu cámara?... ahora que estás saliendo en los periódicos, los fogonazos impiden a veces hasta la respiración. Con mayor razón el disparo. Si tú hubieras salido de paseo con Mella y tu *Kodak*, y frente a los desconocidos, antes que ellos su pistola, hubieras disparado tu cámara, habría pasado cualquiera de estas dos buenas cosas. O se asustan y no lo matan, te falla la instantánea, se van y todos quedamos tan tranquilos, o ya que el destino lo ordenaba, lo desempadronan, pero en cuanto tú revelaras tu negativa, la verdad se abriría paso hasta el cerebro de lo jueces. Tu clientela crecería enormemente. No que así, ya lo ves, esa negativa verbal no revela nada.[177]

[177] Novo, Salvador. "Sin título." En *Viajes y ensayos II: Crónicas,y artículos periodísticos.* Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999, pp. 241.

In the banter, Novo singles out Modotti's misfortune by expounding his conservative view of communism and despise towards populist celebrity figures. The pun is most effective, however, on its backhanded intention that posits on "shot", "negative" and "truth" a double meaning thus parodying objectivity with violence, veracity with oratory of denial, and legal justice with unreliable human reason. The hypothetical situations offered are possibilities in as much as photography is an evidentiary device to guarantee justice. Implicitly, Novo articulates a consistent conception: photography is a medium of empirical potential and verisimilitude creative capacity, a means to perpetuate memory and afford human transcendence based on the photograph's material and marketable potential. That Modotti gained more popularity through print media, despite the absence of her own *Kodak*, is the central bind of the photographer turned celebrity in a culture of mass produced images. Novo's banter sustained a premonition of media induced stardom and in many ways comprises a critique of the myth-making elements of early twentieth century photography, a critique that he would also rearticulate, albeit less harshly, in 1931 in "El arte de la fotografia."

"El arte de la fotografía" or "La *kodak* ante el arte" condenses Novo's conception of photography as a mechanical medium that lacks a historical and aesthetic tradition. At best, in his view, photography is a medium that allows for the continuation of "indirect emotion or aesthetic emotion", which is to say that photography affords the illusion of mnemonic magnificence (indirect emotion) and is potentially configured to inherit "el mal arte", the mimicry and reproduction-like aesthetics of neoclassical and realistic painting (aesthetic emotion). Yet, even with that double potential, photographs are objects intricately tied to material conditions, always susceptible to oblivion and vulnerable to the effects of material decay. The essay thus builds on a paradigm, and reproduces the binary scheme that places

photography as an adjacent, and subaltern category to painting. Novo also applied this scheme cinema and journalism. This first was subaltern to theater; the second was the prodigial son of literature. Hence when Novo states that photography is "la hija prodiga del arte… en la edad de los instrumentos mecánicos", the medium is presented as a subjugated assistant responding to the demands of pre-existing aesthetic traditions; it inherits painting's unwanted labor: reproduction, and allows painting to engage its natural pictorial mission: creation.

Analogically, the essay's title approximates photography to art only via an ironic and gendering ploy that purports the medium as having its own female-like ability: the art of reproducing and propagating that which painting cannot do: indirect emotions and superfluous sentiments attached to stagnated aesthetic styles. In other words, this ability would be the inherent realist capacity to exact pictorial precision. In highlighting such ability, Novo employs a normative (conservative view of art forms) understanding of gender functions and suggests that photography does not have art's capacity to reflect and project human creativity, but only affords a technologically driven potential viable for the materialization of ever-present psychological desires. In his understanding, photography falls within the technological development that gave rise to the daguerreotype and silent cinema; it is thus the means allowing for the "perpetuación amable de nuestros mejores parientes." In a way, photography allows for the continuation affective social relations. It provides a type of effective representation solely on the grounds of it being an aesthetic and material referent. Implicitly here what is disclosed is that photography has the potential to include in the realm of representation the visual image of those subjects whose social status excludes them from pictorial representation. The common folk, the beloved relatives, enter into a form of figurative representation that prolongs affective ties, which via the photograph and in due time, can active a process of recognition within a corpus of pictorial and

symbolic representations. But, as a technology of representation, photography also perpetuates " una serie de engaños de que nos hacen víctimas, primero, los hombres de ciencia, y en seguida, los técnicos."[178] As a deceptive means, photography is art in that it takes as a proper quality, the realist tendency to copy and materializes the desire to reproduce *ad infinitum* verisimilitudes of external reality. Novo suggests that photography concretizes a technical and scientific ambition for true-like representation and allows a type of projection that mimics art's creative processes; yet, unlike art, photography is falls short of transcending a material dimension and is most proper for complying with the transcendental aspirations of the common folk.

> En manos de millones de jóvenes, la humilde Kodak es deporte y expresión. Junto a miles de retratos de familia – ya ellos mismos más involuntarios, más instantáneos, sin retoque ni pose ni prueba -, ¡Cuántos pequeños trozos de arte puro! Puro porque constituye la expresión platica de quienes… no dispusieron de otro medio de sublimación, y fijaron, para sí y sus afines, el instante más selecto de su visión.[179]

Through the 1920s, Novo did not appreciate photography as a democratic practice and expressive means for popular sectors; it might seem contradictory then that in 1931, when he read "El arte de la fotografía" at the Sala de Arte de Secretaria de Educación, Novo appreciated the medium's creative potential and even highlighted family portraits as "pure art." The change of tone was not accidental and one reason for this change might be the fact that photography's language had enveloped Novo to the extent that he could only rearticulate it and not demean it as he had done in the 1920. That is, photography, in 1931, had already established its credentials as means of creative expression, as an evidentiary system of reproduction and its ample popularity

[178] Novo, Salvador. "El arte de la fotografía." En *Viajes y ensayos I: Crónicas,y artículos periodísticos*. Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999, pp. 139.
[179] Ibid… 143.

had positioned the medium as the democratic means for taking part in a visual form of representation, with its always-alluring political connotations. Novo, of course, echoed such notions in the speech and, at least rhetorically, sided with the notion in vogue; photography as art was an "instantaneous" un-manipulated transferring of images between technical supports.

By alluding to the instantaneous, un-retouched and un-posed photographed as "pure art", Novo seems to have voluntarily reiterated the photography-as-art argument proposed by straight photographers, who like Weston, rejected retouching and other post-production effects and extolled pre-visualization as means to achieve a unique and artistic of object. Yet, in Novo speech at the Sala de Arte de Secretaria de Educación points in a different direction. In his speech, photographic discourse is paired with strong influx of psychoanalysis and a surrealist appreciation of images, which together facilitate the appreciation of photographic instantaneity as an art-constituting element. On this regard, one should recall that in psychoanalysis desire is repressed by the privileging of other sense and that the rise of subconscious matter is a pursued mode cognitive production, and cultural production, for it occurs in a spontaneous way thus reintroducing desires by way of circumventing the interference of rational processing. The surrealist applied this notion to their interpretation of photographic images and in these, it was presumed resided traces of physical objects photographed and of the cognitive unrationalized emotions and images of the photographer's subconcious. The photograph was therefore a plastic plane of fusing human subconscious matter and the imprinted traces of physical object. The photography in this sense is a space of sublimation, a site where what excluded from rational visual representation is included and made visible by workings of the camera, a visual complementary aide to human vision. How all of this comes into play in Novo's idea of sublimation can be explained as follows.

Take for instance, as Novo marveled at the perfection of photographic reproduction, through a Freudian reading of technical developments, he equated the camera to the typewriter: "¿Sería exagerado comentar, ya que de eso se trata, que la maquina en que escribo estas líneas le ha tomado una instantánea a mi subconsciente?"[180] That a typewriter would operate as a camera speaks of a conception of the machine as device for the unhindered and instantaneous projection of subconscious thought. On this notion, Novo was playing non-jokingly with the surrealist conception of the photographic camera. As mentioned before, for the surrealists, as it was for Man Ray, the only photographer Novo mentions in the essay, the camera was a complementary element of vision in a world constituted a priori as representation.[181] In this sense, the camera aids in the visual materialization of what is already visible, all depicted matter previously subdued in the chambers of the subconscious. In other words, where Novo speaks of the photographic camera as means for instantaneous projections of conscious thought, he links such notion on the idea of photography as "pure art" if and when the photograph is "la expresión plástica de quienes… no dispusieron de otro medio de sublimación." In this sense, sublimation amounts to the materialization of a desire to transcend; a desire deposited on the photographic image, which as an index withholds the traces of a former instantaneous vision: the self-image of subject photographed. One can think here that Novo regards as instantaneous not the photograph, but the traces it registers of that moment when the sitter, in front of the camera, revealed and projected a spontaneous image of the self, a fleeting pose that contained the desire to be visible and the desire to be seen. This projection, for it swiftness, comprises a subliminal instance by which the sitter revealed an image seen by the photographer and taken by the camera in a simulation of the glance, the transitory and never-fix way of looking at representations solely on

[180] Ibid… 139.

[181] For photography and surrealism, see: Krauss, Rosalind E. "The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism." In *The Orxscgghihtt ggft cxtrhhnalily of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths.* The MIT Press, 1986, pp. 87-118.

the basis of desiring what is visible. The photograph is thus "pure art" in that it registers the instantaneous projection of a vision, a self-derived aesthetic appreciation of the self; the photographs come to stand as the sole remaining object of a vision that had no other means to represent itself. By implication, then, on the concept of sublimation Novo expounds a change of perspective towards the medium; it offers a view, a concession to photography's social appeal and indirectly admits a lack of means for popular representations. On this, one can sense a veiled reference to the rigidity of elite culture from which Novo wrote and witnessed the incursion of the medium as a means promising another form of material transcendence.

Lasting Transcendence

In Novo's chronicles of the late 1920s and early 1930s, photography figures as a platform to express uncertainties about strolling along the march of modern progress. Within the scope of the articles analyzed in this chapter, for instance, Novo's conception of the medium progresses from a conservative attitude that holds the medium as heralding a cultural degradation to an appreciation that takes the medium as the sole means of representation with the capacity to register the desiring glance. From a conservative perspective, photography was thought to enabled a new class of citizen, a subject more interested in viewing superficially than on developing a heightened sense of culture molded on the experiences afforded by the national territory. In the latter perspective imprinted in "El arte de la fotografía", Novo did not withhold his conservative view of photography as a predominantly popular and subaltern medium to painting, but recognized its factual expressive potential.

As a means of expression, photography's own language figures in Novo's later work. In *Yucantán, Buen Vecino*, a travel narrative of the 1940s, the sections "Retrato de una matrona" and "Placas vedadas" draw from photography. The first attempts a strong and instantaneous

portrait of elderly women, whose moral character impressed Novo. The second hints at photography's vulnerability: fogging and unintentional exposure, as a way of admitting that writing is susceptible to the voids of memory, and particularly, to bluntly question the homophobic attitude of an elementary school teacher, who recommends psychoanalysis to correct the supposedly homosexual behavior of a 6-year-old student.[182] In the 1960s, again, Novo's work conjoined photography with the publication of "Nueva Grandeza Mexicana" in photobook formant and with photographs by Héctor García, a master of Mexican photojournalism. In these works, as in the articles of the 1920s, there is a fluid and multivalent performativity that allows one to purview how cultural concepts and predominant modes of thinking are set in question and/or employed as strategies to undo and reaffirm conventional paradigms.

Novo's take on photography is thus similar to the character of his journalistic work in that it sustains common parallels. From instance, in his chronicles of the 1920s, the parallel between urban chronicler as prostitute intermixed gender, pleasure, urban labor mobility, maternity and femininity, all of which were mobilized against an entrenched militant masculinity that held sway of the literary scene in post revolutionary Mexico. By so doing, Viviane Mahieux argues, Novo he circulated his own image around different spaces of the urban and public sphere and also drew readers into a "sexualized market of popular culture."[183] This circulation, most certainly, was the end result of his writing and the explicitness of commercial photographic images illustrating the pages of the popular magazine. But as his writing moved around the public sphere, it navigated paths previously traced by popular photography to the extent that

[182] Novo, Salvador. "Yucatán, buen vecino." En *Viajes y ensayos I: Crónicas,y artículos periodísticos*. Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999, pp. 866.

[183] Mahieux, Viviane. *Urban Chroniclers in Modern Latin America: The Shared Intimacy of Everyday Life*. University of Texas Press, 2011, pp. 122-123. Mahieux takes as an example the photograph of Barbara La Marr that Novo appropriated to illustrate his 1924 article "Bathing Motifs".

Novo's conception of his prose as "prodigal sons" has its roots in the already popular conception of photography as the "bastard child of science" or the "prodigal daughter of painting" as he would articulate the same idea in "El arte de la fotografia."

Therefore, in that prodigal offspring is as much a reference to writing as it is to photography, it also accentuates the lack of historical and aesthetic tradition shared by journalistic writing and photography in the 1920s. In such context, both mediums were innovative and somewhat exempt of the formulaic and rigidity of established aesthetics norms. Free of cultural and aesthetic precepts, chronicles, like photography, were thus means by which intellectuals could innovatively enter into the ample range of public sphere and well into the niches of elite culture, where accepted or not, both mediums were unavoidable means of expression.

La ola de barbarie que nos amenaza, entre otras muchas cosas nobles, ha desterrado el silencio, para exaltar el ruido como signo de vitalidad. Ruido de cañones, ruido de botas militares que marchan al paso por las calles de las ciudades. Mas no por esto hemos de acallar la voz, sino alzarla proclamando la causa que defendemos, sin debilidades ni claudicaciones.[184]

- Rafael Sánchez de Ocaña

Los hombres se reúnen hoy como soldados; no para discutir la bondad de su causa sino para determinar el modo eficaz de desbaratar al enemigo.[185]

- Juan Marinello

El desarrollo de un programa definido de gobierno requiere de un conjunto de órganos de publicidad y propaganda coordinados bajo una sola dirección.... si no se cuenta con una dirección única. Tampoco puede esperarse… que tenga eficacia la intervención del Estado, normada por la Ley, pero opuesta a la tradición liberal que todavía influye considerablemente en el derecho y en la costumbre.[186]

- Lázaro Cárdenas

Chapter 3

1937: Retraction

In the 1930s, the promotion of Mexico abroad continued and photography remained an essential tool. In this decade, the medium continued serving as a platform for exiles to assimilate into the Mexican nation, and for local intellectuals to synchronize global ideas. However, photography still a popular medium and attractive representational technology had lost its liberating allure. Instead, with the rise of the Third Reich, the Soviet Union and American imperialism, the medium turned against a less liberating idea: fascism, and its redeployment of mechanical reproduction for the edification of a totalitarian state. Caught up in the rising shadow of totalitarianism, photography, like other arts, became a contested terrain where leftist and rightist intellectuals claimed and disputed the medium's objectivity and verisimilitude. In this

[184] Rafael Sanchez de Ocaña spoke at a conference organized in 1938 by Enrique Gutmann and Liga Pro-Cultura Alemana en México. The English version of the epigraph: "*The barbarous wave that threatens us, among many other noble things, has exile silence, in order to awake uproar as a sign of vitality. The uproar of cannons and of military boots that march in-step along the city's streets. But we should not silence our voice, but raise it to proclaim the cause we stand by, without weakness nor capitulations.*" Sánchez de Ocaña, Rafael. "HEINE." La Verdadera Cultura Alemana. *6 actos culturales organizados por la Liga Pro-Cultura Alemana en México. Tomo 1* Ediciones LPC, 1938, pp. 22.

[185] Marinello, Juan. "Transformar el dolor en libertad". *Frente a Frente,* Número Especial, 1937, pp. 2

[186] Cárdenas, Lázaro. Decreto de creación del Departamento Autónomo de Prensa y Propaganda dirigido a la Cámara de Diputados, 25 de diciembre de 1936, AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Lázaro Cárdenas del Río (LCR), exp. 545.22/33, s.f. qtd. in Cruz Porchini, Dafne. *Proyectos culturales y visuales en México a finales del cardenismo (1937-1940).* Dissertation, UNAM, 2014, pp. 39, 40.

contest, what to some was objective and photographic "truth"; to others, it was a deceptive and manipulated effect taking the place of a morally and socially edifying notion of truth.

In post-revolutionary Mexico, the specter of an authoritarian - and potentially totalitarian - state arose late in the 1920s during the reign of President Plutarco Elias Calles, who was known as the "Maximum Chief". During Calles's term, revolutionary promises; such as land distribution, political rights and civil liberties reached a standstill. In 1934 when President Lázaro Cárdenas assumed power, revolutionary ideals rekindled amid a plethora of socialist dreams and fascist threats. During Cárdenas' tenure, the state also consolidated as an authoritative institution; yet, photography continued extolling Mexico's democratic potential and simultaneously denounced the close ties between authoritarianism and totalitarianism. In this paradoxical situation and favoring Cárdenas politics, photography was set against the menace of fascism and towards the projection of a democratic Mexico. To the task, photography's optical verisimilitude and "truth" appeal and its potential to reveal beyond human perception were mobilized and proposed the figure of the president as central mast for political direction. This is certainly the case with the photography of Enrique Gutmann, who claimed to work at the service of the "Mexican nation in its struggle for its improvement and progress…"[187]. Gutmann was a German anti-fascist activist, propagandist, Jewish journalist, editor, photographer and photomonteur whose work parlayed nationalism and promoted Mexico as progressive nation. [188]

[187] Gutman, Enrique. *Letter to General Hay, Secretary of Foreign Relations*. México, Archivo Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriors, VII (N), Solicitudes, 1937, Caja 174, Exp. 46.

[188] There is a common confusion between Enrique Gutmann (Heinrich Gutmann) and Juan Guzmán (Hans Gutmann) and John Gutmann, a German-born American photographer. Although all three were German, I have no evidence to suggest any ties, other than they were photographers. Enrique Gutmann, son of the novelist Paul Gutmann, was an active photographer with Mexican leftist circles and served in several government positions in the 1930s and 1940s. According to the BT (B.Traven) Mitteilungen editors, Enrique Gutmann was epileptic and died in Mexico City as result of a tragic accident in 1950s; see: "Gottes Mühlen Mahlen Langsam, Aber…" BT Mitteilungen, 1925 (reprint 1978), pp. 52. Juan Guzmán was a prominent portrait, journalist and celebrity photographer in Mexico. Some of his work is published in: Renata von Hanffstengel and Cecilia Tercero. *México, El exilio bien temperado*. Instituto de Investigaciones Interculturales Germano-Mexicanas, A.C., 1995. See also: Aguilar, Fernández S. L, and Cruz M. M. González. *México bajo la óptica de Juan Guzmán:(arte, famosos y vida*

His work allows one to glance at how photography supported the Cárdenas' administration, confronted fascism and parlayed Mexican nationalism's socialist adventure. In this complex endeavors, Gutmann's photography drew from proletariat literature principles, and attended conflicting logics: historical materialism and the propagandistic prerogatives emanating from the Departamento de Prensa y Proganda (DAPP). His collaborative work as a member of the Liga de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios (L.E.A.R) and in association with American and Mexican leftist intellectuals remains in *Frente a Frente, Futuro, LIFE, Despertar Lagunero, Chimeneas* and *Lázaro Cardenas Visto por Tres Hombres.* These publications withhold what is readily available of Gutmann's oeuvre. His archive, unfortunately, has not been located. The publications offer an opportunity to trace how the antifascist, pro-socialist propaganda of the Cárdenas era employed photography aligned to the defining principles of Socialist Realism to promote Mexico as a democratic socialist nation. [189]

Most significantly, in Gutmann's work, one also finds the figure of the state at the core of a materialist equation purporting to bond artists and proletariat towards a shared condition: liberation. Focusing on this materialist equation, the following chapter brings to the fore how anti-fascism, when aligned to official pro-Cárdenas propaganda, drew on morality to justify the need of an authoritarian figure. Hence, analyzing how Gutmann confronted fascism by drawing from photography's objectivity and employing a rhetoric truth shows that in the face of fascism,

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cotidiana, 1945-1965). Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 2009. Most recently, the Televisa Foundation printed a voluminous book on Juan Guzman; see: Guzmán, Juan, and Carrillo A. Morales. *Juan Guzmán*. RM, Fundación Televisa, 2014.

189 It is worth noting a couple of clarifications regarding the Soviet notion of Socialist Realism. According to Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez, the basic Marxist idea behind socialist realism understands art as form of knowledge that captures human reality and, attending truth, impedes mystifications and aides in the transformation of the social. James C. Vaughan underscores that this concept predates Lenin and Stalin. Lenin reformulated the concept in *Party Organization and Party Literature* and introduced a partisan component that was then instituted by Stalin. The introduction of partisanship, however, does not necessarily mean that the Socialist Realism decreed as official dogma by Stalin was in fact a byproduct of Lenin's thinking. Therefore, for Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez, the 1930's, or Soviet notion of socialist realism, was a transformation of the concept into "false realism" and "idealized socialism" detached from social reality. See: Sánchez Vásquez, Adolfor. *Las ideas estéticas de Marx.* Era, 1974, pp.37. Vaughan, James C. *Soviet Socialist Realism: Origins and Theory*. Macmillan, 1973.

leftist intellectuals employed similar weapons as fascism but veiled them with an aura of morality. If that is the case, the fact that most of Gutmann's available work was produced within tenure of the Cardenas administration makes it factual that his work maintained a correspondence with the principles of Socialist Realism: its historical materialism, the attention to the immediate present of a class struggle; its claim of being "true" and objective, and most explicitly, the obligation of the artist to society and the corresponding relation between art and politics.[190]

The presence of such notions in Gutmann's work shows then that in the struggle against fascism, a materialist dialectic purporting to link artist and people was redirected so that it no longer abided a socialist creed nor Marxist theory. That is to say, in strict Marxist theory, art is a reflection of social reality when it springs from a spontaneous relation between artists and proletariat and leads to a mutual liberation. However, Gutmann's work in Mexico promoted the idea of art at the service of the people but subsumed to a political affiliation: the Lázaro Cardenas administration. This disjuncture will be explained in the following chapter by contextualizing how Gutmann called upon photography to serve and attest the social processes at work delivering a proletariat society under President Cárdenas. At his request, photography was revolutionary when it turned to illustrate social reality or the social truth. It must be stressed, though, that in a time when Socialist Realism was decreed as official art theory and declared avant-gardist aesthetic experimentation as anti-revolutionary, Gutmann exalted the Cárdenas administration by redeploying avant-gardist techniques and pictorial values proper to Constructivism and New Vision, mechanical objective vision and socially immersed perspectives.

[190] These are the most explicit ideas in the phrase "serving the people". According to James C. Vaughan Socialist Realism is grounded on three interconnected principles: people-ness, class-ness and party-ness; see: Vaughan, James C. *Soviet Socialist Realism: Origins and Theory*. Macmillan, 1973.

In essence, the following chapter analyzes Gutmann's work in Mexico to highlight an interaction between conservative and leftist journalists and cardenismo and anti-fascism in a transnational context, where leftist intellectual joined efforts to withstand fascism and defend Mexico as the last bastion for a social democracy. The chapter builds onto contemporary research on the German exile in Mexico and draws information from documents at the Archivo General de la Nación in Mexico City, and the Joseph Freeman Collection in the Hoover Institute Archive at Stanford University. These documents help contextualize Gutmann's work within the history of leftist transnational intellectual culture, the rise of avant-gardist photography and proletariat literature in Mexico.

Antifascist in Contest

Heinrich, or Enrique Gutmann was one of many German exiles that came to Mexico in 1934, the year after the book burnings and the Reichstag fire in Germany.[191] His arrival in Mexico was marked by a threefold international coincidence: the Nazis' escalating attacks on socialists, communists and "un-German" culture; the institutionalization of Socialist Realism in Russia, and Lázaro Cárdenas's quest for a socialist-democratic Mexico. In the midst of these nationalist fronts, Gutmann, like many of the 8000 to 9000 European Jews that arrived in Mexico in the 1920s and 1930s, understood himself as a "stateless" German, who was fleeing a "death sentence" imposed on him by the Nazi regime. [192] Unlike many exiles, Gutmann was a journalist,

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[191] While publishing *Suma Gastronómica,* Enrique Gutmann used a different name. See: Polsen, Federik. "Problems of the Small-Country Writer." *Books Abroad,* 21. 3 (Summer, 1947), pp. 271-273. Poulsen mentions the director of Suma Gastronómica as Henrik Evander. I have also come across two spelling variations of his last name: Gutmann and Guttmann. I will employ the first spelling because that is how it is written in official documents. Other researchers have noted the date of his arrival in Mexico as 1933 and 1935. I use 1934 because that is what Gutmann declared in official documents.

[192] According to Judit Bokser Liwerant, that is an estimate of the eastern Europen Jews that migrated to Mexicon between 1920s and 1930s; see: Bokser Liwerant, Judit. *De exilios, migraciones y esncuentros culturales*, pp. 23. In *México, el exilio bien temperado.* Instituto de Investigaciones Interculturales Germano-Mexicanas, A.C., 1995, pp. 23. In 1943, Gutmann described himself as "apátrida" (stateless) and wrote down he had been sentenced to death by the Nazi regime. The information is included in a travel application submitted to the Mexican Secretary of the

photographer and was married to Maria Magdalena Farks Galindo, a Mexican woman who had been required by the Reich Ministry of the Interior to prove she was a pureblood.[193] In Germany, Guttmann had edited *Aus der Frühzeit der Photographie 1840-70*, a photobook of nineteenth-century photographers published in 1930. He also worked for the magazine *Tempo, Berliner Mongenpost*, *Berliner Zitung am Mittag, Vossische Zeitung* and presumably edited the *Vorwärts,* the Berlin-based newspaper of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SDP).[194] It is probably not a mere historical coincidence that when the publication of the *Vorwärts* came to a halt- the Nazis banned the SDP in 1933- Guttmann requested exile in Mexico, where he sought an opportunity to confront fascism and collaborate in the reconstruction of a "progressive and free" Mexican society.[195] As an ideal, the construction of a liberal and free society was an attractive enterprise for a socialist and antifascist intellectual in need of refuge and territory to counteract National Socialism. For Gutmann, paradoxically, due to the conflicting nature of the sociopolitical landscape, Mexico was an amenable home for socialist longings and an ideal battleground against fascism.

The conditions to rise against fascism while upholding socialist ideals were established years prior to Gutmann's arrival in Mexico. Throughout the 1920s, for instance, while the religious radicalism of the Cristero rebellion was opposing secular-oriented change, Mexican modernization programs hailed colonization and immigration as means to social and economic

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Interior; see: Gutmann, Enrique. México, AGN, Galería 2, Fondo: SEGOB, Sección: DGIPS. Clasificación: 2-1/265.2/2. Expediente relativo a Enrique Gutman. Caja 122, Exp. 45.

[193] An official document of the National Socialist Party explains that the Gutmann' wife was under investigation because she was suspected of being Mexican, a mixed-blood with American indigenous heredity. See: Pohle, Fritz. *Das mexikanische Exil: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der politisch-kulturellen Emigration aus Deutschaland (1937-1946)*. J.B. Metzlersche, 1986, pp. 466.

[194] "El Pueblo Alemán solo quiere Paz y Trabajo." *Periódico El Popular*, 23 de Septiembre de 1934. Pohle, Fritz. *Das mexikanische Exil: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der politisch-kulturellen Emigration aus Deutschaland (1937-1946)*. J.B. Metzlersche, 1986, pp. 83.

[195] "free and progressive" are adjectives Gutmann used to refer to Mexico in a travel application; see: Gutmann, Enrique. Mexico, Secretaría de Gobernación, AGN, Galeria 4, Fondo: Manuel Avila Camacho, Clasificación: 2-1/362.6. From here on, unless otherwise noted, translations of German and Spanish documents are mine.

progress. These programs were paired with lenient immigration policy and took precedence during the reconstruction years of the Obregon and Calles administrations. To that end, both regimes, despite guiding social development towards less radical and more capitalist objectives, employed the rhetoric of the Mexican Revolution to project a progressive and economically welcoming image of the nation. The strategy attracted foreign investors, tourists, political and religious exiles, and deposed communities. Of the latter, one striking example was the resettlement in northern Mexico of Mennonite communities for whom the Obregon regime made available 155,000 acres of land.[196]

Moreover, towards the end of the decade, the economically fragile Calles administration turned to private investors "to promote Mexican identity and revolutionary goals."[197] This coalition of government and business interests lead to the formation of the Mixed Pro-Tourism Commission, the Mexican Tourism Association (MTA) and the Mexican American Automobile Association (AAMA) so that in the 1930s when Gutmann ventured into a socialist-promising Mexico, the tourist infrastructure was consolidated to the extent that it saw the birth of the Tourist Department of the Ministry of the Interior. In time, tourism' s promotion of the country as a progressive nation intertwined the propaganda of the Cardenas's regime and gained more momentum with the creation of the Departamento Autónomo de Prensa y Propaganda (DAPP) in 1936; the same year that Gutmann edited *Así es México de hoy y de mañana,* the official organ of the Partido Revolucionario Nacional.

In the 1930s' information web that exalted Cárdenas as a progressive leader, Gutmann took on a prominent role as promoter of the moral, socialist, democratic and popular character of

196 Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online. *Cuauhtémoc Mennonite Settlement*, http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Cuauht%C3%A9moc_mennonite_settlement_(chihuahua,_mexico). Accessed 18 August 2017.

197 Crites, Byron. Review of *The Development of Mexico's Tourism Industry: Pyramids by Day, Martinis by Night* by Dina Berger. EH.NET, December 2006, https://eh.net/book_reviews/the-development-of-mexicos-tourism-industry-pyramids-by-day-martinis-by-night/.

the president. In so doing, his work developed in a contested terrain on which the forces of pro-socialist, antifascist coalitions stood against secular right-wing radicalism that stood against the progressive measures of the Six Year Plan promoted by Lázaro Cárdenas. Part of the confrontation between left coalitions and rightist extremisms took place on print media, where "independent" journalist of commercial newspapers: *Novedades, Hoy, Excelsior,* and *El Universal* amplified the standing opposition of long-entrenched conservative voices that questioned revolutionary progress consistently praised the expansionist and anti-Semitic policies of the Third Reich.[198] In the midst of this confrontation, Cardenas's image was invested with the extreme right's persisting fear towards communism, socialism, and popular democratic politics, and thus the president became the nemesis of capitalist bourgeois society. Against this representation, the forces of the leftist press, insisted on the popular, democratic, socialist and antifascist potential of the Cardenas administration, and thus set out to construct a strong, moral and democratically minded portrait of the president. As Gutmann's work was partaking in this presentation of the president, it echoed the DAPPs' pedagogical prerogatives and incurred into the American press, *New Masses* and *LIFE,* from where it took an opposition to the conservative perspective of American journalists, who presented Cárdenas as an authoritarian, Marxist, anti-capitalist and fascist dictator.

The idea that Cardenas was a popular and democratically supported president was a direct result of a coalition of anti-fascist intellectuals and labor organizations that took a stand against the rising wave of pro-Nazi and fascist forces in Mexico. This coalition led to a conjoined endeavor in which governmental propaganda resonated in leftist media. An important moment for this coalition occurred in 1934 when the labor leader, Vicente Lombardo Toledano,

[198] Gónzalez Marín, Silvia. *Prensa y poder politico: la elección presidencial de 1940 en la prensa Mexicana*. Siglo veintiuno editores, 2006, pp. 48-58.

and president Cárdenas reached an agreement and consolidated the Comité de Defensa Proletaria. The agreement eventually turned into the Confedaración de Trabajadores de Mexico (CTM) and allowed the working class to participate in public affairs.[199] As it regards to print media, the agreement set a precedent for leftist intellectual organizations, like the L.E.A.R. and Gutmann's own Liga Pro-Cultura Alemana in Mexico, to take a stance against international and national fascism while purporting to be the Mexican nuclei of the Popular Front. The rallying moment for the fight against fascism occurred in 1937 when Vicente Lombardo Toledado denounced in the American press the intervention of German fascism in Mexico and called for unity in defense of the country. The defense of the country intensified in 1938 when Cardenas moved to nationalize the oil industry.

The call to unite against fascist forces in Mexico responded to the reactionary entanglement of nationalistic currents: indigenismo, xenophobia, atheism, anti-capitalism and authoritarianism that rose in opposition to socialist education, agrarian reform and governmental economic intervention, all components of the Six Year Plan.[200] The ultrannationalist and pro-fascist tendencies opposed Cardenas's economic plan because it relied on strong State intervention and benefitted organized labor and rural peasantry. According to the editorial board of *Futuro,* Toledano's own magazine of the 1930s, much of the opposition was a paradoxical counterrevolutionary block that claimed to "be nationalist and patriotic, yet favored the foreign oil companies" and while "condemning agrarianism" purported to be in defense of peasants and Indians.[201] This antirevolutionary or reactionary opposition had access to publications such *Timón, El hombre libre, Novedades, Hoy, Excelsior,* and *El Universal* and was the purveyor of discourse for antisocialist, xenophobic and "counterrevolutionary" organizations that gained

[199] Ibid… 54
[200] Campbell G Hugh. *La derecha radical en México.* SEP, 1976, pp. 33-34.
[201] "El Frente Antipopular y Antimexicano." Editorial, *Futuro,* No. 29, Octobre de 1937, pp. 3-4.

strength during Cardenas's administration. Consider for instance that in 1934 when Cárdenas assumed power, the paramilitary, anti-Semitic and anticommunist Acción Revolucionaria Mexicana (ARM) was established. Its members, known as Camisas Doradas (Golden Shirts), promulgated the motto "Mexico for Mexicans". Financed by Calles regime, landowners and industrialists, the ARM defended anti-labor and conservative middle class values.[202] By 1936, the ARM was the military force of the Acción Cívica Nacionalista (ACN), which coalesced with a plethora of other far-right conservative and utter fascist organizations under the direction of the Confederación Patronal de la República Mexicana (CPRM).[203] In 1937, also, when socialist education became a priority of the State, the Union Nacional Sinarquista was formed, and presumably had direct ties with German Nazis and Spanish falangists.[204]

And while Cardenas was lenient toward exiles and refugees, and effective at restricting the political scope of the most extremist organizations, such as the Camisas Doradas (Golden Shirts); at a regional level, the administration had limited power to prevent political and legislative measures from xenophobic influence. This resulted in the deportation of many people and more political pressure for foreigners in the country to comply with "mexicanization" requirements. Most significantly, throughout its tenure the Cardenas's regime did not have a legal definition for exiles and refugees, and only towards the Evian Conference of 1938, did the government considered the term "political refugee', but such category did not include the people fleeting Nazism.[205]

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202 Hugh G. Campbell, 50 – 61.

203 Judit Bokser, Daniela Gleizer and Hugh G. Campbell mention the following organizations: Comité Nacional Pro-Raza, Union de Comerciantes Mexicanos, Juventud Nacionalista Mexicana, Partido Cívico de la Clase Media, Partido Socialista Demócrata, Frente de Comercianes y Empleados del Distrito Federal, Liga de Defensa Mercantil, Legión Mexicana de Defensa, Liga Anti-China y Anti-Judía, Legión Mexicana Nacionalista, Frente Anticomunista, Vanguardia Nacionalista Mexicana, Centro Unificador Revolucionario Union Nacional de Veteranos de la Revolucion, Confederacion de la Clase Media.

204 Hugh G. Campbell, 83-86.

205 Gleize Salzman, Daniela… 88-89.

The exclusionary demands of Cardenas's ultranationalist oppositions delineated boundaries and provided predominant discursive currents with rhetoric against foreigners. Among these currents, indigenismo still holding sway of pre-Columbian imaginings was called upon to fortify the autochthonous roots of revolutionary nationalism. Not far from the *indigenista* undertow, *mestizaje* amplified its breadth entered legislative precesses and became the bulwark of State measures.[206] Thus, once the Immigration Law of 1930 took effect, *mestizaje* set cultural and economic requirements for foreigners attempting to make Mexico a new home. Among the requirements, it was imperative to show predisposition to assimilation and attest not to be an economic burden. This resulted in an over appreciation of some ethnic groups over others. During the height of fascism in Europe, Mexico allowed Spanish exiles as refugees and victims of the Franco's regime. German Jews and other European exiles were caught up in a conflict in which it was necessary to prove they were actual victims of fascism and not "false tourists". [207] This was the case for "twenty-one Jewish refugees" that arrived in the steamship *Orinoco* in 1938. They were not allowed to enter the country; in part, because the government did not want to set a precedent for accepting visa-holding Jewish refugees.[208] In time, the application of immigration laws and the double standard on refugee policies - declared preference towards Spanish refugees for cultural and biological affinities – limited the number of political exiles and Jewish refugees and only about 1800 entered Mexico throughout the Nazi era.[209]

For German Jews attempting to enter Mexico, and for people like Gutmann, who were already in the country; governmental indeterminacy on the refugee question meant more social

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[206] Gleizer Salzman, Daniela. "Unwelcome exiles: Mexico and the Jewish Refugees from Nazism, 1933-1945." Brill, 2015, pp.48.

207 Judit Bokser Liwerant 27.

[208] Gleize Salzman, Daniela… 115-116. In a different occasion, other Jewish refugees had been allowed in the country; however, efforts to find employment for those individuals were unsuccessful.

[209] Ibid… 24.

and political pressure to be integral, productive and not-"undesirable" subjects at the service of the nation. For Gutmann, the social animosity towards foreigners subjected him to the surveillance of the Secretaría de Gobernación and to accusations of being a Nazi spy.[210] And the legislative hurdles of immigration law resulted in a protracted naturalization process. In 1937, he submitted a naturalization petition to General Eduardo Hay, the Secretariat of Foreign Relations. The petition included a detailed exposition of professional achievements: editorial projects, publications, artistic collaborations, and assiduously underscored one single fact: "I don't live in Mexico as undesirable foreigner; but, on the contrary, I entirely dedicate myself to serving the Mexican nation in its struggle for its improvement and progress…"[211] The citizenship request reached the desk of General Hay with letters of supports from Gilberto Bosques, Director of *El Nacional;* the Secretary of Public Education, Luis Chávez Orozco, and Gustavo Ortiz Hernán, Director of Talleres Gráficos de la Nación. Despite the recommendations of such prominent state figures, Gutmann only received procedural instructions to attend Article 16 and 18 of the Citizenship and Naturalization Law.

Over a decade later, on November of 1948, another naturalization petition was submitted. This is time, Gutmann appealed directly to President Miguel Alemán, who was well aware of Gutmann's pro-governmental activities: "You known, without a doubt, of my activities during my fourteen year stay in Mexico. It is on record that I have never done anything else but serve this wonderful country... as a writer, journalist and photographer…." And he added:

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[210] Melchor, Daniel. "La historia del "espía nazi" que vivía en Coyoacán." Chilango, 30 abril, 2017, http://www.chilango.com/ciudad/historia-del-espia-nazi-en-coyoacan/. In 1942, the conservative Guadalajara-based newspaper, *El informador,* published an article claiming the Gutmann was trafficking and infiltrating anti-nazi organizations: "Se Desenmascara a un Prominente Quintacolumnista de Mexico D.F.". *El informador*, lunes 13 de abril de 1942, pp.2.

[211] Gutman, Enrique. *Letter to General Hay, Secretary of Foreign Relations*. México, Archivo Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores, VII (N), Solicitudes, 1937, Caja 174, Exp. 46.

I fervently hope that you consider the petition of a man who has no other ambition than to live for and with Mexico. I have never been an opportunist. For me, Mexico is not a "refuge", - IT IS A SECOND HOMELAND! I wish to surrender entirely, all intellectual and moral abilities, to the fight for the wellbeing and future of this country, along the great Mexican people.

The petition displayed an extensive list of achievements and included a request on behalf Gutmann's father, Paul Gutmann, an "internationally known writer" who had left the "wonders" and "horrors" of the destruction of Europe to live at the foot of the Paricutín volcano in Michoacán. This request, like the former, reached the desks of presidential and judicial dignitaries, but as far as evidence shows, Gutmann only received instructions to comply with requirements of pertinent legislation.

The fact that the two citizenship requests frame a time span of over a decade underscores the inaccessibility of having a permanent status and points to the fluctuating discourses regarding refugees from Nazi Germany. In the first case, it is clear that Gutmann disowned the markings of an "undesirable" status via the advocacy of his own cultural production achievements, which, according to him, benefitted the national quest for progress. The rejection of undesirability status highlighted that as a working artists, he posed no detrimental competition to the local artistic community. In turn, his presentation as an artist working at the service of the nation, undercut the predominant governmental and nationalist concern of the moment, which insisted on protecting the local working class from foreign economic encroachment and abuse. In the second case, at a moment when Jewish colonization projects were being contemplated as an alternative to showcase Mexico's open-door policy towards asylum seekers, the singularity of projecting a nationalist conception of Mexico – "IT IS A HOMELAND"- underlines the impossibility of a return to Germany, as it indicates the irresolute position of the Mexican government which

required staking a nationalist claim in order to be valued as desirable subject, despite fleeing Nazism.

The Rhetoric of Truth

From the 17th thru the 24th of January 1937, the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City held the Congreso de Escritores y Artistas de Mexico, an event organized by the Liga de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios (L.E.A.R). The eight-day conference drew "liberal and revolutionary" intellectuals from across the spectrum of the international left. A multinational forum, the conference was an opportunity for the L.E.A.R to define its position against pressing issues: fascism, popular culture, proletariat literature and propaganda. The organization was thus seeking to outline revolutionary objectives in order to unite "men of letters and arts" in defense of "human heritage" and against "regressive manifestations" that "perpetuate human oppression." For the committed - Marxist, socialist and/or communist - artist, the conference was an opportunity to attest an unwavering creed to the ideals of the Popular Front, for which intellectual labor was covenant with human reality and against fascism. [212]

At the conference, as the standing Secretary of Press and Propaganda for the L.E.A.R and photographer for *Frente a Frente,* the organization's official organ, Enrique Gutmann's delivered as speech that laid out the coordinates for a revolutionary photographic practice:

> El fotógrafo revolucionario no debe perseguir únicamente efectos artísticos o trucos técnicos, sino la función social de la fotografía. Si la fotografía es el arte de fijar la realidad objetiva en su manifestación más sugestiva, es preciso añadir: la manifestación más sugestiva de realidad para el fotógrafo revolucionario puede ser solamente la VERDAD

[212] Marinello, Juan. "Lo que debe ser el Congreso de Escritores y Artistas de Mexico." and "Convocatoria" *Frente a Frente,* No. 7, 1937, pp. 2.

> SOCIAL. El fotógrafo revolucionario, por lo tanto, no debe reproducir exclusivamente la realidad en sus formas bellas o feas, en sus expresiones más o menos interesantes, *sino tratar de descubrir en ellas una verdad más profunda: en el hombre, el carácter, en el acontecimiento, el motivo; en la situación, el fondo social.*[213]

A revolutionary photography, according to Gutmann, forgoes formal and technical effects, is bound to its immediate objective reality and pursues a "truth" that resides beyond material manifestation. This conception, for a photographer, who in 1937 was still employing the aesthetics of New Vision- defamiliarizing perspectives, extolment of machine vision for its objectivity and democratic potential- drew from a long-standing discourse on photography as objective document and builds on contradiction. That is, Gutmann asks for photography to be materialist and objective but also demands that photography reveal character, motives and social backgrounds, concepts that are beyond the visible field. If for Gutmann, revolutionary photography finds "Social Truth" through the medium's inherent objectivity, then, objectivity does not translate as social truth and revolutionary does not equate aesthetic novelty. In fact, photography as means to deliver "social truth" was the common notion of the early twentieth century social documentary photographer. For instance, the American Lewis W. Hine, who photographed labor conditions in the 1920s believed that either as "a painting or a photograph, the picture is a symbol that brings one immediately into close touch with reality."[214] And like Hine, who pursued social reality opposed to the formalist aesthetic of pictorialism, the Constructivist Moholy-Nagy also held that "photography should facilitate a new sensory

213 "Algunas intervenciones." *Frente a Frente,* Número Especial, 1937, pp.12-13. (*Emphasis mine)*
214 Hine, Lewis, W. "Social Photography." In *Classic Essays on Photography*. Editor, Alan Trachtenberg. Leete's Island Books, 1980, pp.111.

relationships with the world… rather than represent known" relationships.[215] Throughout the 1920s, photography was thus the medium potentially capable of pushing the boundaries of representation and a common platform for advocating the creation of new social relations. In this sense, that Gutmann would call on photography to pursue "truth" in a conference where propaganda and popular culture were embraced as tools against fascism, he merely spelled out a strategy grounded on a truth that has more to do with political rhetoric than with objective reality. His idea of social truth as was thus a tactic against fascism's own version of the truth. In the proposition to reach an "social truth" one can hear a disapproval of the Third Reich's use of "truth" as propaganda and an a motion to redeploy photographic objectivity against fascism construed rhetoric of "truth'.

Gutmann's intervention at the conference, therefore, builds on the recurring tendency of counterpoising social truth to advocate for a socially determined photographic image. In this regard, the insistence that a "revolutionary photographer" should equate objective reality to "Social Truth" reiterated both an opposition towards photography as art and the dominant position of the left: the evaluation of art as functional tool as opposed to the bourgeois idea of "art-for-art's-sake." Simultaneously, by conjuring photography's "truth" potential, Gutmann set out to counteract fascism's own version of truth from a perspective entrenched in democratic ideals. From this perspective, fascism is a false truth that manipulates social consciousness. In taking that stance, his intervention also reads as containing a twofold attempt to caution about photography's pedagogical potential. On the one hand, it was an announcement suggesting that photography could lead to the creation of a social consciousness so that actual human conditions

215 Migilow, Daniel H. *The Photography of Crisis: the photo essays of Weimar Germany*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012, pp. 18.

will remain the priority of representational techniques, as well as a priority of photographic practice. On the other, it was a warning indicating that photography could also lead to deception.

In parleying this contradictory use of photography, Gutmann's intervention concedes that photography, his photography, was at the forefront of antifascist struggle, and at the core of propaganda enterprises, where the flow of information is anchored on a disputable notion of truth. Based on this concession, it is possible to discern that Gutmann's words were concerned with photography in propaganda and with the rhetoric of truth inherent to propagandistic relays. Meaning: Gutmann grants that in information exchanges, what to some is objective; to others is propaganda: information vent on instilling predetermined ideas. Caught in this contradiction is a shared medium that follows similar logics and aesthetics, but different intentions. Thus, that Gutmann would underscore the social function of photography in a conference that embraced propaganda, as weapon against fascism, was an inevitable strategy to redeploy the dialectic of photographic "truth" as propaganda.[216] Here, it is worth noting that in 1937, it was proletariat literature that had been under dispute as to what constitutes propaganda. Therefore, Gutmann's intervention exhibits that photography had entered a debate instantiated by the emergence of the proletariat writer, the counterpart of the socially immersed photographer. In Gutmann's case, thought, the quest to reach "Social Truth" through photography as it was not a search to define a novel aesthetic trend, it was a reverberation of the predominant propagandist strategy to claim the "truth", which in 1937 at the moment of the Congreso de Escritores y Artistas de Mexico, was a mayor objective of the Departamento Autónomo de Prensa y Propaganda (DAPP).

Established in 1936, the DAPP was constituted as a "fourth power" of the legislative structure of Mexican government. In its short existence, the department functioned as an "organ for executive expression" allowing the president to have direct control of diverse media for the

[216] "Resumen del Congreso." *Frente a Frente,* Número Especial, 1937, pp.22-23.

promotion of cultural projects and the diffusion of discourses and imaginaries related to ruling regime. As a propaganda institution, the department was modeled on other European propaganda agencies and it employed many of the same propagandistic strategies at work in Europe, but in defense of Mexico and the president. Like the Third Reich's Ministry of Propaganda, the Soviet Union's propaganda machine, the DAPP drew its creative power from a plethora of avant-garde artists and was geared to "refute" existing "lies" about the country and appease the radical currents within its owns networks.[217] Unlike the European agencies, however, the DAPP deployed its means of communication against fascism and it provided an avenue for foreigners and exiles to counteract fascism while promoting a progressive and democratic idea of Mexico. Gutmann was in the midst of this propagandistic process. In 1936, the year the DAPP was established, Gutmann edited *Así es México el de hoy de mañana*, the official organ of the National Revolutionary Party and produced cultural posters using photomontage techniques. Moreover, he was in close contact with Agustin Arroyo Cházaro, the director of the DAPP, with whom Gutmann exchanged ideas on how to employ photography to illustrate the progressive reforms of Lázaro Cárdenas. [218]

Gutmann's quest for "truth" and the opposition to bourgeois art responded to the L.E.A.R's core revolutionary doctrine: an openness to collective collaboration, the intent to create an intellectual unity at the service of the working class and against the "capitalist regime" and its attending fatal sequels: "fascism, Imperialism, and War." [219] And as agreed at the Congreso de Escritores y Artistas, the L.E.A.R's intent to collaborate included supporting the Cardenas government. Although, the degree to which the L.E.A.R. supported the administration

[217] Cruz Porchini, Dafne. *Proyectos culturales y visuales en México a finales del cardenismo (1937-1940).* Dissertation, UNAM, 2014, pp. 39-46.
[218] Agustin Arroyo Cházaro, a prominent state official directed both the PIPSA and DAPP. Arroyo also organized literary enterprises and directed *El Nacional* in the 1970s.
[219] "Síntesis de los principios declaritivos de la LEAR." *Frente a Frente*, Num. 1, 1934, pp. 3.

is hard to determine; there is no doubt that the organization's intent to work at the service of the working class amplified the pedagogical rhetoric of the government: its socialist education, the moral obligation to elevate the masses in an opposition to fascism. These themes, emitted as a framework of class struggle, were taken by the organization in its function as nucleus for the rise of a proletariat culture in Mexico, a country in need of liberation unlike the Soviet Union, "the only country" where culture was at the service of humanity.[220] Gutmann's vision was no different, at least in terms of his proclivity to socialist ideals and the intention to anchor photography on the dialectical relation between proletariat and government figures. In a way, then, the promotion of the social function of photography at the conference was an attempt to advocate for direct photography, photography as document and as transcription of its inherent historical circumstance.

At a conference of leftist intellectuals, the idea of photography as transcription of reality was a distant echo of the Marxist-Leninist thesis on art's political function. For Lenin, if and when attending truth, art is a reflection of reality. As such, art was a means for creative and social liberation and a vehicle for the social immersion of the producer into the revolutionary cause of the proletariat.[221] This idea was the operating logic for the Russian avant-gardes and carried over to Germany, where in the 1920s, the photo essay blossomed.[222] Some time late, at the apogee German photobook production, the idea also manifested as repetitive and serialized documentation for illustrated works that combined documentary and formal photography techniques.[223] Similarly, in the United States, though more politically driven by Depression Era

[220] Ibid…

[221] Sánchez Vásquez, Adolfo. *Las ideas estéticas de Marx.* Era, 1974, pp.18

[222] At this point, it is not known if Gutmann produced photo essays in Germany. However, it is likely that his mode of production was influenced by the format of the photo essay. In Mexico, his work in 1930s has a strong narrative characteristics and for his work in 1940s, the photo essay was an essential format.

[223] Parr, Martin and Gerry Badger. *The Photobook: A History volume 1*. Phaidon Press, 2004, pp. 86.

free market economics than by experimentation aligned to revolutionary and socialist aesthetics, photography as social truth was at the heart of the Farm Security Administration's photographic production that grew into the documentary photobooks of the 1930s. In 1937, therefore, Gutmann's call for an objective photography was an open declaration to steer photography onto a proven causeway. In Gutmann's case, though, photography as document, attending realty and truth was closely in connection with the propaganda machine of the Lázaro Cárdenas administration, which made it a goal to employ the rhetoric of truth to refute negative perceptions of the national regimen.

Truth as rhetoric even if intended to counter an existing erroneous perception is posited on faulty ground and relays idealized notions of reality. And for the rhetoric of truth to be effective, it requires collaboration and opposition. As the next section illustrates, Gutmann's notion of truth had an ally in the American left, Joseph Freeman, editor of *New Masses,* and fascism was their common and ever standing nemesis.

Towards an Image of the Present

In February of 1937, a month after the Congreso de Escritores y Artistas de Mexico, President Lázaro Cárdenas travelled to the country's coastal region to "stimulate" infrastructural improvement and turn Acapulco into a "commercial and hygienic center" for tourism, agricultural and industrial development.[224] Joseph Freeman, editor of *The New Masses,* who was still in Mexico after the conference travelled to Acapulco with Enrique Gutmann, as photographer and interpreter. There, as journalists and active participants in the writers' conference, Freeman and Gutmann meet with the president under "the shade of mango trees". The journalists were seeking to follow Cárdenas and document first hand how the president went about conducting social "revolutionary" progress. They were also looking to get the president's

[224] Cárdenas, Lázaro. *Obras: I-Apuntes 1913/1940.* Nueva Biblioteca Mexicana, 1972, pp. 365.

sponsorship for another hemispheric intellectual conference, Congreso Continental de Intelectuales. This conference was to be held again in Mexico City in the fall of 1937, and Cárdenas, who the previous month had closely followed the Congreso de Escritores y Artistas organized by the L.E.A.R., assured the journalists that for the upcoming conference "his government would do anything within its power to make the conference a success."[225] Despite the president's support, however, the continental congress did not materialize; the reason: the L.E.A.R disbanded towards the end of 1937.

During the interview, Cardenas attended the journalists' questions and provided insight into the direction of governmental policies and promised the journalists a second interview. In turn, Freeman and Gutmann committed to publishing on the president's work. Quite possibly this second interview never occurred, but the journalists came through on their commitment.[226] From the interview in Acapulco, *New Masses* showcased "A Talk with President Cardenas", Freeman's extensive interview, and the magazine's cover was fully illustrated with a monochromatic rendering of Cardenas's portrait. For his part, Gutmann published in *Frente a Frente,* "El maestro rural de Mexico", a pseudo-psychological profile promoting Cardenas as the "ideal rural teacher". That same year also, Gutmann's publishing house, Editorial Masas, reprinted both articles in booklet format as *Lázaro Cárdenas visto por 3 hombres*.[227] Presumably, the articles intended to initiate a full understanding of the importance of the president because, according Editorial Masas, possibly Gutmann- "there was nothing or almost nothing published

[225] Freeman, Joseph. " Una conversación con el Presidente Cárdneas: (A talk with Cárdenas)." In Lazaro Cardenas visto por tres hombres. Editorial Masas, 1937, pp. 19.
[226] Evidence at the Archivo Nacional General shows Gutmann tried several times in 1938 to gain access to the president, his requests for an interview seem to have failed.
[227] The third article in the booklet is *Interpretación Marxista de Lázaro Cárdenas* by Luis Chavez Orozco.

that could serve to explain" the president's "historic function as leader of the Mexican Revolution."[228]

To explain that historical function of the president, in "A Talk with President Cardenas" Freeman presented a "sturdy", "courteous", "self-assured", yet "humble" and legislative-minded portrayal of Cardenas, who was unmistakably the "best meaning Mexican president."[229] In so doing, the interview touched upon key issues of the Cardenas's social reform program: land distribution and secular education. On the first topic, Freeman asked: "What is the basis of your land-distribution policy, Mr. President?" Coherent and in absolute accordance to political democracy theory, Cárdenas responded: "There is an agrarian code in our national law which prescribes land distribution."[230] This answer, was evident proof that as a political leader, the president's actions were congruent with legislative proceedings. The president's response thus exhibited a keen attention to the democratic implementation of constitutional law.

A subsequent question on education allowed the president to speak with awareness about the challenges to overcome and objectives the educational program sought to accomplish. According to Cárdenas, the mayor challenge was an "illiterate and individualistic" parent population, whose children needed to "learn the secrets of labor" and "a sense of the collective" in order to "meet the modern world". In his words, the educational program was to abridge persisting cultural voids separating parents and children –peasants/workers- by "transforming the individualistic parent into a socially conscious being." Education in this sense meant the production of a citizen subject, a "new peasant" brought to social life through a system of rural schools, in which the teacher stood as the mediator between parent and children by the fact of

[228] Lazaro Cardenas visto por tres hombres. Editorial Masas, 1937, pp. 3.
[229] Freeman, Joseph. "A talk with Cárdenas." New Masses, vol. xxii, no. 10, March 2, 1937, pp. 3.
[230] Ibid… 4.

being the bearer of moral, ethical, political values and technical knowledge.[231] In this vision, the teacher was an extension of the state and connection for the peasantry to the pedagogical apparatus. This was a vision that contained a materialist dialectic whereby the state and peasantry were mutually edified through the teacher's knowledge transmission. In this function, the rural teacher was the organizer of collective wills and agent of cohesion between the rural world and the urban space, the site of governmental power.

In the production of a "socially conscious being" and the edification of the rural teacher as the epitome of social progress print media played a foundational role even before the Cardenas administration. Early in 1932, for instance, the magazine *El Maestro Rural* was established as a platform of knowledge exchange between official intellectuals, ideologues in the Secretaría de Educación Pública and peasants and teachers in the rural world. The magazine operated as an educational tool that instantiated a process of incorporation of the peasantry to the lettered culture of the city.[232] In the process of linking the rural and urban, the magazine moved along a previously traced pattern established in the Cultural Missions of the 1920s. In those pedagogical enterprises, the role of the teacher was often interpreted as an apostolic, missionary and heroic endeavor. It is no surprise then that Guttmann's piece from the interview with Cárdenas in Acapulco would surmise the character of the rural teacher. And within the DAPP's quest for the "truth", Guttmann also assigned the moral values of the rural teacher to the portrait of Cardenas, so that the president would become: "El Maestro Rural de Mexico".

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[231] Palacios, Guillermo. *La pluma y el arado: los intelectuales pedagogos y la construcción sociocultural del "problema campesino" en México, 1932-1934*. Colegio de México, 1999, pp. 37, 48-51.

[232] Guillermo Palacios notes that Cárdenas in 1936 redirected the magazine's focus exclusively to rural teachers, see: pp. 16-17.

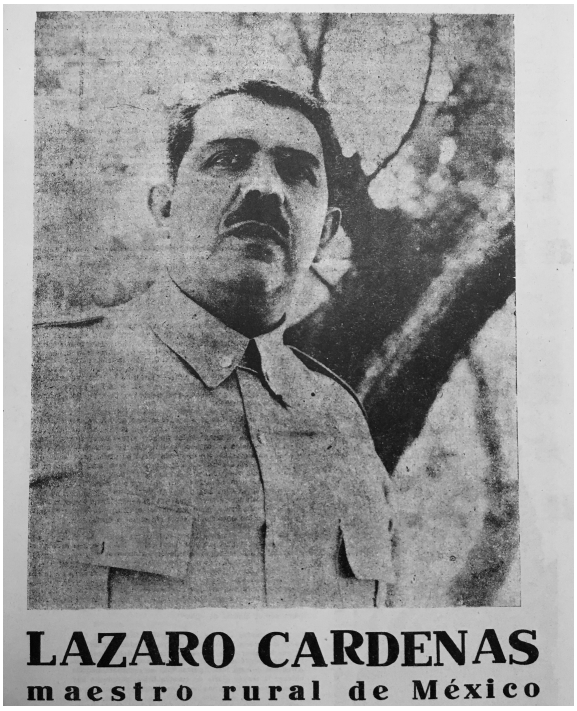

Figure 6: Enrique Gutmann's Portrait of President Lázaro Cárdenas. The protrait presents the president as "Mexico's rural teacher".

From Gutmann's perspective, evident in the portrait that accompanies "El Maestro Rural de México," Cárdenas was an outstanding leader. In the portrait, the president rises above eyelevel, sternly looking into an undefined horizon far beyond the photographer's point of view. The presidential gaze is thus more far-reaching and transcendental than the objective view of the photographic camera that captures his image but does not fully contain the president's vision. What the president sees is unavailable but it is certain his vision contains the attending viewer of the photography. In the image, the crisp ridges of the president's military uniform constellate into an arrangement of embossed angles protruding the uniform's seams and create a hierarchical structuring for the viewer to glance at the president as if instantiating a dialectic political correspondence between ruler and ruled. Viewers looking at the photograph would engage the dialectic from the lower left corner of picture's frame. And through the acute triangle of his right-side pocket's seams ascend towards the president's face. The president's left shoulder

intercepting a left-leaning tree trunk would produce a visual alliteration and carry a symbolic charge that in connection to the president's posture confirms and naturalizes his political predisposition to leftist policies. Above the intersection of shoulder and tree trunk, the president's all-stern and pensive countenance acquires an inherent rationality firmly anchored on the political and moral ideals of his leftist orientation. His left shoulder thus becomes a solid base for a visionary mind and gaze focused on the development of a project in the distant horizon.

At play in Gutmann's image of Cárdenas as "maestro rural" is a redeployment of New Vision aesthetics- low angle and slating lines of perspective- that cut against a harmonious arrangement of pictorialist composition, and purport to be an objective representation thereby investing the presidential figure with symbolic and transcendental human values. Thus that Cárdenas is shown as a subject of absolute authority is the result of a twofold enterprise: the projection of the heroic and messianic attributes of the rural teacher via avant-garde aesthetics conjoined with a propagandistic intent that assigns monumentalizing pictorial values for the projection of a singular and ultrahuman character.

Evidently, by employing New Vision aesthetic as propaganda exalts the president's common characteristics and creates a role model for popular values. In this case, the strategy was to correlate the attributes of the rural teacher to the presidential figure because, according to Guttmann, the popular conception of the rural teacher as a moral leader was embodied in no other that the president himself. Interestingly, in "El Maestro Rural de Mexico," Gutmann critiques other representations of the president because they are "in many occasions" crafted from a "subjective perspective" and are therefore "images created" by impulse.[233] If those other images of Cárdenas were "subjective" then by implication "El Maestro Rural de Mexico" was

[233] Guttman, Enrique. "El Maestro Rural de México." *Lazaro Cardenas visto por tres hombres*. Editorial Masas, 1937, pp. 12

objective. Here, then one can sense what Gutmann meant when he conjured photography's objectivity and social function at the Congreso de Escritores y Artistas de Mexico. For Gutmann, it seems, the social function of revolutionary photography consisted of relating that which resides beyond material reality: morality. While speaking against photography as art and seeking to dismantle fascism, Gutmann's intervention alluded to the possibility of employing photography beyond its material dimension. When he stated that the "revolutionary photographer" should "aim to discover a deeper truth in aesthetic forms: in man, character; in the event, the motive; and in the situation, the social background", there lays a move away from objectivity itself. In essence, he called for a redeployment of objectivity as effect, and for photography as a means to construct as "deeper truth" against fascism. This move implied steering away from a strict materialist logic and upending the working dialectic between artist and proletariat, yet it was essential for 1930s propaganda to be effective against its fascism.

That Cardenas was important in 1937 is hardly questionable, yet the appreciation of his work required a specific perspective and political inclination. For intellectuals, like Gutmann and Freeman, who viewed the president's work from a socialist position, Cardenas was of outmost importance in the fight against fascism. At least for Freeman, the president was a bastion for the promises of a socialist nation. To this regard, at the closing ceremony of the Congreso de Escritores y Artistas, Freeman delivered *Construcción de un Mundo Socialista*, a speech that underscored the importance of the Secretaría de Educación Pública for the realization of a socialist union. Mexico, according to Freeman, was unlike the United States, where the lack of a revolutionary tradition impeded a congress of liberal and revolutionary intellectuals to be held in a government building: El Palacio de Bellas Artes. Because of the country's revolutionary tradition, Freeman continued, Mexican artists were "fortunate" to participate in pedagogical

projects that facilitated a direct connection to the people, despite the inconvenience of being economically dependent on the state:

> "Muchos de vuestros escritores, pintores, músicos, economistas… trabajan en la Secretaria de Educación… esto tiene el inconveniente de hacer que el escritor dependa del Gobierno y, con tal motivo, poco tiempo le queda para escribir. En cambio tiene la gran ventaja de defender al escritor del aislamiento con la vida y la obra cotidiana del trabajador. En tales circunstancias es menor el peligro de que desaparezca sus sentimientos revolucionarios en frases tan vacías como gloriosas… Encontramos en ello un nexo vivo entre la lucha armada por la libertad, la literatura revolucionaria del pueblo y la cultura general de la Republica."[234]

To view governmental tutelage as advantageous to safeguard "revolutionary sentiments" comprised a mayor deviation from the aesthetic tenets of Marxist-socialist logic, and that was a view that at least one of Freeman's comrades at the conference did not sponsor. The American writer, Waldo Frank, who also a friend of Cárdenas, raised a flag against conflating revolutionary responsibilities and misunderstanding Marxist theory on art in the revolution. For Waldo Frank, if art was produced in an "organic" dialectical relation between artist and proletariat, art was a means to achieve social liberty and was thus revolutionary; yet:

> Desgraciadamente, hay signos de esta distorsión dialéctica del trabajo del artista, en el mundo actual; una tendencia a reducir la tarea del artista revolucionario simplemente a su participación… hacerlo dependiente de la visión necesariamente restringida de la política, en lugar de exaltarlo a una matriz y una orientación.[235]

[234] Freeman, Joseph. "Construcción de un Mundo Socialista." *Frente a Frente,* Núm. Especial, 1937, pp. 20.
[235] Frank, Waldo. "Por un mundo de conciencia humana." *Frente a Frente*, Número Especial, 1937, pp. 4-5.

By warning against the distortion of Marxist theory, Waldo Frank did not specific that the distortion was an issue in Mexico. However, he had been speaking against the implementation of Socialist Realism since 1935 when he spoke at the International Writers' Congress of Paris and noted that art should not be bound to the political needs of party.[236] This position was evidently in contrast to the conception of art that Stalinist intellectuals promoted and that many intellectuals at the Congreso de Escritores y Artistas upheld, including Gutmann and Freeman.

Hence, in contrast to Waldo Frank contention, Freeman's evaluation of government sponsorship seems to suggest that Marxist theory was indeed upended and gratuitously sponsored as a means to take a stand against fascism, and by extension in defense of Cardenas. Here, one can only speculate as to how Freeman was convinced about the potential of Mexico becoming a socialist nation. Perhaps it was his own idealism, his dissolution with American industrialization that led him to appreciate Mexico as a socialist promise. Or perhaps, it is was Freeman's external position as foreign observer and thus a subject to Cardenas' propaganda, and to Gutmann's own participation. However that might be, there is little doubt that from the experience of the Congreso de Escritores y Artistas and from the interview in Acapulco with the president, Freeman found Cárdenas to be the "best meaning" political leader of a country in route to be a socialist nation through the effective implementations of artistic labor in socialist education. This conviction prompted Freeman to take an interest in Mexican political developments and to more collaboration with Gutmann in the defense of Cárdenas.

[236] Aznar Soler, Manuel. I congreso internacional de escritores para la defense de la cultura (paris, 1935). Vol. 1, Generalitat Valenciana, 1987.

Against the "Invented" Image

In 1938, as Cardenas moved to nationalize the oil industry, the "independent" Mexican press was alarmed and took a stand against Cardenas' communism. The revolutionary journalists at the base of Vicente Toledano's C.T.M. -and *Futuro* - quickly interpreted the move of the "independent" press as a reactionary tactic, a guise to conceal the "autochthonous fascists" working to divide the president's political party, the Partido Revolucionario Mexicano.[237] North of the Rio Bravo, sections of the conservative American press began portraying Cardenas as an "anarchist" and the nationalization project as an anti-liberal and anti-capitalist attack on foreign investments. From the left, Joseph Freeman, moved *New Masses* onto the task of "educating the American people" on the "oil legalization" by presenting "Mexico's story truly and usefully."[238] In this sense, "truly" meant an accurate portrayal given Freeman did not consider that the conservative press was be impartial. From his point of view, "truly" was a version of event congruent with the principles of left-leaning politics, from which the oil nationalization was a progressive move and reaction against U.S. imperialism. To that end, the magazine focused closely on Cardenas and ran several articles on Mexico's political situation. The articles covered the economic and political influence of foreign powers on Mexican fascists forces inclined to forestall social progress. Early in March, an article informed the American people of possible fascist strongholds in Mexico and stressed that while the country was "one of the few surviving Latin-American democracies…" Germany and American reactionaries were buffing up a possible "Mexican Franco".[239] For Freeman, presumably, the rise of another caudillo signaled a looming possibility: the disruption of workers' alliance with the Cardenas regime.

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[237] "Nueva Maniobra de la Reación." *Futuro,* Núm. 30, Agosto de 1938, pp. 5.

[238] Freeman Joseph. *Letters to Enrique Gutman*. June 6, 1938 and June 27, 1938. Joseph Freeman Collection, Box 25, Folder 20, Hoover Institute Archive.

[239] Frank, Mark. "Fascist Threats in Mexico." *The New Masses*, 8 Mar. 1938, pp. 8-9.

To further explain the possible emergence of another Mexican fascist caudillo, in June, at Freeman's request to "present Mexico's story truly", Gutmann, submitted *Oil, Swastika, Cedillo: Democratic Mexico Prepares Her Defense.* This piece, according to Freeman, was a "splendid article on the Mexican situation."[240] As suggested by its title, the article offered an overview of the Mexican situation from a Marxist and anti-fascist perspective. Accordingly, the oil in question was conceived as political matter through which Mexican reactionaries were drawing "Italian Fascism and German National Socialism" to interfere Mexico's struggle against "foreign imperialism". The article explains that reactionaries in Mexico were determined to obstruct the revolution, which became dangerous only "when it was given a goal and a direction" by Cardenas' Six-Year Plan. This defined and systematic program was presented as part of Mexico's "historical course" and its "tremendous process of recasting its economic, social, and political foundations". In opposition to this historical course, the article insists, reactionaries, for whom the revolution was politically and economically detrimental, had aligned with the "fascist international" to pick "a tool against the progress of the Mexican people"; that tool was Gen. Saturnino Cedillo, who had been organizing a military campaign against Cárdenas.

According to Hugh G. Campbell, Cedillo was the "last regional caudillo" in Mexico but his rebellion against Cardenas, although sponsored by secular radicals: fascists, Nazis and American oil barons, only lasted a few weeks before it was defeated in great part by the coalitions supporting the oil nationalization project.[241] Yet, seen from Gutmann's pro-Cardenas perspective, General Cedillo was presented as "an experienced old soldier, but at the same time a provincial satrap, a feudal ruler in the style of the Middle Ages," a defender of the church and "persecutor" of socialists. In retrospect, it is quite possible that Cedillo's representation as an

[240] Freeman Joseph. *Letter to Enrique Gutmann*. June 27, 1938. Joseph Freeman Collection, Box 25, Folder 20, Hoover Institute Archive.
[241] Campbell, Hugh G.… 61, 77-78.

atemporal ruler was guided by a twofold propagandist intention. On the one hand, as feudalist ruler, his image embodied the potential host for fascism to take root in Mexican soil. On the other, as the antithesis of modern democracy, Cedillo's image legitimized the projection of Cardenas as progressive ruler. Thus, Cedillo as the feudalist and Cardenas as democratic leader bespeaks the underlying opposition sustaining Gutmann's article and in great measure synthetizes the predominant view of the left for whom Cedillo was the bearer of the reactionary intentions seeking to "mislead the popular masses" and deliver the country's wealth to imperialism.[242]

In its ample objective, *Oil, Swastika, Cedillo* was bearing the pedagogical imprint of a journalistic contention at play in Mexico, where "revolutionary" journalists riposted the attacks of the "independent" press by insisting on the constitutionality of the oil nationalization process. This contention drew energy from the guarantees of the free press and sustained itself not only on a voiced concern for the people but on the omnipresent fear of fascism. For their part, "Independent" journalists critiqued social and agrarian reforms as threats to free economic progress, and their most effective device to stake a claim in favor of foreign interests was the correlation of fascism-communism to Cardenas' agrarianism. Similarly, as fascism was conjured up to critique the government, revolutionary writers alluded to fascism as a means to identify the "true" intentions of the critics. In all, the contention was a dispute over media space and access to the popular sectors; workers and peasants that remained fertile and lucrative ground for a press that when guided by economic interests and conservative motives viewed Cardenas as a socialist threat; and when guided by revolutionary ideals, projected the president as a bastion of liberal democracy. This was the case with Gutmann and his *Oil, Swastika, Cedillo: Democratic Mexico*

[242] "El Frente Antipopular y Antimexicano." Editorial, *Futuro,* No. 29, Octobre de 1937, pp. 3.

Prepares Her Defense, which was a response to Joseph Freeman, and a concession to a mutual insistence on rebutting representations of Cardenas in the American press.[243]

In the United States, one salient critic of Cardenas was Frank L. Kluckhohn, the New York Times correspondent whose continuous "reporting on the woes of foreign businessmen" lead to his expulsion from the country by Mexican authorities.[244] After his expulsion, Kluckhohn continued to write about Mexico lamenting the lack of strong U.S. intervention and accusing the American government of failing to contain Cardenas, who was leading Mexico into the economic web of fascist nations.[245] At some point, Kluckhohn accused the Mexican government of failing to act on a series of anti-Jewish attacks that the Mexican press was publishing. [246] His most enduring assessment on Mexico is *The Mexican Challenge (1939)*, a book that condensed a presentation of the progressive nationalist reform in Mexico as detrimental to the Good Neighbor Policy; the policy with which the United States was seeking "to unite the New World in a stand against European and Asiatic penetration."[247]

From Kluckhohn's point of view, with the rise of Cardenas, relations between Mexico and the U.S. were infused with a "high degree" of "blind nationalism" promoted by the "official caste" that had "control of the organs of propaganda, the educational system and the public platforms." In terms economic trade, the fact that there was an intense "nationalist spirit"

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[243] Some of Cardenas's critics in the American Press were: Raymond Moley, director of *Newsweek*; George Creel, who wrote for *Collier's* magazine; Nicholas Roosevelt, correspondent of New York Herald Tribune and H.R. Knickerbocker, correspondent of the *International New Service.* See: Prendergast, L.O. "La Prensa Norteamerica Contra México." Futuro, Núm. 30, Agosto de 1938, pp. 24. Gónzalez Marín, Silvia. *Prensa y poder politico: la elección presidencial de 1940 en la prensa Mexicana*. Siglo veintiuno editores, 2006, pp. 155-156.

244 Proyect, Louise. [PEN-L] Frank L. Kluckhohn follow-up. The Mail Archive. https://www.mail-archive.com/pen-l@sus.csuchico.edu/msg23812.html. Accessed 29, September 2017.

[245] Prendergast, L.O. "La Prensa Norteamerican Contra México." Futuro, Núm. 30, Agosto de 1938, pp. 24.

246 Anti-Jewish Attacks Continue in Mexican Press; Regime Fails to Act. Jewish Telegraphic Agency, January 19, 1939, https://www.jta.org/1939/01/19/archive/anti-jewish-attacks-continue-in-mexican-press-regime-fails-to-act. Accessed 29, September 2017.

[247] Kluckhohn, Frank L. *The Mexican Challenge.* Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1939, pp. 1. The book was certainly reviewed by Mexican authorities. Among Lázaro Cardenas documents at the General National Archive, there are several copies of The Mexican Challenge.

promoting a "reconquest of Mexico for the Mexicans" had given way to unfair trade policies that imposed "high tariffs" on American products and favored the imports of "Fascist nations". His solution to the "unfair" economic trade was a suspension of Mexican imports so as to pressure the Mexican government to respect American interests. Given this insistence on defending American policy, it is quite possible that the accusation on the Mexican government about condoning anti-Semitism on the press was congruent with the idea that the government "controlled" the press and public opinion. This control was, according to Kluckhohn, leading the public to misperceive Americans' "sincere desire to act on a basis of friendship and equality." [248]

By underlining the unidirectional relation between public opinion, press and government, Kluckhohn projected the image of a centralizing state in control of the political arena and Mexican economic policies as mere attacks on American interests. Interestingly, even as he noted that there was a lack of independent media outlets, which made it difficult to judge whether policies responded to public demands or simply attended the interests of the ruling elite, Klukhohn concluded that the slogan "Mexico for Mexicans" was an overarching official attitude. This slogan was in vogue during the early years of the Cardenas administration, but it was the banner of the radical and extreme right; a political faction more aligned to the Mexican "independent" press. In a way, then, the accusation of Cardenas as a fascist government suggests a circularity between the American conservative press and the voices of the "independent" journalists in Mexico. It not only speaks of the common fear of fascism, but of fascism as trope to discredit Cárdenas and promote American intervention.

The disapproving assessment on Mexico's socialist-driven programs, and the fact that in Kluckhohn's perspective, Cardenas was an "Indian leader" did not resonate well in the American left. Thus, in 1938, just about the time of Kluckhohn's most intense criticism in the American

[248] Ibid… 20- 24 , 32.

press, and leading up to the publication of *Oil, Swastika, Cedillo*, Joseph Freeman informed Gutmann that:

> the New York Times [was] running a disgraceful series in which [Kluckhohn] accuses your government of every conceivable crime and blunder; he claims that the oil workers themselves are AGAINST the recent oil legislation; and now he even claims that the trade unions are conducting an anti-semitic campaign a la Goebbels.[249]

Gutmann did not take this notice lightly and set out to draft "extensive articles for international publications." To do that, he urgently requested an interview with Cardenas throughout the early months of 1938. On one of many petitions to the president, Gutmann poignantly noted that the interview was "to counteract the sensational reportages circulating in the United States about the events in San Luis Potosi."[250] This was not the first time that Gutmann felt the "obligation as German anti-fascist living in Mexico" to refute "disdainful" portrayals of the country. In one occasion, he drafted *Mexico visto por un Nazi*, an extensive article in response to Colin Ross's *Los Balcanes de América.* According to Gutmann, Ross was employing the term "balcanes" in reference to Mexico and was thus tapping into a deeply-seated derogatory German feelings. The concern was that by associating balcanes and Mexico, any common folk in Germany would think of "inferiority" "disorder, filth, laziness, civil immorality or corruption in state affairs." Contrary to that perception, for Gutmann, Mexico signified a people invested in a "struggle for progress, internal and external liberty". [251]

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[249] Freeman Joseph. *Letter to Enrique Gutmann*. June 27, 1938. Joseph Freeman Collection, Box 25, Folder 20, Hoover Institute Archive.

[250] Gutmann, Enrique. *Letter to General Lazaro Cardenas.* Mexico, Secretaría de Gobernación, AGN, Galeria 4, Fondo: Lazaro Cárdenas del Río, Caja 1291,Clasificación: 704/128.

[251] ---. *México visto por un Nazi.* . Mexico, Secretaría de Gobernación, AGN, Galeria 4, Fondo: Lazaro Cárdenas del Río, Caja 1291,Clasificación: 704/128.

Certainly, there was reason to report and be alarmed about anti-Semitism in Mexico, particularly, in March when the oil industry was nationalized, and throughout the weeks of Cedillo's rebellion. For instance, at the demise of Cedillo, his main supporters, members of the Acción Revolucionaria Mexicana unleashed their propaganda machine and inundated Mexico's northern border with anti-Semitic and pro-Hitler flyers.[252] This was one of the last instances in which secular radicalism exhibited its xenophobic and ultranationalist tendencies. However, it is difficult to access the extent to which anti-Semitic propaganda signaled any real threat on Jewish population in Mexico even though in the northern region there were Third Reich sympathizers, among them many industrialists and well-established families that eventually were subjected to policing and imprisoned at the height of the hysteria resulting from Nazi infiltration in Mexico. But the fact that many of those families were not convicted of any real anti-Semitic crimes, and some lost family assets through government confiscations, raises questions on the concrete possibilities of fascism taking hold on national territory.

If taken with certain caution, Kluckhohn's claim points to a political currency: anti-Semitism and fascism as the rhetorical devices used to misinform American readers and discredit Cardenas socialist progressive reforms. And if one is to take Gutmann and Freeman earnestly, it should also be noted that their concern was a common sentiment of the left: the fear that fascism through its "anti-semitic" policies would stall socialist progress in Mexico. In all, what is evident here is an incessant antagonism between liberal conservative and leftist progressive journalists, who viewed Cardenas as the bearer or adversary of their own political agendas. Not surprisingly, then, since the antagonism played into print media, where it did inform a right-wing critique; the left counteracted by providing a rebuttal. The significance of such antagonism is twofold. On the one hand, it shows a conviction shared by anti-fascist intellectuals like Freeman and Gutmann,

[252] Campbell, Hugh G… 77.

who were convinced that "a defeat brought about by fascism in Mexico [was] a continental, indeed a worldly, defeat" [253] That conviction lead to collaborative projects and an opposition to predominant discrediting narratives on Cardenas. On the other, it illustrates that in the contention between independent and revolutionary journalists, the latter had lasting resource: the rhetoric of truth, to disclaim accusations of being fascist. And as evidenced in *Oil, Swastika, Cedillo,* in the interest of presenting an objective and "truly" image of the Mexican political scene, Cardenas' social progress was exalted as much as it was framed within the struggle against fascism.

Convinced, then, that Mexico was pivotal terrain to defeat fascism, Freeman and Gutmann envisioned a popular book project that would serve to educate the American public on the importance the country played in the struggle against fascism. According to Freeman, the book was to be presented as a "Journey Through Mexico with Cardanas - - thus dramatizing and humanizing the economic and social problems involved." The book contract was secured for a publication run of 30, 000 copies and Gutmann was to provide photographs and text.[254] As imagined, the book's literary and visual content was to come from the events related to Cardenas' tour in Northern Mexico; specifically, the military events in the state of San Luis Potosí, where both Freeman and Gutmann were to accompany the president as he set out to appease Cedillo's regional base. In the end, only Gutmann went to San Luis Potosí to cover the swift skirmishes between government forces and the rebels, and it is thus uncertain whether the book project materialized. Had the book been published, its publication would have added a second collaborative photobook project to the list of books promoting the Cárdenas regime abroad. Gutmann's first contribution was *Despertar Lagunero* (1937), which still remains as one

[253] Gutmann, Enrique. *Letter to Joseph Freeman.* July 3, 1938. Joseph Freeman Colletion, Box 25, Folder 20, Hoover Institute Archive.
[254] Freeman Joseph. *Letter to Enrique Gutmann*. June 27, 1938. Joseph Freeman Collection, Box 25, Folder 20, Hoover Institute Archive.

of earliest photobooks in Latin America directly engaged in official propaganda.[255] From the coverage of the events in San Luis Potosí, Gutmann produced images that circulated widely and from these, it is possible to imagine the aesthetic and ideological constitution of the book project Freeman foresaw to counteract mainstream conservative representations of the Cardenas administration.

Figure 7: Enrique Gutmann's article, "Mexican Rebels Wreck Trains and Make Trouble" published in LIFE magazine.

One example of Gutmann's coverage of the Cardenas-Cedillo skirmish is a two-piece reportage titled "Mexican Rebels Wreck Trains and Make Trouble" published in the June issue of *LIFE* magazine.[256] The reportage, a four-page spread, presented ten images and a few lines of text summarizing for the American audience how a group of "Mexican rebels" had wrecked several trains, disrupted social harmony and fled hiding into the hills. The rebels, therefore, are nowhere present in the scope of the piece; instead, figures of the troops, civilians, and allied peasants swarm the sites of the events and occupy most of visual field of the images. Despite, the

[255] *Despertar lagunero* is a chronicle on the expropriation and the establishment of an ejido in northern Mexico. The book was used as public relations material to illustrate the agrarian reform progress promoted by President Cárdenas. See: Kiddle, Amelia M. México's Relations with Latin America During the Cárdenas Era. University of New Mexico Press, 2016, pp. 142.

presumed chaos of the military confrontation, and in the aftermath of events, the images follow a narrative of historical progression, which provides a sense of sociopolitical order.

Hence, in the image layout, uniformed men and affected civilians congregate around interrelated episodes: the search for the rebels, the clean up of the train wrecks and the funeral of the fallen workers, all in which authority and order is posited on the figure of the military general. For instance, in the first two pages, the cavalry formation suggesting a pursuit of the rebels, the images of military men ready for battle, and affected civilians, all gravitate around a small profile of the commanding general, Genovevo Rivas Guillén, who, "bombed the airfield and gasoline depots for the rebel fleet of half dozen planes," according to the textual narrative.

Figure 8: Third page of Enrique Gutmann's article, "Mexican Rebels Wreck Trains and Make Trouble".

Likewise, the relation between the images illustrating the aftermath of the train wrecks and the funeral of the fallen workers is arranged so that civilians and military men are hinged upon an unitary image: President Cárdenas, who stands above on the balcony of a governmental palace. In the layout, the president is viewed from street-level delivering a "funeral oration" to the attending crowd, not visible yet brought to presence via the photographer's socially immersed

[256] Gutmann, Enrique. "Mexican Rebels Wreck Trains and Make Trouble." *LIFE*, Vol. 4, 24, June 13 1938, pp. 14-17.

point of view, which in turn provides a crowd's perspective for the magazine's reader. The president is thus presented as a condensing figure of authority by arranging the lines of perspective in constricting, angular and circular interconnections directed at an abridging visual point: the site in which state authority resides. As a set, the images direct the gaze of the military figures towards a single source of command. And by enclosing the visual narrative within two enlarged images that underscore the participation of the peasantry, the president's authority is further reaffirmed, and by implication the military power of the invisible rebel army is diminished.

While it is difficult to ascertain to what extent Gutmann influenced the photographic layout for the article, it is nonetheless clear that the images collectively abide an internal aesthetic logic. Consistently, the images are crafted using the aesthetic of New Vision: low camera angles, bird's-eye views and the decenter perspectives, which are fundamental techniques of an anti-picturesque aesthetic that seeks to counteract conventional pictorial principles. Mostly notably, the use of low camera angles conveys the intent to redirect the standing monocular viewpoint as to analogize the ground perspective of a marginalized visualizing subject. Or better yet, the low camera angle proposes a view of the events from a basic structural and proletariat perspective. Those techniques are also characteristic of a propagandistic aesthetic that relies on elongation and angling of vectors to constrict and expand scalar proportions that when applied to human figures accentuate physical strength and political power. The tendency to emphasize human and political strength is certainly explicit in the image at the top-right side of the second page.

In the image, a military figure is made to stand high above ground and parallel to the industrial crane that is being employed to reposition the derailed train wagons in the background.

Man and machine are thus equated as conductors of a reconstruction process that conjoins strength and reason, politics and technology to impulse forth an episode, a minute instance of a more complex historical episode. In the episode of historical progression, human and mechanical labor are the hinging force propelling the infrastructural restitution of the train system and by allegorical extension, the movement towards a cohesive social order.

Figure 9: Peasants surrounding aircraft as pictured in Enrique Gutmann's "Mexican Rebels Wreck Trains and Make Trouble".

The equation of human and mechanical labor is most explicit in the representation of the peasantry. For instance, the opening photograph that portrays a farming field with a captured Howard DGA-11 shows a “federal pilot” cranking up the plane’s propeller while peasants move up underneath and behind the aircraft to thrust the plane into flight and off the plowed soil. Figuratively, the farming field is suggested to have been a battlefield, and in the image peasants become solid figures as they enter the visible frame at its lower right angle. As a rhythmic and diagonal line of zigzagging silhouettes, peasants in shadow formation move into arable terrain; then, veer to the left at the intersection of the striding walking frame of a peasant, who, moving below the aircraft’s wing and towards the rear of the aircraft, appears inclined to meet complementary allies walking up into the collaborative effort to unground the airplane thus

freeing the field for agricultural production. Synchronized, silhouettes, men, and machine are interconnected in alternating lineal segments that traverse the frame and obliquely interrupt the emergence of a dividing horizon. There is no planar split; and thus, the horizon recedes invisibly as figures in abstract and concrete form adhere to a logic that traces progression and casts shadows where human labor originates as the basic source of technological achievement.

Technology as the pinnacle of collective endeavor is shown as the direct result of a coalition, a type workforce organization binding peasantry to machinery as compatible components. For instance, as the peasants move in to provide force for the airplane's take off, their presence constitutes a class pushing forth towards the inactive combustion engine of the aircraft. And just as peasants engage the aircraft and provide support for the inactive machine, the photographer activates the camera. The actions align and what is captured in the image is a synchronized process in which peasant and photographer engage technology and activate a materialist dialectic constituting social organization and visual representation. Analogically, the image figures the sequential process in which human labor precedes mechanical power. The materialist relation of peasant and photographer to machine is thus sustained on a labor principle and produces a linearity of progress hinging peasantry to technological invention and by extension photographer's vision to photographic representation. The photograph becomes the standing bearer of a fluid connection between men and machine.

Figure 10: Peasant carrying sewing machine.

The material connection, the binding of peasant to machinery is even more explicit in the last image in which a "peasant, whose only asset is a Singer sewing machine, deserts with it to the Government side." This image, much more individualized, condenses not only the physical contact of peasant to technological apparatus, but brings forth a political and economic link, only subtly visible in the image of the airplane. Where as in the aircraft's photograph, peasants lend labor and power; in this image, the peasant carrying the machine presents that material connection as proprietary relation. Clearly suggesting a de-alienated condition of the peasantry, the Singer machine, despite being the only asset, projects economic potential and reestablishes a material and symbolic link. In other words, the images comprise a political view that judges the rural economy as connected and compatible with modern technological progress as well as with the requirements of liberal political organization. Such presentation of the rural world, cuts against Kluckhohn's view that "Mexicans, excellent at hand craftsmanship, are imitative and not

productive in relation to machine-age developments…"[257] Furthermore, in relation to technological engagement, the images purport the government as the conductor of the laboring interaction exercised by peasantry and machine. In the image of the plane, it is a "federal pilot" who is shown "cranking up the propeller"; his proximity to the matrix of power is such that the pilot comes to stand in as a projection of the federal government. Likewise, as the peasant strolls along arid and bristle terrain sustaining the pounding mass of the sewing machine, his somatic position: arching back, bowed head and angled right knee synch and point to the presence of the federal government. By implication, therefore, a recurring leitmotif presents a free-will peasant conducting laboring energy towards an omnipresent government.

While the projection of a symbiotic relation between peasantry and government references an intricate aspect of the historical moment and alludes to the support Cardenas' policies received, it is also quite obvious that Guttmann's propagandistic techniques are at play in the construction of the images. Notably, the government is projected as the sole arbiter and articulator of political demands. It is as if in the quest to counteract fascism, there was no foreseeable totalitarian danger in government authority as along as peasantry was supporting stock. As the participation of peasants and government official coalesce, it is worth noting that the images reproduce a participatory exercise in which government and people constitute one and other. The images are thus inherently tied to a process of mutual correspondence. Here, then, it is possible to note an inclination towards one of Socialist Realism's principles; namely, the concept of *people-ness* by which art should be invariably tied to the enactment and promotion of social events leading to the formation of socialist society. Aligned to this principle, and despite possible editorial vetting, Gutmann's reportage managed to conveyed not only news worthy content, but a sense of liberal democratic resiliency; the order and progress of a government

[257] Kluckhohn, Frank L. *The Mexican Challenge.* Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1939, pp. 27.

supported by its own electoral base. In retrospect, it is possible that this sense of democratic resiliency was highly construed or at best an idealized projection of socialist yearnings; certainly too, it was the means by which pro-Cardenas propaganda reached an American audience and through print media.

That "Mexican Rebels Wreck Trains and Make Trouble" appears propagandistic derives from Gutmann's experience as Secretary of Press and Propaganda for *Frente a Frente,* and quite possibly from his incursion into the rhetoric of truth of the DAPP. This incursion allowed him to cover the aftermath of the Cedillo rebellion as "foreign journalist" with a direct invitation from Cárdenas. Or, at least, that is how Gutmann attempted to draw Joseph Freeman to Mexico for a second time to begin working on the book project. As already mentioned, the book project quiet possibly fell through, but the idea was to meet the president, gather information as press attachés in the presidential caravan traveling throughout northern Mexico.[258] This meeting would have been a follow up interview and the realization of a mutual promises made early in 1937 when Freeman and Gutmann interviewed Cárdenas in Acapulco. From the collaborative work both journalists sought to create, it is possible to suggest that as foreign correspondents, like Colin Ross and Frank L. Kluckhohn, profiled Mexico as ungovernable and President Cardenas as a anti-capitalist "dictator, who tries to be a beneficent one" and who went about legitimizing oil expropriation by having "laws made to permit seizures", Freeman and Gutmann committed to construct a counteracting portrait of the president. [259] This image would present Cárdenas as rational and moral leader thus undercutting Kluchhohn's contention that that the president-

[258] Gutmann, Enrique. *Letter to Joseph Freeman.* July 3, 1938. Joseph Freeman Colletion, Box 25, Folder 20, Hoover Institute Archive.

[259] Kluckhohn writes that Cardenas "dominated the courts as Mexican executives always have" and "deliberately selected the most unpopular foreign control industry" to benefit from the negative effect on public opinion caused by the Teapot Dome scandal, which revealed that oil companies had bribed American officials. The suggestion that Cardenas was as dictator is explicitly made on page 140; see: Kluckhohn, Frank L. *The Mexican Challenge*. Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1939, pp. 96-97, 140.

sponsored education program was "educating children along propagandistic lines" if not constructing "the basework for real "Socialist" education later along lines closer to Marxism."[260]

In the contestation between independent and revolutionary journalists, it seems that the latter had good reason to suspect that critics of social progress were paradoxically intent on being pro-nationalist and imperialist, yet claimed to be concerned with popular interests. In turn, pursuing social progress and agrarian reform, revolutionary journalists held onto the principles of "truly" representations as means to educate the public and counteract fascism. In the midst of it all, their projects coincided in edifying an authoritarian leader, but diverged in terms of understanding authoritarianism. Where as the "independent" journalist looked at Cárdenas as undemocratic; the revolutionary journalist saw a moral leader. This difference speaks of the demands of fascism on the ideological tendencies of revolutionary intellectuals. Against the fear of fascism in Europe, and the possibility of losing ground to reactionary forces in Mexico, intellectuals on the left posited in Cárdenas the promise of popular and social movement. In support of an individual leader, political creeds converged with morality and obfuscated the distortion of the materialist dialectic that proposed a mutual liberation of artist and proletariat. In its place, the figure of the state emerged as the condenser and unifier of the people and the artist; that was the case for Gutmann as his work inclined to portray Cardenas as the all standing figure of authority.

Searching for the Proletariat Novel

The Congreso de Escritores y Artistas de Mexico was a pivotal moment for the L.E.A.R and for its literature. For the organization, the congress marked a "third historical phase", a new

[260] Kluckhohn, Frank L. *The Mexican Challenge.* Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1939, pp. 161-162. The book was certainly reviewed by Mexican authorities. Among Lázaro Cardenas documents at the General National Archive, there are several copies of The Mexican Challenge which suggest that the book was extensively reviewed by government official prior to Kluckhohn's expulsion for Mexico.

epoch for its membership to attest a "deep sense of responsibility" and "commitment" towards intellectual production in support of popular and progressive governments. [261] For the L.E.A.R's literature, its "revolutionary literature", the conference was also a watershed moment that defined a framework for literary production. Among the many resolutions reached at the conference's end, it was decreed that literature should track a tripartite causeway: progressive, anti-imperialist and classist. Accordingly, a progressive literature was to confront fascism, reveal middle class biases, give voice to the popular sectors, and support the cohesion of the urban proletariat and rural peasantry. Anti-imperialist literature was to focus on exalting the national values and take a stand against foreign invasion. Classist literature was to push for the realization of a class-less society.[262] Although this paradigm was to steer literary production into a socially committed direction, its principles were not exclusive to literary production. Thus, in a general sense, because most attendees at the conference were writers, these principles for literature became the guiding points for other art forms. And indeed, since fascism was the common enemy, Cárdenas the common ally, proletariat culture the shared ideal and propaganda the collective tool, that Gutmann brought photography into a discussion of "men of letters" indicates that literature and photography had found a common political path.

The coincidence speaks of the coalitions that resulted from the intent to unite as a Popular Front and push proletariat literature in a country that lacked the infrastructure for leftist media.[263] Most significantly, the coincidence also shows how the consensus to guide artistic production in unilateral direction ultimately supported and amplified the quest to forge an authoritative yet moral, powerful and democratic image of Cárdenas. In large measure, the fact the literature was

[261] "Resumen del Congreso." *Frente a Frente,* Número Especial, 1937, pp. 22.

[262] Ibid… 23

[263] For an overview on the rise of leftist print media in Mexico, see: Rivera Mir, Sebastián. Los primeros años de Ediciones Frente Cultural. De la teoría revolucionaria al éxito de ventas (1934-1939). Estudios de Historia Moderna y Contempóranea de México 51, 2016, www.sciencedirect.com.

guiding the arts and supporting progressive regimes, opened the discursive space of revolutionary literature to echo the prerogatives of the Departamento Autónomo de Prensa y Propaganda. Likewise, the possibility of joint endeavors combining literature and visual media set the coordinates for photography to amplify the objectives pursued by revolutionary literature; its quest to prorogate a class-less society and a fusion of urban proletariat and rural peasantry. In turn, that literature, photography and propaganda were set on a common path facilitated the emergence of the photobook as the optimal medium for refuting and magnifying information on the Cárdenas administration and thereby instantiatie a visual narrative to redefine what social revolution meant in the face of fascism.

The opportunity to seize on the photobook as means propaganda was instantly made available to Gutmann, as Secretary of Press and Propaganda for the L.E.A.R, and Gustavo Casasola, who was then an established photographer, and prominent business man deeply invested in recirculating his family's massive archive on the Mexican Revolution. In different occasions, Gutmann and Casasola reached out to Agustin Arroyo, Director of the DAPP, in response to the director's requests for professional photographs to compile an image archive with themes on infrastructural development, tourism, agricultural and educational programs.[264] To these requests, Gustavo Casasola offered photographs with indigenous themes and other images from *Album histórico gráfico,* the massive "photohistory" of the nation that his father, Agustin Víctor Casasola, published in 1921.[265] Quite possibly, Gustavo Casasola's images of indigenous people came from the material of his 1936 photobook, *La raza tarahumara*, a commission work

[264] Cruz Porchini, Dafne. *Proyectos culturales y visuales en México a finales del cardenismo (1937-1940).* Dissertation, UNAM, 2014, pp. 52.

[265] Johh Mraz states that Gustavo Casasola "began to plumb the family archive in the 1940s"; Dafne Cruz cites a letter from Casasola to the Agustin Arroyo, the Director of the DAPP. The letter, dated June 1939, is a suggestion making available archival imagery on indigenous people and from photographs from the "album histórico." See: Mraz, John. *Looking for Mexico*. Duke University Press, 2009, pp. 10, 72. Cruz Porchini, Dafne. *Proyectos culturales y visuales en México a finales del cardenismo (1937-1940).* Dissertation, UNAM, 2014, pp. 52.

that presented the indigenous people in northern Mexico as "dignified" but isolated from modern progress.[266]

Towards the end of 1938, Gutmann contacted Arroyo to discuss the possibility of setting price tags on many of the DAPP's publications. And in 1939, after Cárdenas finally toured northern Mexico and "resolved the problem of Yaqui Indians", Gutmann proposed the creation of photo exhibitions and "graphic albums" exalting Cárdenas's "social and popular" attitude.[267] As already noted, the idea of creating a graphic albums led to the Freeman and Gutmann collaboration of 1938 and for Gutmann, the idea had already turned into *Despertar Lagunero* (1937), one of the earliest exemplars of the photobook as "ally of political power" and governmental propaganda in Latin America.[268] *Despertar Lagunero* remains Gutmann's best-known photographic work and is the most readily available photobook in which Gutmann came close to materializing his long-sought idea of publishing an artist book of Mexican themes. In part, the book is still available because it had a print run of 40,000 and was published to promote the Cardenas regime.[269] As a celebration of the agrarian progress in northern Mexico, the book comprises a redeployment of Constructivist aesthetics- low camera angles, horizontal tilts- that edify the peasantry as heroic laborers of their own agrarian development and project machinery and technical advances as transformative tools of historical progress leading towards a socialist nation. These techniques employed at the service of the Cardenas regime had the intention of promoting an active sense of social development. Aside from the intention of edifying Cardenas as a moral and proletariat-supported leader, the employment of Constructivist techniques pushed against predominant conservative views.

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[266] *La raza tarahumara* was a commission by the Cárdenas administration in an attempt to register the indigenous groups in the national territory. See. *Alquimia: Fotolibros en Mexico,* año 9, núm. 29, enero-abril 2007, pp. 38-39.
[267] Gutmann, Enrique. *Letters to Agustin Arroyo*, 28 de diciembre de 1938; 18 de Julio de 1939, AHLAG/FAACh.
[268] Fernández, Horacio. *The Latin American photobook.* Aperture, Fundación Televisa, 2011, pp. 29.
[269] *Alquimia: Fotolibros en Mexico,* año 9, núm. 29, enero-abril 2007, pp. 42.

Whereas critics pointed to Cardenas as purveyor of an anti-capitalist revolution and inheritor of Calles's stagnated revolutionary process, Gutmann's imagery insists on the possibility of ongoing progress. This idea is anchored on the resolutions of the Congreso de Escritores and on the unwavering conviction that revolutionary progress in Mexico, through Cardenas, was still following a materialist dialectic whereby proletariat, government and artist production were fused in a mutual edifying historical sequence. The overall result of this conviction held that revolutionary works were those produced within such sequence. Revolutionary literature, as explained before, was thus revolutionary if it flowed through a sequence uniting proletariat-government-artists.

The logic of this materialist structure, or "distorted" materialist dialectic if one is to recall Waldo Frank's intervention at the Congreso de Escritores, was the reason behind the publication in 1937 of *Chimeneas,* Gustavo Ortiz Hernán's prize-winning proletariat novel. In 1931, the novel resulted from a contest announced in *El Nacional,* where Hernán was chief editor, and in 1937 when the novel was finally printed, the author had just become director of the Talleres Gráficos de la Nación after receiving a national journalism award. The novel's publication resulted from the collaborative work of members of the Talleres Gráficos, and the support of the DAPP's director, who donated the paper.[270] This series of coincidences through which one can see the close association of intellectual work and government sponsorship aside from revealing the "dubious" nature of literary production, indicate that many of the exemplars of proletariat literature remain as works inscribed with the "class conflicts" and political imprints of the many ideological currents of their own time.[271]

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[270] Ortega, Bertín. *Utopías inquietantes: narrativa proletaria en México en los años treinta.* Instituto Veracruzano de la Cultura, 2008, pp. 115-116.
[271] Ibid… pp. 16.

In the 1930s, a mayor conflict was the contestation between "independent" journalist that opposed Cardenas and those on the left that supported the president. This conflict was analogous and paralleled the continual literary debates in which literature was taken as a battle field in a dispute that sough to take literary production into a national and cosmopolitan directions. For those interested in a national and progressive direction, the mayor ideological current was Cardenismo, from which intellectuals, proletariats and peasant drew impetus to perceive the Mexican Revolution as an on-going movement entering a new progressive phase. Hence, in *Chimeneas* one finds a protagonist, Germán Gutíerrez, who abandons the intellectual dullness of a factory book-keeping job and joins t organized laborers determined on taking over the means of production. In presenting this transition from petit bourgeois to proletariat, Hernán followed the dictates of the I Congress of Soviet Writers (1934) in which the soviet writer, Maxim Gorki proposed the idea of defining the image of the petit-bourgeois subject. According to the Hernán, *Chimeneas* is a "geological map" of the consciousness of a "typical" subject whose identity is transformed by the forces of a social revolution. The revolution as an agent of change is thesis of the novel and is not without inherent contradictions. Among which, as Jesse Lerner notes, the novels conjoins the search for revolutionary literature sponsored in the Soviet Union and the "modern experimentation" prohibited by the Soviet Union's Socialist Realism.[272] This contradiction still is, nevertheless, one of the most attractive aesthetic qualities of the novel as it relies on an interplay of images by Agustin Jimenez, Enrique Gutmann and archival imagery from the Casasola's collection.[273]

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[272] Lerner, Jesse. *Alquimia: Fotolibros en Mexico,* año 9, núm. 29, enero-abril 2007, pp.40

[273] Carlos A. Córdova's Agustín Jiménez y la vanguardia fotográfica mexicana, recuperates Jiménez's work and argues for the necessity to excavate into the shadow of foundational figures in Mexican photography. His research suggests that avant-garde photography in Mexico cannot be reduced to a few individuals or to a single political and aesthetic tendency. According to Córdova, Jiménez was the first Mexican photographer to exhibit internationally

Between the photomontages and low-cut perspectives of Jiminez's work and Gutmann's direct documentary style images, there is a complementary symmetry that infuses *Chimenas* with a progressive imprint and an avant-gardist- New Vision- perspective. Thus, as the protagonist enters his voyage from bookkeeper to proletariat, Jimenez's and Gutmann's work parlays the narrative themes through text-image dialectics that at times are both illustrative and counterpoising. Take for instance chapter 6, "El viaje", in which the narrator extolls the protagonist's revolutionary journey by conjuring up the locomotive as trope of modern mechanical power and as metaphor for the social revolution. Yet, the certainty with which the narrator understands the psychological impact of the machine on the protagonist's consciousness is quickly set in question by Gutmann's photograph, "La fuga", which represents the locomotive as a fuzzy, unfocused and irresolute time frame from which progress appears as an undefined horizon.[274] This counterbalancing play between image and text exacerbates if one takes the images as visual narrative in themselves. As such, the novel's visual plane presents Casasola's contributions from his family's archive as fragments of a national archive that is simultaneously revisited, fractured and renovated by Jiménez's low-angle photographs, complex photomontages and Gutmman's straight-on images of ordinary proletariat subjects. This paradoxical aesthetic interplay is striking given that the novel purports to be an exemplar of revolutionary artistic collaboration. On this regard, *Chimeneas* attests the contradictory nature of those collaborations that under the Cardenas regime drew economic support and semantic charge from already established symbols related to the Mexican Revolution. Aesthetically, then, the fact that Casasola's images of the earlier leaders of the Revolution enter the visual register of the novel as "revolutionary" despite lacking avant-garde aesthetics, speaks of the marketability of those

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and was the showcasing photographer for the exhibit in which Salvador Novo delivered an early version of *El arte de la fotografía* at the inauguration of the Sala de Arte de la Secretaria de Educación in 1931 (23).

[274] Chimeneas… pp. 59.

images as figures already instilled in the popular consciousness. Likewise, the fact that the revolution had already produced a plethora recognizable images speaks of the common conception of the military movement as phenomenon of the past, which was the discourse that *Chimeneas* was seeking to dismantle as the novel proposes the idea of an ongoing, yet to-be concluded revolution.

B. Traven and the "Great Revolutionary Propagandist"

The very conception of the revolution as an on-going movement was an inherent principle of proletariat literature and in *Chimeneas* it works in support of the Cardenas administration at a time when the harsh criticism of the conservative press required the promotion of the Mexican president as a strong democratic leader. For Gutmann, as noted earlier, promoting Cárdenas was an objective that had as much to do with his affiliation to the DAPP as with his idealized conception of Mexico as exile-receiving nation. Gutmann's work should be then understood as resulting from the promises of proletariat literature and within the history of German-Mexico relations. On this regard, it is worth noting that before arriving in Mexico, Gutmann had travelled throughout Europe. He visited Switzerland, France and Spain. [275] There, quite possibly, as he was moving through exiles networks, he not only felt the encroachment of Nazis on Jewish safe heavens but also became aware of another contradictory fact: the Cardenas's administration had inherited a historical governmental attitude that valued Germany as a model of progress and as economic alternative to the United State and England; Germans, meanwhile, had not renounced disdainful and doubtful attitudes towards Mexico's capacity to be a liberal nation. [276]

[275] Melchor, Daniel. "La historia del "espía Nazi" que vivía en Coyoacán". Chilango, 30 April, 2017.
[276] In a 1934 interview, Gutmann stated that in Germany there was an "erroneous" opinion about México: "El Pueblo Alemán solo quiere Paz y Trabajo." *Periódico El Popular*, 23 de Septiembre de 1934. Also, Ricardo Pérez Montfort mentions that Porfirio Díaz, the constitutionalist and revolutionary leader, Venustiano Carranza, and the

In the early decades of the twentieth century, distrust on Mexico's ability to self-rule was not a novelty. In fact, that distrust goes back well into the nineteenth century. For example, for the great traveller of the nineteenth-century, Alexander von Humboldt, Mexico (then New Spain) was an attractive territory because it was sated in economic potential; but as a society, it was grounded on inequitable relations, which hindered the possibility of liberal economic stability.[277] Through Humboldt's idealist and romantic gaze, the territory under Spanish rule was best as an uncharted geography apt for scientific exploration. However, when the territory was not taken as a scientifically promising and aesthetically pleasing vision, it was a landscape plagued by the inefficient administration of Spanish aristocracy, and the rampant submission of native people was a source of looming social upheaval.[278]

Ironically thought, decades after Mexico's independence, popular print media presented the country as attractive for potential German immigrants by highlighting its lack of a rigid social and economic system, which made the territory amenable for entrepreneurships and economic adventures.[279] Moreover, in the years prior to Gutmann's arrival, and at the onset of the revolution, the country sociopolitical turmoil was reason for a member of the German delegation, Paul von Hintze, to explain to the Kaiser that the revolutionary leader, Francisco I. Madero, was not foreseeing that a "semi-barbarous" nation could only be ruled a despotic

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post-revolutionary president; Plutarco Elías Calles held a strong admiration towards Germany. Even some figures within the Cardenas administration marveled at the technological progress in Germany. See: Pérez Montfort, Ricardo. *Algunas ideas sobre las relaciones germano-mexicanas en la primera mitad del siglo XX*. In *Las relaciones germane-mexicanas: desde el aporte de los hermanos Humboldt hasta el presente*. Colmex, UNAM, Servicio Aleman de Intercambio Académico, 2001, pp. 146-147.

277 Perceptions on Mexico by foreigners were contingent on the internal political conditions as they were determined by socioeconomic conditions abroad; particularly, in the location of the potential traveller or immigrant. On this theme, see: Von Mentz de Boege, Brígida M. *México en el siglo XIX visto por los alemanes.* UNAM, 1982, pp. 40-41

278 Ibid… 48.

279 Ibid… 291.

regime. Likewise, social democrats expressed in the *Vorwärts* that sympathizers of the revolution were a "rabble" of deposed peasants manipulated by American capitalists.[280]

Within the history of German-Mexican relations the scorn towards American interests was a consistency; but the aforementioned idea of a "semi-barbarous" Mexico contrasted with romanticized, picturesque, yet less demeaning visual renditions of the nation's lower classes and indigenous people that Gutmann and other German image makers espoused. Again, for instance, Alexander von Humboldt's writings and accompanying illustrations are regarded as foundational in "redirecting the perceptions on the Other" and for setting the base for nineteenth century liberal *indigenista* thought; and photographer, Hugo Brehme, while invested in picturesque aesthetics, contributed to the promotion of Mexican landscape and costumes.[281]After the First World War, however, pejorative attitudes towards Mexico changed; and coincidently, the *Vorwärts* played a significant role by circulating more critical and sympathetic views on social issues affecting the national population. On important event related to the change of attitude towards Mexicans was the *Vorwärts'* publication in 1925 of B. Traven's *Los algodoneros* (The Cotton Pickers). The manuscript of the novel was mailed from Mexico and reintroduced Traven's denunciative writings within Socialist circles in Germany.[282] Sometime after the

280 Kats, Freidrich. "La revolucion Mexicana desde la perspectiva de los refugiados politicos en México." In *México, el exilio bien temperado. Instituto de Investigaciones Interculturales Germano-Mexicanas, A.C., 1995, 161-164.*

281 Von Kügelgen, Helga. "Imágenes de México en Alemania desde la conquista hasta el presente." In Las relaciones *germane-mexicanas: desde el aporte de los hermanos Humboldt hasta el presente*. Colmex, UNAM, Servicio Aleman de Intercambio Académico, 2001, pp.352. On the importance of Humboldt's contribution to indigenismo, see: Villoro, Luis. *Los tres grandes momentos del indigenismo en Mexico.* El Colegio de México, 1950.

282 Suáres, Luis. *Prólogo a "las obras escogidades de B.Traven."* In *B. Traven. Canasta de cuentos mexicanos,*1968, pp. 13. Hauke-Kaschel, Antje. *Statt Fruhlings-erwachen Kampf gegen den Krieg*. Vorwarts:100 Jahre Kampt fur sozialen Fortschritt, 1976, pp. 38.

publication of *Los algodoneros,* Traven's work was distributed under the pseudonym Maruth, a penname credited to Gutmann's ingenuity. [283]

The relation between Gutmann and Maruth is vague but evidence points to a direct connection between Gutmann' editorial projects and the promotion of Traven's work in Mexico and abroad. One possible link to Gutmann's interest in the promotion of Traven's work is "Traven: novelista incognito", an anonymous article that appeared in 1936 in *Frente a Frente.* The article brought to readers' attention, and possibly to the LEAR's membership, the fact that among German exiles in Mexico there was "one of the greatest German revolutionary writers" whose work in Central Europe was an "effective echo of Mexican social themes". Yet, according to the article, despite the ample popularity of Traven's work among German workers, in Mexico "nobody knew who" that writer and "great revolutionary propagandist" was.[284] The importance of Traven's work was further highlighted by a succinct recollection of his published works. The article presented, in Spanish and German, some of Traven's novels: *Los algodoneros* (Die Baumwollpflücker), *El pais de la primavera (Das Land des Frühlings), La Rosa Blanca (Die Weisse Rose), La fuente en la jungle (Die Brücke im Dschungel), La Selva (Der Busch) and El tesoro de la sierra madre (Der Schatz der Sierra Madre).*

Moreover, a more clear connection between Gutmann and Traven took place on the pages of the Mexican newspaper, *El Nacional.* In 1938, months after the Lázaro Cárdenas administration nationalized the oil industry and American and other foreign correspondents were presenting an economically demoralizing image of Cardenas's programs, Gutmann decided to publish an "Open Letter" in *El Nacional* asking for Traven's permission to reprint *La Rosa*

[283] Fritz Pohle mentions in a footnote that the editors of BT-Mitteilungen credit Gutmann for inventing the pseudonym. See Chapter 4; footnote 2 in Pohle, Fritz. *Das mexikanische* Exil*: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der politisch-kulturellen Emigration aus Deutschaland (1937-1946)*. J.B. Metzlersche, 1986, pp. 417.
[284] "Traven: novelista incognito:" *Frente a Frente*, Num. 2, 1936, pp. 16.

Blanca in Editorial Masas.[285] To his astonishment, as a response to the request in the newspaper, "an anti-Semitic, counter-revolutionary letter" was submitted.[286] The reply, of course, was a disappointing episode for the publishing house, and particularly for Gutmann, who had just gained governmental support and rallied leftist publishers for the "establishment of a network of kiosks throughout the country, in order to break the sabotage of the reactionary bookstores of Mexico once and for all."[287] Disgusted by the unacceptable "anti-Semitic" response, Gutmann contacted Traven's editors, who replied that "an imposter wrote the letter" and that the only issue "about Traven in Mexico [was] that some publishing house started to pirate some of [Traven's] books…"[288] It is unknown whether the Editorial Masas ever published the novel or if it was pirating other novels. It is certain, however, that in 1938, the "anti-Semitic response" was a shock for intellectuals promoting proletariat literature. The event thus points to the diverging ideas on literature's social function, or at the service of governmental propaganda.[289] For Gutmann, *La Rosa Blanca* was attractive because its basic theme condenses the ongoing class and economic struggle attendant to the oil nationalization of 1938. As the novel presents it: an indigenous ranch owner, in Veracruz, is being pressed by a Mexican attorney, who is mediating for an American oil company interested in exploiting the petroleum reserves within the rancher's

[285] Gutmann, Enrique. *Letter to Joseph Freeman.* May 12, 1938. Joseph Freeman Colletion, Box 25, Folder 20, Hoover Institute Archive. I have not located the Open Letter to B. Traven, however, on October 16, 1938 a short piece in *El Nacional* refers to Gutmann as a "comentarista traveniano". In this piece, Gutmann speaks of the importance of B. Traven's work and comments on Traven's incognito status. *El Nacional*, 1938-10-16, pp.23.
[286] Freeman Joseph. *Letter to Bernard Smith*. May 21, 1938. Joseph Freeman Colletion, Box 25, Folder 20, Hoover Institute Archive.
[287] Gutmann, Enrique. *Letter to Joseph Freeman.* May 12, 1938. Joseph Freeman Colletion, Box 25, Folder 20, Hoover Institute Archive.
[288] Smith, Bernard. *Letter to Joseph Freeman.* May 24, 1938. Joseph Freeman Colletion, Box 25, Folder 20, Hoover Institute Archive.
[289] Against B.Traven's approval, the Salvadorian, Pedro Geoffroy Rivas translated *La rebelión de los colgados* and references the "anti-Semitic" response Gutmann received. See: Rivera Mir, Sebastián. Los primeros años de Ediciones Frente Cultural. De la teoría revolucionaria al éxito de ventas (1934-1939). Estudios de Historia Moderna y Contempóranea de México 51, 2016, www.sciencedirect.com, pp. 125.

property. The theme of the novel was then seen as analogy of the confrontation between American oil companies and the Cardenas administration's nationalist programs.

From the Gutmann-Traven connection, it can be surmised that the novelist's work was attractive for it represented marginalized social sectors through sympathetic, direct and realistic writing. The attention to the unfavorable conditions affecting the indigenous population in Mexico is a characteristic imprint of other Mexican narratives: *La carreta, La rebelión de los ahoracados*; which are still considered forbearers of the literary *indigenista* movement known as the Chiapas cycle.[290] In that sense, it is quiet clear that Traven's internalized and undertow narrative perspective not only anticipated the ethno-fictional aesthetics of the mid-twentieth century *indigenista* writing, but also aligned with the formal and political particularities of proletariat literature as determined at the Congreso de Escritores y Artistas de México. For Gutmann's socialist, propagandist aesthetic appreciation, the proletariat narrative values of Traven's work- the internalized perspective, objective and extended-observation, the realistic, sympathetic and counter-discourse perspective- were an attractive modality to counteract the stereotypical and pejoratives views on Mexico, and most particularly, the derogating accounts on the Cardenas' revolutionary programs. For that reason, *La Rosa Blanca* seemed like a proper text for publication in 1938, a year in which the Cardenas's programs were being misrepresented abroad, and internally contested by conservatives and fascist in the "independent" press.

In this chapter, I have framed Gutmann's contributions to Mexican culture within the history of the Cardenas' administration, the rise of avant-gardist photography and proletariat literature because his work resulted from an active participation in those three arenas. Through the analysis of a few of Gutmann's remaining photographs, I have emphasized how his work

[290] Rall, Deitrich. *B. Traven ¿un autor mexicano?* In *Las relaciones germanas-mexicanas: desde el aporte de los hermanos* Humboldt *hasta el presente*. Colmex, UNAM, Servicio Aleman de Intercambio Académico, 2001, pp. 98-99.

benefitted from the revolutionary rhetoric of the 1930s; participated in the conflict between conservative and leftists journalism, and incurred into a contradiction that benefitted the centralist propaganda of the Cardenas regime. As an active participant in government propaganda, Gutmann redeployed a notion of "truth" grounded on photographic objectivity and political commitment. This political stance was in large measure a direct result of Gutmann's proximity to the working principles of proletariat literature, which dictated the coordinates for other art forms simultaneously engaged in the struggle against fascism and in support of President Lázaro Cárdenas. Gutmann's work, however, offers other points of analysis and ample room for further research. To start, his photographic archive, information on Editoral Masas and documents related to his participation in indigenista enterprises in the state of Michoacán, have yet to be located. Finding more archival information on Gutmann would yield essential data to position his work in a more comprehensive view of the intellectual history of the 1930s.

Conclusion

The previous chapters explored how Anita Brenner, Salvador Novo and Enrique Gutmann engaged photography. In their work, photography is present as a visual medium, theoretical framework and discursive platform. Their engagement with the medium can be understood as a praxis by which exile and national intellectuals took up a novel technology to parley and contest sociopolitical matters. In their immediate context, the mayor sources of concern were fascism and a surplus of nationalist tendencies that led intellectuals to engage photography, be it to reflect on or query those tendencies. Hence, this analysis situates of Brenner, Novo and Gutmann's engagement with photography as part of hemispheric phenomenon in which photography became the means of access to modes of representation and allowed intellectuals to pushed forth ideals seeking to position Mexican national culture within twentieth century cultural logics.

The central premise of the chapters holds that Anita Brenner, Salvador Novo and Enrique Gutmann partook in cultural phenomena and that through photography they contested nationalism, fascism and upheld Mexico's modern status. For instance, it was through photography's referential logic that Brenner highlighted national art production as a modern enterprise. Photographic indexicality is the basis for Brenner's formulation of Mexico's cultural connection with pre-Columbian civilizations. In her narration, photography lends its modernist theory of unhindered referential reproducibility to purport Mexico as modern nation, a status presumably inherited from the Mexica Empire. Her argument is thus twofold: the Mexican nation was modern because the Mexica Empire was also modern. This lineal argument was a re-articulation of a nationalist thesis that sought to legitimize a cultural connection as well as grant anthropology a central role of power in the political sphere. The argument was also a response to

denigration theories that grounded on empiricist logics defined Mexico as primitive nation. The religious nature of her argument was a strategy to circumvent materialism and re-evaluate religion in the wake of American religious extremism, which sought to legitimize racial segregation as a biblical tenet. Hence, in Brenner's *Idols Behind Altars* photography contests empiricism, parlays religion while articulating a modernist ideal: the nation is rising as a form thus giving new light to artistic production.

For Novo, photography was also a means to question nationalist ideas, tease popular rhetoric and circulate the public sphere. Throughout the 1920s, Novo traversed a territory wherein photography in the form of postcards transcribed visual impressions of itinerants: bohemians, cultural enthusiast caught up in the web of a nascent tourist industry. Contact with the postcard culture of that decade translates a tense interaction with romantic and pictorialist values at play in the vogue for folkloric artifacts. Novo's reluctance to partake in the vogue for folkloric expressions suggests a move towards the swiftness and fragmentary character of the photographic image. For him, photography although a practice of unsophisticated amateurs was an instantaneous process modulating writing.

In the 1930s, the impact photography had on Novo's writing and on the traveling auteur took a different meaning and Novo conceded that photography was a means to transcend in the sphere of representation. His essay, "El arte de la fotografía", is layered with multiple threads of conversations brought about by photography's rise to the gallery wall. One important discursive thread suggests that photography had resolved the debate on art's relation to copy work or reproduction. For Novo, photography was liberating painting by taking up the burden of reproducing the aesthetic values of other art forms. Photography's innate ability was reproduction, which Novo viewed as a feminine task and proper way for the common folk to

reach the sphere of representation. In the background of Novo's engagement with photography looms the threat of fascism and the visual fatigue caused by the KKK's imagery, which in a moment of spontaneous reflection became a symbol to mock provincial architecture. Later, Novo recanted that symbol by drawing on photography's erroneous character.

As a practicing photographer, Gutmann entered Mexico looking to produce a photo book on traditional practices. Pursuing such idea, he carried a camera around the country and photographed religious celebrations, social and political events, but the book project did not materialize. His most politically driven work followed the Popular Front's principles and was published in leftist publications, where it remains as the only available archive.[291] As Gutmann sought to photograph Mexico, he also prioritized facilitating exile petitions. Conjoining art practice and politics, he reached the higher echelons of power and attempted to have direct communication with President Lázaro Cárdenas, who responded favorably to the photographer's requests for political intervention on behalf of German exiles.

In return, and following the resolutions of the Congreso de Escritores y Artistas de Mexico, an event organized by the Liga de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios (L.E.A.R), Gutmann sought to highlight Cárdenas' work. To do so, Gutmann collaborated with Joseph Freeman, editor of the *New Masses*, and envisioned a series of projects to promote Cárdenas' democratic and progressive character. His work in support of the President coincided with the state's propaganda rhetoric, which insisted on refuting negative portrayals of the administration. The rebuttal to negative portrayals relied on a rhetoric of truth that echoes photographic objectivity and verisimilitude. Likewise, his work as photographer, journalist, and antifascist

[291] Gutmann's work, unfortunately, has not been located and further scholarly research is required to gain a comprehensive understanding of his contributions.

reached a level of prominence due to the fact that photography was a means of access into national and international politics.

For Gutmann, Brenner and Novo, photography was thus a means to enter the national sphere, partake in politics and engage cultural debates. In the 1920s, a mayor topic of debate was *reproduction* and its association to art. Brenner and Novo approached the debate from different angles. Whereas Brenner reworked the concept by tapping into photographic theory, Novo gave the concept a psychoanalyst and surrealist twist. He gendered photography and assigned the medium the responsibility to enact reproduction and liberate art.

For Gutmann, in the 1930s, the debate was not one of aesthetics and theory, but politics and art. His works entered a highly contested arena where the role of art and politics was disputed in the wake of fascism and totalitarianism. He embraced photography as means to document social events and bring forth a realist conception of "truth" against fascism's rhetoric. In the dispute, photography was pushed to enact the logics of moral ideals by which anti-fascists prerogatives counteracted American imperialism and German fascism.

Significantly, the analysis of Brenner, Novo and Gutmman's work reveals that photography interacted fluidly with writing. Photographic theory and discourse imprinted narrative structures and amplified nationalist tenets. For Brenner, Novo and Gutmann, the medium was a complex terrain from which they derived an understating of sociopolitical phenomena in which politics and art, religion and science, and longings for the past and the nation's future intertwined. That photography was complex field suggests that the medium was a technology synchronizing multiple national territories.

Recent scholarship on Weimar Germany's visual culture indicates that male German and Eastern European Jews acculturated and gained access to the sphere of representation via

photography and print media.[292] Across the Atlantic, in the United States, Jewish exiles settled and partook in cultural phenomena by working in industries somewhat exempt of racist policies aimed at keeping ethnic minorities and people of color out of the sphere of cultural production. Thus, in the early decades of the twentieth century, for many artists, writes and rising intellectuals, novel industries such as photography, journalism and cinema were channels to navigate the art world and engage discourses in a context where extremist organizations attempted to forestall access to means of representation.

Some of the challenges faced by minority groups in the sphere of representation were promulgated by well-funded organizations. In the United States, the Ku Klux Klan established a film company in the early 1920s dominated the media landscape with sharp rhetoric against Jews, Catholics, immigrants and non-Protestants.[293] The following decade, in Germany, the Third Reich optimized its propaganda industry and exalted its version of the "truth" by declaring all other forms of expression un-German and thereby uncultured and untruth. Against the challenges of such organizations, photography and journalism for intellectuals like Brenner, Novo and Gutmann were novel visual media viable to circumvent institutional precepts and reach the public sphere.

In this context marked by extremisms, Mexico remained in the vicinity pursuing a national culture. In the 1900s, for instance, film production was primarily representing military skirmishes of the Revolution and within a decade, the country was producing full-length films and had the basis for a film industry. In the 1920s, as Mexico's cinema industry struggled to find solid ground it also sought to gain momentum to counteract stereotypical portrayals of Mexicans in American cinema, which was also feeling the pressure if not the influence of homegrown

[292] Migilow, Daniel H. *The Photography of Crisis: the photo essays of Weimar Germany*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012, pp. 35.
[293] Gordon, Linda. *The Second Coming of the KKK*. Liveright, 2018, pp.2.

extremist and racist rhetoric. At the onset of the 1930s, Mexican cinema reached its Golden Age while photography gained momentum as a recognized art form.

These achievements occurred in a decade marked by all sorts of extremisms and it remains to be seen how Mexican cinema responded to the rise of ultra nationalist and fascist cinema. In fact, how the KKK and fascist propaganda affected Mexican literature and visual culture is a topic that this project leaves for future research. Analyzing the reaction to the rise of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s will derive an understanding of how Latin American fascist and antifascist movements responded to American Protestant nationalism and will further reveal the complexity of Brenner, Novo and Gutmann's engagement with visual media. In sum, the previous chapters explained that in Mexico, like in Weimar Germany and the United States, photography allowed Jewish exiles and national intellectual to enter the national scene and partake in cultural production.

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