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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
IRIVNE

American Modern Photographers and Mexico:
Interwar Aesthetics and Visual Culture South of the Border

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

In Visual Studies

By

Cindy Urrutia

Dissertation Committee
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2015

DEDICATION

To my mother Jovita Adalgiza Casasola Vanegas.
For all of the love and support you have always given me.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

American Modern Photographers and Mexico:
Interwar Aesthetics and Visual Culture South of the Border

By

Cindy Urrutia
Doctor of Philosophy in Visual Studies
University of California, Irvine 2015
Professor Cécile Whiting, Chair

American Moderns and Mexico: Interwar Aesthetics and Visual Culture South of the Border investigates the allure of Mexico during the interwar period for modern American photographers, with a focus on Edward Weston and Paul Strand. This is an important study because *American Moderns and Mexico: Interwar Aesthetics and Visual Culture South of the Border* examines how Mexico transformed Edward Weston's photography aesthetically and was instrumental to the development of Paul Strand's political activism. More specifically, *American Moderns and Mexico: Interwar Aesthetics and Visual Culture South of the Border* will discuss how Weston's and Strand's art contributed to visual expressions of Mexican ideas on nationhood and formed part of Mexico's cultural esthetic. In other words, Weston and Strand were transformed by their residency in Mexico, and at the same time their photographs promoted certain ideas about Mexico in both Mexico and the United States.

In this project I will be arguing that traveling to Mexico was an important interlude in the lives of Weston and Strand because Mexico was a place that nurtured and changed their visual production. In *American Moderns and Mexico: Interwar Aesthetics*

and Visual Culture South of the Border I propose that Mexico, and its representations were a site for developing ideas related to modernism that the artists were first exposed to in the United States as members of the States. Thus, I will note that prior to visiting Mexico, the two artists had already developed ideas about modernism, many of which were filtered in part through their contact with Alfred Stieglitz. Lastly, this project situates Weston and Mexican avant-garde.

INTRODUCTION

American Modern Photographers and Mexico: Interwar Aesthetics and Visual Culture South of the Border examines the ways in which photographers Edward Weston's and Paul Strand's works contributed to visual expressions of Mexican ideas on nationhood and formed part of Mexico's cultural and revolutionary aesthetic during the decades of the 1920s and 1930s. Weston's and Strand's contributions to Mexican ideas on nationhood are important to the field because in post-Revolutionary Mexico (1920-1940), the country as a *state* in terms of a governing agency, preceded the country as a *nation* of people with a sense of belonging and metaphysical unity. Thus, the works of Weston and Strand demonstrate how ideas on nationhood were being expressed and created during the time of their residency in Mexico.

Prior to Mexico's Revolutionary War (1910-1920), the country had been fragmented as a result of its various indigenous populations, a small ruling "white" elite, and *mestizos*¹ that often had little in common with each other. The pre-Revolutionary regime under the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz (1884-1911), had tried to unite the nation under progressive ideals of modernization and industrialization, but left the majority of rural indigenous Mexicans on the peripherals of his nationalist project. This is one of the reasons that led to the Revolutionary War.

As Mexico sought to reconstruct itself after its Revolutionary War, there was a push for the construction of a "modern Mexican nation in which everyone born within the

¹ *Mestizo* a term often utilized in reference to someone of mixed racial heritage. In the case of Mexico, it is used to denote a mixture of Indian, European, or African background.

borders claimed by the state shares a common culture and spirit of solidarity.”² As a result, Mexican artists and cultural leaders called for a new aesthetic orientation that was part of a larger project that aimed to create a distinct national identity called *Mexicanidad* as a source of Mexican authenticity. *Mexicanidad* can be defined as Mexican national identity, or the idea of nationhood Mexican leadership was promoting that aimed to represent a “notion of democratic enfranchisement”³ that was inclusive of, and often emphasized the populous’ pre-Columbian past, *indigenismo* (indigenous background), *mestizo* heritage, and revolutionary ideals. As a result, *Mexicanidad* also included a revolutionary aesthetic and narrative. According to Fernando Fabio Sánchez:

México a partir de la década de los ’20 hasido una gran narrativa cuyas bases se encuentran en la revolución. El arte y el intelectual han desempeñado un rol fundamental en la arquitectura de esta narrativa...Los artistas han representado el *pathos* de México post-revolucionario.⁴

Since the decade of the 1920s, Mexico has been a grand narrative whose base is found in the revolution. The artist and intellectual have been fundamental in the architecture of this narrative...The artists have represented the *pathos* of post-revolutionary Mexico.⁵

Within this framework, the cultural aesthetic of nationalism that emerged in Mexico was largely a result of revolutionary ideals of rebelling against the establishment’s social

² Rick Lopez. *Crafting Mexico* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 13

For additional information see Mexican historian Alan Knight’s *The Mexican Revolution, v. 1. Porfirians, Liberals and Peasants* and v. 2, *Counter-revolution and Reconstruction*. (Cambridge, 1986)

³ Desmond Rochfort. *Mexican Muralists: Orozco, Rivera, Siqueiros*. (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1998)

⁴ Fernando Fabio Sánchez, “Contemporáneos y Estridentista ante la identidad y el arte nacionales en le México pos-revolucionario de 1921 a 1934.” *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana*. Año 33, No. 66 (2007), pp. 207-233

⁵ *ibid*, Translation by Cindy Urrutia

norms and promoting populist ideals. Edward Weston and Paul Strand partook in this conversation through their visual imagery while in Mexico.

The Mexican Revolution is often dated between 1910 and 1940. However, armed conflict occurred between 1910-1920. Peace was declared in 1920 and the post-Revolutionary (post-armed conflict) or Reconstruction era was from 1920 to 1940. The reason the years of the revolution are at times extended to 1940 is because the rhetoric of revolution and the ideas behind it continued to permeate Mexican politics, as well as Mexican art. For that reason, the art that arises in the post-Revolutionary period is one of a revolutionary aesthetic.

This revolutionary aesthetic however encompassed multiple styles of representation that was inclusive of, but not limited to: politics, modern formal qualities, *Mexicanidad* and *indigenismo*.⁶ It should be noted that although Mexico's revolutionary aesthetic was predominantly bound by themes related to things Mexican, its history of strife, revolution, and populist ideals, not all art produced at the time was a direct call to arms. Nonetheless, it was considered to be revolutionary.

During their residency in Mexico, Edward Weston and Paul Strand not only engaged with various aspects of Mexico's Revolutionary aesthetic, but were also transformed by their experiences in Mexico. More specifically, traveling to Mexico was an important interlude in the lives of Weston and Strand because Mexico was a place that nurtured and changed their visual production. For that reason, this project will examine the impact that Mexico's pre-Columbian past, the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920),

⁶ *Indigenismo* focuses on the indigenous qualities of Mexico and its pre-Columbian heritage. It promotes the importance of Indians, and places value on things Indian. This concept is elaborated upon below.

Mexican Renaissance (a cultural and artistic movement that celebrated Mexican heritage—from Pre-Columbian times to the Revolution) and its Revolutionary aesthetic had on the artists, as well as the ways in which they participated in this movement.

This project will also explore the ways in which Edward Weston and Paul Strand were both insiders and outsiders of Mexico. Thus, *American Modern Photographers and Mexico: Interwar Aesthetics and Visual Culture South of the Border* will address the ways in which the artists' imagery of Mexican nationhood was complicated and informed by their status as foreigners. However, this project is not a post-colonial account of Americans in Mexico, but rather shows how Weston's and Strand's imagery is multilayered due to their dual status as Americans and as members of the Mexican avant-garde. Moreover this study, through Weston's and Strand's works, considers the ways in which Mexican national identity as expressed in the arts, has a transnational element to it and was forged by both Mexican and foreigner's ideals on what constituted *Mexicanidad* and national character. Thus, the formation of *Mexicanidad* echoes Edward Said's words, "partly because of empire, all cultures are involved in one another, none is singular and pure, all are hybrid...and un-monolithic."⁷

⁷ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), p. xxv

EDWARD WESTON AND MEXICO DURING THE 1920S

Edward Weston's time in Mexico (August 1923 - December 1924 and August 1925 - November 1926), was transformative on many levels—from transitioning to a more formal aesthetic after having worked within the rubric of Pictorialism, to being an active participant of Mexico's post-Revolutionary nationalist project vis-à-vis his interest in Mexican themes, and acquiring a reputation for his technical prowess as a photographer. Weston's photographs of Mexico formed part of the specific revolutionary art being espoused by the Mexican avant-garde during the 1920s. This is apparent when Weston is analyzed in relation to Mexican avant-garde visual artists during the 1920s. Weston's photographs shared similar interests in terms of exploring a modern aesthetic, subject matter, and values.

As a result, I propose that Weston be regarded as part of the Mexican avant-garde, whose interest extended to political and non-political subject matter. What is critical to consider is that at the specific time that Weston was in Mexico, national identity and revolutionary art was creating itself and was in flux. There was not one Mexico, but multiple expressions of Mexico and Mexican national identity. Therefore, there was a variety of visual representation within Mexico's revolutionary art. Weston's Mexican works do not contain a direct political message. Due to this, the field has labeled Weston as apolitical in Mexico. Scholars have predominantly discussed Weston's time in Mexico in terms of his transition from Pictorialism to a modern aesthetic. However, I would like

to argue that Weston's works do have a subtle political message that promoted *Mexicanidad*, or Mexican-ness.

Weston's subject matter is directly related to Mexican national identity, from his photographs of key political and artistic figures, to his still life of Mexican folk art—a corner stone of Mexican revolutionary art and aesthetics. For this reason, I propose that Weston's Mexican works are not only part of a revolutionary aesthetic, but contribute to the ideas on nationhood and art being developed at the time. However, Weston's Mexican imagery is complicated by his roles as an insider and an outsider, because he was both a leading member of the Mexican avant-garde and a foreigner.

Weston photographed Mexican subject matter of folk art and famous Mexican figures like an insider, but remained distant when it came to engaging with Indians, an important tenant of national identity that was being explored at the time. As a result, Weston's works contain a tension. His insider portraits of leading Mexican politicians and artists celebrate those individuals and the post-Revolutionary movement, while his distance from Indians, whether conscious or not, displays his outsider sensibility. Moreover, Weston's art is further complicated by the fact that it does not display a direct call to arms. However, not having a direct political message does not necessarily mean that Weston did not participate in Mexico's Revolutionary art and aesthetics. In fact, it will be seen that he did.

Art produced in Mexico during the 1920s was considered to be revolutionary because it either held a political message or was a rebellion against the academic art and establishment that prevailed during its pre-Revolutionary days. Prior to Mexico,

Weston's art was that of Pictorialism. In Mexico, his art was transformed, and developed a modern aesthetic. In addition, Weston joined a group of Mexican avant-gardes called the *estridentistas* or Stridents (to be discussed in Chapter 1) that valued the technical characteristics of Cubism, Dadaism, Futurism, as well as rebelling against the establishment's social norms.⁸ Weston's photographs of Mexican folk art and nudes exemplified the values of the *estridentistas* because those works contain a dual function: 1) rebelling against the establishment with a modern sensibility, 2) and focusing on Mexican subject matter.

During the decade of the 1920s, Mexican folk art was becoming of major thematic interest and was considered to represent a link to Mexico's pre-Columbian past. At that time, Weston, along with other members of the avant-garde were turning to folk art for inspiration. Folk art was valued as subject matter, and for the formal aesthetic qualities that were linked to it. Mexican avant-gardes such as Diego Rivera and Jean Charlot considered the simple and abstract qualities of Mexican folk art on par with modern art. Weston was influenced by Charlot's and Rivera's opinions on Mexican folk art and photographed folk art as still life.⁹

Weston aided in the creation of Mexican identity, or *Mexicanidad*, by photographing the people that were creating Mexico's post-Revolutionary identity and by photographing folk art. Through portraiture Weston documented people as historical

⁸ For additional information see, Luis Mario. *El estridentismo o una literatura de la estrategia*, (México: Conaculta, 1997)

⁹ For additional information see: Edward Weston, *The Daybooks of Edward Weston*, Vol. 1, edited by Nancy Newhall (New York: Aperture Foundation, 1990) and *Lew Andrews, Weston and Charlot; art and friendship*. (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2011)

figures, icons, and celebrated the leaders who were shaping Mexico's ideas on nation. Through folk art, Weston photographed *lo Mexicano* (what is Mexican). In addition, Weston's photographs represent a visual economy of exchange in which artists promoted each other and created a who's who within the Mexican avant-garde and society.

Scholarship on Weston

Few scholars have provided an in-depth account of Weston's time in Mexico. While most scholars have similar opinions on the work of Weston, there are some distinctions on how his work is regarded. The general consensus of art historians is that Mexico was a place that allowed Weston to explore form and transition to a modern aesthetic. For that reason Mexico is considered pivotal to Weston's career.

Amy Cogner was the first person to investigate Weston's time in Mexico in a deeper manner than her predecessors. In *Edward Weston in Mexico 1923-1926* Cogner elaborates on how Mexico provided Weston with the exposure to modern art and ideas he was seeking in order to help him break away from the sentimentality of Pictorialism, and to acquire a more modern aesthetic that focused on objects, form, shapes, and volume. Because she was the first to provide an in-depth account of Weston in Mexico, Cogner became the leading authority on Weston. Cogner considered Weston's Mexican works to be apolitical, did not expand upon his relationship with the avant-garde, and did not take into account Weston's pre-Mexico bohemian leftist associations.

Other art historians followed Cogner's lead. Biographers on Weston rarely discuss the social-political ways in which Mexico may have affected Weston's oeuvre.

And if they mention it at all, they do so briefly. As a result, the trend of labeling Weston apolitical has developed in the field. For example, more recent scholars such as art historian David Peeler have proposed that Weston's works demonstrate a sense of "disengagement." In addition, Weston's Mexican still life is regarded as being "free" of political and revolutionary rhetoric—meaning that it does not display hammers, sickles or political propaganda like many of his contemporaries' works do. In fact, Weston's biographer Ben Maddow considered Weston's still life to be a "dead end."¹⁰ Thus, there has been a trend in the scholarship of Weston's Mexican works that effaces political undertones. Scholars have recognized Mexican motifs in the works of Weston, however his un-involvement in politics and non-Mexican identity has situated Weston as an outsider, or foreigner visiting Mexico.

An important Mexican exhibition (and accompanying publication) that began to shift views on Weston in Mexico was called *Edward Weston, La Mirada de la Ruptura*.¹¹ The title of the exhibition is a play on the word "rupture" implying that Weston's views ruptured or changed in Mexico. The exhibit explored the exposure Weston had to European art, exhibitions, and leading avant-gardes such as Diego Rivera in Mexico. More specifically it argues that Weston's interest in modern representation along with Mexican themes, clearly aligns Weston with Mexican subject matter, ideas on nationhood, and as a member of the Mexican avant-garde. However, this exhibition does

¹⁰ Ben Maddow, *Edward Weston: Fifty Years*, (Millerton: Aperture, Inc., 1973)

¹¹ Pablo Ortiz Monasterio and Museo Estudio Diego Rivera, *Edward Weston, la mirada de la ruptura: exposición Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, Museo Estudio Diego Rivera, Centro de la Imagen, México, Septiembre-Noviembre 1994*. (Mexico: El Instituto, 1994). The title, *Edward Weston, la mirada de la ruptura* translates to "Edward Weston, the rupture of the gaze." Trans. By Cindy Urrutia

not develop the ways in which Weston participated in expressing Mexican notions of nation, nor does it discuss Weston as creating Mexican themed subject matter that is meaningful to Mexico's artistic expression in the decade he visited that country. In this study I will elaborate and expand on some of the ideas presented in this exhibition by specifically discussing the ways in which Weston engaged with *Mexicanidad* and *Indigenismo*. In addition, I am adding a new viewpoint to the field by proposing that in expressing themes of *Mexicanidad*, Weston's works have an indirect political message of forging nation.

A more recent and important contribution to the field was by Mexican Art Historian Mariana Figarella who published *Edward Weston y Tina Modotti en Mexico: Su insercion dentro de las estrategias esteticas del arte posrevolucionario*¹² Figarella's study is the most in-depth and comprehensive study published on Edward Weston, his time in Mexico, and the art he produced in that country.¹³ Figarella not only discusses Weston's formal aesthetic and maturation in Mexico, but also addresses the ways in which specific Mexican artists influenced Weston and how his art is related to ideas on Mexican national character and identity. While I echo many of Figarella's ideas, I differ from her because I propose that Weston's art forms part of Mexico's Revolutionary aesthetic. In addition, I will contribute to the scholarship on Weston by examining

¹² This title translates to "Edward Weston and Tina Modotti: their insetion within aesthetic strategies of the post-Revolutionary art" Tran. By Cindy Urrutia

¹³ Unfortunately, shortly after Figarella's publication, she passed of cancer. That is part of the reason why Figarella is not well known in the United States. The other reasons are that this was her only major publication, and this book in not available in English.

Weston's insider versus outsider perspectives in terms of their tensions and complexities; rather than utilizing a more popular post-colonial account that Figarella develops.

Edward Weston Biography

Edward Weston was born on March 24, 1886 in Highland Park, Illinois. He came from a family of well-educated and respected community members. His grandfather, Edward Payson Weston was a professor and an administrator at several female academies such as Ferry Hall in Lake Forrest, IL and Highland Hall in Highland Park, IL. Edward Weston's father was Dr. Edward Burbank Weston, a gynecologist and obstetrician who had a practice in Highland Park, IL. In addition to being a physician, Dr. Weston was an archery enthusiast, a breeder of prize-winning poultry¹⁴, and an officer in the local Masonic Lodge.¹⁵

As a child and young adult, Edward Weston led an unhappy life. This was a result of his mother's passing when he was a young boy and his father's remarriage to Minnie D. Randolph. Weston's father's remarriage was very disruptive to Weston,¹⁶ and contributed to the rebellious nature he developed. Weston's dissatisfaction with home life

¹⁴ *Dr. E.B. Weston, Highland Park, Ills, Breeder of Choicest Varieties of Thoroughbred Poultry*, advertising brochure, 1880s, Edward Weston Archive, Center for Creative Photography, Tuscon, AZ

¹⁵ Beth Gates Warren, *Artful Lives: Edward Weston, Margrethe Mather, and the Bohemians of Los Angeles*. (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2011), Note 16, p. 2

¹⁶ Charlis Wilson and Wendy Madar. *Through Another Lens: My Years with Edward Weston* (New York: North Point Press/Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998), p. 39

increased in 1897 when his sister May married and moved out.¹⁷ Weston also had a strong disdain for school. In his personal diaries *Daybooks*, Weston recalls,

Schools, I only remember as dreary wastelands. I cannot believe that I learned anything of value in school, unless it be the will to rebel, to “play hookey” which I have done on numerous occasions since first my days with my camera in the snow-covered Chicago parks: “played hookey” from my first job, from my own business, from my family life—not without some sense of responsibility, but never with the after regrets.¹⁸

Although largely unsatisfied as a child, the turning point for Weston was in 1902 when he received a Kodak Bulls-Eye #2 camera as his sixteenth birthday present from his father. At that time Weston was on vacation, visiting some relatives in Michigan.¹⁹ His happiness over his gift was apparent in his thank you letter to his father.

Dear papa,

Received camera in good shape. It’s dandy...Took a snap at the chickens. I think it’s a good one as I was right near them...It makes me feel bad to think of the fine snaps I could have taken if I had had the Kodak the other day...I suppose I’ll have plenty of chances and I’m going to wait for good subjects.²⁰

The camera and photography became Weston’s solace during his unhappy childhood. He was constantly in pursuit of a “good subject” and according to an interview with Nancy Newhall, Weston attended his first photography salon exhibition at

¹⁷ Gates Warren, *Artful Lives: Edward Weston, Margrethe Mather, and the Bohemians of Los Angeles*. Chapter 2 (Note 26)

¹⁸ Weston, Edward. *The Daybooks of Edward Weston*, Vol. 2 edited by Nancy Newhall, (New York: Aperture Foundation), 1990, p. 235

¹⁹ *ibid*, p. 4

²⁰ Edward Henry Weston, letter to Edward Burbank Weston, August 20, 1902 Edward Weston Archive, Center for Creative Photography, Tucson, AZ

the Art Institute of Chicago. Weston told Newhall that he admired the works of Rudolf Eickemeyer and Louis Fleckenstein.²¹

Despite the joy photography brought to him, Weston became even more rebellious. Shortly after his sister May married, Weston dropped out of high school, left his father's home and moved in with his uncle Theodore Brett (his mother's brother).²² While living with his uncle Theodore, Weston saved money and moved out to California with his sister May. Weston moved to Los Angeles in May of 1906 and immediately began to work as an itinerant photographer, going door-to-door photographing a variety of subjects—from brides to corpses.²³

Through his sister May, Weston was introduced to Flora Chandler, Weston's future wife. Within a year of meeting Flora, Weston began to think about marrying her and having a serious career as a photographer.²⁴ As a result, Weston decided to go to a professional photography school. However, there were not any professional photography schools west of the Mississippi River at the time. Thus, in early 1908 Weston returned to Illinois to attend the Illinois College of Photography in Effingham.²⁵

The college offered a nine-month course that Weston completed in six. Due to his quick study, Weston felt he should not have to pay the full price for the course.

²¹ Edward Weston, responses to questionnaire from Nancy Newhall [late 1940s], Beaumont Newhall and Nancy Newhall Papers

²² Gates Warren, *Artful Lives: Edward Weston, Margrethe Mather, and the Bohemians of Los Angeles*, p. 5

²³ Weston, *Daybooks*, (prologue, note 2), p. xvi

²⁴ *ibid*, p. 9

²⁵ Maddow, Ben. *Edward Weston, His Life*. (New York: Aperture, Revised Edition, 2005) Chap. 1, note 10, p. 67

However, the administrator of the college disagreed with Weston's view, and as a result Weston returned to California without his diploma.²⁶

Although Weston did not have a diploma, he was able to easily find employment with the top photography studios in Los Angeles—those of George Steckle and A. Louis Mojonier. The two studios dominated the Los Angeles Times society and entertainment pages.²⁷ Weston worked for Steckle for a few months and Mojonier until sometime mid 1911.²⁸ When Weston resigned from Mojonier's employment, it was to open his own studio.

Weston opened his studio at 113 North Brand Boulevard, Tropic, CA. Tropic is the modern day city of Glendale. It was a convenient location due to Pacific Electric commuter train connecting to downtown Los Angeles (6 mile trip), and its access to the San Gabriel and San Fernando Valleys. At his studio, Edward Henry Weston Photographs, Weston made a living out of commercial portraiture—with a focus on children.

Pictorialism was the dominant style of photography at the time in Los Angeles and a large part of the United States. For that reason Weston utilized Pictorialism as a commercial photographer, and in his creative endeavors. Weston fully committed himself

²⁶ Charlis Wilson and Wendy Madar. *Through Another Lens: My Years with Edward Weston* (New York: North Point Press/Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998), Chap 1, Note 25, pp. 41-42

²⁷ Gates Warren, Beth, *Artful Lives: Edward Weston, Margrethe Mather, and the Bohemians of Los Angeles*, p. 10

²⁸ *ibid*

to photography and believed that if Velásquez were alive, “he would assuredly use a camera, and be a great photographer.”²⁹

Although Weston was working as a Pictorialist, he began to break from his repertoire with *Carlota*, 1917, because it was neither a child’s portrait, nor a typical genre scene. Instead, *Carlota* is a “character portrait,” in which Margrethe Mather, the person Weston considered to be “the first important person in my life,”³⁰ posed as the wife to Emperor Maximilian of Mexico.

Although, *Carlota* utilizes many of the lighting elements associated with Pictorialism, there is a shift. According to Sarah Lowe and Beth Gates Warren, the photograph suggests new possibilities for Weston’s work as a result of its historical exotic setting.³¹ *Carlota* was a tragic figure whose husband Emperor Maximilian was shot to death in a court martial (in late nineteenth century Mexico); and may be viewed as a representative of Mexican instability as a result of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) that was ensuing when the photograph was taken. At the time, Angelinos were becoming

²⁹ Edward Weston, “Photography 1926,” in Peter C. Bunnell, ed., *Edward Weston on Photography* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs M. Smith, Peregrine Smith Books, 1983), P. 45

³⁰ Weston, *The Daybooks of Edward Weston*, Vol., p. 145

Margrethe Mather was a photographer who Edward Weston met in 1913. Mather and Weston were lovers and worked together until 1923. Mather is often regarded as an enigmatic figure who associated with the political left, bohemians and anarchists of San Francisco and Los Angeles. She was known to have been a prostitute and have bisexual affairs. Initially Mather worked in a Pictorialist Style, but soon moved away from it as she began to explore abstraction along side Weston. It was through Mather that Weston met the majority of his leftist associates, joined the Friday Morning Club, and interacted with figures such as Max Eastman, Charlie Chaplin, Emma Goldman to name a few. Weston and Mather also jointly signed late teens and early 1920s photographs. According to mutual friend Imogen Cunningham, it is difficult to parlay who photographed specific images, and that Mather often directed Weston’s eye. When Weston’s relationship with Mather shattered, Weston destroyed a substantial number of his diaries and papers that referenced her. For additional information on Weston and his relationship to Mather, see Beth Gates Warren *Margrethe Mather & Edward Weston: A Passionate Engagement*.

³¹ See Sarah Lowe *Edward Weston and Life Work*, p. 23 and Beth Gates Warren *Margrethe Mather & Edward Weston: A Passionate Engagement*.

increasingly aware of Mexican politics and its revolution because it threatened to infringe on American soil.³² While *Carlota* was a single photograph, it may provide a link to Weston's Mexican portraits because one sees via *Carlota*, and Weston's later Mexican portraits, an interest in characters, history and narratives.

Carlota won multiple prizes: the Grand Prize for the best group of photographs submitted to the Northwest Photographers' Convention in Saint Paul, Minnesota;³³ won a bronze medal at the Toronto Camera Club Salon;³⁴ and a first prize at the annual Photographers' Association of American convention in Atlanta.³⁵ It received the most recognition for technique by Bertram Park, Honorary Secretary of the London Salon of Photography of 1917.

As a result of his mastery of technique and prize-winning photographs, Weston published several articles on photographic techniques.³⁶ By 1920, "his work had been

³² The Los Angeles Times published an article on the Mexican Revolutionary War several times a week (there were times on a daily basis). The war was consistently and considerably covered. The following articles are highlights of some main events that occurred during the Mexican Revolutionary War. It seems highly unlikely that Angelinos, Weston included would be unaware of the war happening in Mexico. "Madero's Outbreak Planned While Upon American Soil," *Los Angeles Times*, November 24, 1910; "Warrant Out for Madero," *Los Angeles Times*, February 14, 1911; "Coalition of Rebels," *Los Angeles Times*, February 12, 1912; "Three Cruisers and Two Submarines Are Sunk," *Los Angeles Times*, September 23, 1914—the U.S. had sent ships to Mexico as stated in the body of this paper; "Wilson's Mexican Policy is Praised," *Los Angeles Times*, January 31, 1917; "Caranza Would Break with Germany if America Aids Mexico," *Los Angeles Times*, May 26, 1917; "Obregon May be Winner," *Los Angeles Times*, September 6, 1920

³³ "Notes and News," AP, January 1915, p. 55; "Notes and Comment: Illinois College of Photography," CC, March 1915, p. 131

³⁴ "Society News," AP, July 1914, p. 473; "Toronto Camera Club," PE, July 1914, p. 47; "Edward H. Weston," *Glendale News* [autumn 1914], p. 41 newspaper clipping Edward Weston biographical file, Glendale Public Library

³⁵ "Notes from the Illinois College of Photography," CC, July 1914, p. 360; "With the Camera," AP, August 1914, p. 543; "Edward Weston" (note 19)

³⁶ See Peter Bunnell, *Edward Weston: On Photography*, (Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith Publishers: Layton, UT, 1985), pp. 1-24.

exhibited in over forty venues, including a handful of solo shows.”³⁷ Weston had also made a name for himself in Los Angeles. However, that was not enough. Weston wanted fame *à-la* Alfred Stieglitz and to produce innovative works of art that utilized modern techniques.

Alfred Stieglitz is known for his contributions to photography, publications such as *Camera Work*, and his preference for modernism rooted in expressive abstraction. Stieglitz grew up during the Progressive Era and as a young adult ideologically committed himself to the “politics of modernism and to a renaissance in the nation’s arts and letters.”³⁸ He is also associated with a loyal and small group (Stieglitz Circle) of artist that focused on “native” or homegrown art. The focus was on three main themes: “American past,” “soil,” and “spirit.” In addition, Alfred Stieglitz was a leading figure of U.S. cultural nationalism.

Cultural nationalism was strong in the United States and Mexico during the 1920s. In the United States, art and literary figures espoused cultural nationalism as a belief in “cultural forms as uniquely expressive of the nation—its democratic heritage, and its freedom to forge a new language attuned to contemporary realities, without the restrictions of traditions and conventions.”³⁹ In Mexico, Weston found a similar rhetoric of cultural nationalism, and engaged with it. However, in Mexico, cultural nationalism was imbued with a revolutionary aesthetic.

³⁷ Sarah M. Lowe, and Dody Weston Thompson, *Edward Weston Life Work*, (Revere, PA: Lodima Press, 2005), p. 22

³⁸ Wanda Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1999), pg. 4

³⁹ Angela L Miller, Janet C. Berlo, Brian J. Wolfe and et al. *American Encounters*, (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2008), p. 402

Life and Photography Before Mexico

Edward Weston's political views, particularly with respect to Mexico have often been ambivalent at best. He never made a clear political statement denoting his political affiliations, or beliefs. The reasons for keeping his political views quiet are unclear but it has been suggested it may have been to protect his family. And yet, given his social circle, one does have to wonder if he was truly apolitical, or if he did in fact have leftist tendencies as did many American artists at that time in the United States, and the majority of the artists that participated in the Mexican Renaissance. Perhaps a more accurate way to view Weston's politics is that of indifference to overt activism that elides a political stance.⁴⁰

A clear and concise argument on what exactly were Weston's politics is difficult to parlay. Nonetheless, I would like to suggest that based on the people with whom Weston associated while in Mexico, as well as in Los Angeles pre-Mexico, that it is highly probable that he was in fact sympathetic to the left, even if he was indifferent to overt political activism. Thus, I would like to propose that leftist "sympathies" (using the term loosely), would further align Weston's works with the revolutionary inclinations of the Mexican avant-garde. In making this case, let's focus our attention to Weston's connections in Los Angeles, pre-Mexico. During the 1910s and early 1920s, many of the people with whom Weston associated, and often photographed were anarchists, hobos,

⁴⁰ Bert Winther-Tamaki has suggested that be 'apolitical' in and of itself implies a political stance. Notes to Cindy Urrutia, January 29, 2015 by Winther-Tamaki.

silent movie actors and muckrakers.⁴¹ Moreover, Weston was not working in the West coast in isolation, but was:

part of a circle of avant-garde personalities who sought each other out for companionship and encouragement, and whose sphere of influence encompassed such far-flung locales as New York City's Greenwich Village, Cape Cod's Provincetown, and Chicago's Hyde Park, as well as the small, but rigorous artistic community that existed in Los Angeles.⁴²

The question at hand then is; *who were the 'personalities' with whom Weston associated?* Some of the better known 'personalities' are: Emma Goldman, Charlie Chaplin, Carl Sandberg, Sadakichi S. Hartmann, Max Eastman, and John Haydenmeyer to name a few. In addition, Weston interacted with people associated with the publications *Little Review*, *The Masses*, and *Mother Earth*. Weston met many of the above individuals through his association with Magarethe Mather, and his membership in the Friday Morning Club.

Suffragist and abolitionist Caroline Severance founded the Friday Morning Club in 1891. Severance was originally a transplant from the East Coast and co-founder of the first women's club in the United States called the New England Woman's Club (1868) and co-founder of the American Woman Suffrage Association (1869). Severance was a leftist. According to Clark Davis:

The Friday Morning Club and similar organizations around the country, in fact, stood in the center sphere of progressive era civic culture...by the early 1920s the Friday Morning Club (FMC), had become the largest member within the nation's General Federation of Women's Clubs...Political and cultural dignitaries visiting Southern California almost invariably appeared there and spoke to its members,

⁴¹ Gates Warren, *Artful Lives: Edward Weston, Margrethe Mather, and the Bohemians of Los Angele*, p. vii

⁴² *ibid*

who comprised a “who’s who” of the regions prominent women reformers, artists, philanthropists, professionals and business leaders.⁴³

Warren Gates has suggested that Edward Weston most likely joined the Friday Morning Club because of the “companionship and intellectual stimulation it offered.”

Moreover,

his commitment to such a politically charged organization, particularly at a time when it was extremely risky to declare such alliances, is surprising. He had already demonstrated his concern about openly associating with those likely to attract the unwanted attention of the Justice Department, and most certainly many of the Club’s members fell squarely into that category.⁴⁴

Not only was Weston a member of the Friday Morning Club, but he also exhibited there on numerous occasions, and obtained sittings from people he met through the Club such as Sadakichi Hartmann and Max Eastman. Thus, while it is believed by the field Weston was ‘apolitical,’ there is a trend of friendships and associations that lean towards the left. If not a leftist, Weston was certainly not opposed to its ideals. In a retrospective his daughter-in-law, Dody Weston Thompson, described Weston as:

His politics were humanitarian and liberal but not extreme. He may have been swayed by the more militant and pro-labor attitude of his witty, trenchant wife Charis towards the end of his life; and the mistress with whom he went off to Mexico in 1923, the voluptuous and dashing Tina Modotti...but one had the feeling not much of this rubbed off on Edward...If anything...he was always apolitical, I always felt.⁴⁵

Certainly, his daughter-in-law would know Weston well. However, his associations, particularly in the 1910s and 1920s were far from moderate.

⁴³ Clark Davis, “An Era and Generation of Civic Engagement: The Friday Morning Club in Los Angeles, 1891-1931.” *Southern California Quarterly*, Vol. 84, No. 2 (Summer 2002), pp. 135-168 Publisher(s): University of California Press on behalf of the Historical Society of Southern California, pp. 135-137

⁴⁴Gates Warren, Beth, *Artful Lives: Edward Weston, Margrethe Mather, and the Bohemians of Los Angeles*, p. 158

⁴⁵ Published in *The Malhat Review*, April 1970, p. 48

Most scholars disconnect Weston 1910s and early 1920s friendships because there is little written on Weston's early life, career and associations. This is partly because the record on Weston's early life is difficult to piece together.⁴⁶ Weston destroyed all of his personal diaries from the 1910s and early 1920s after his relationship to Margrethe Mather, who was his business associate and mistress ended. Another important issue to note is that in United States there was a shift in political ideology, particularly after the 1940s towards the right. However, it should be noted that although Weston was not politically vocal, he *did* believe in liberal politics and voted for Franklin D. Roosevelt in all four presidential elections. In a letter to Jean Charlot, Weston wrote that he was saddened by Roosevelt's passing.⁴⁷

With the above in mind, I am not suggesting that Weston was a leftist, but rather he did have a proclivity associating with the left and was perhaps more supportive to its cause than has been previously believed. In addition, one can infer that Weston admired and was sympathetic to the Mexican avant-garde through his personal diaries, where he writes about the parties he and Tina Modotti had [in Mexico City], and their communist friends that attended them.⁴⁸ It may have been with age or in certain social settings that he became more politically indifferent. Further, Weston was well aware of the political

⁴⁶ Beth Warren Gates' recent publication *Artful Lives: Edward Weston, Margrethe Mather, and the Bohemians of Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2011) has shed new light into Weston's early life and career. It discusses Weston's associations, friendships, activities and art. It focuses also focuses on Weston's and Mather's relationship, as well as art. Warren Gates' study is most comprehensive and biographical investigation of Weston, pre-Mexico.

⁴⁷ Weston Letter to Charlot, 1945 in Lew Andrew's *Weston and Charlot: Art and Friendship*, (University of Nebraska Press, 2011) In this book, Andrew's documents that letters Charlot and Weston exchanged from the 1920s to Weston's death in 1958

⁴⁸ Weston, *The Daybooks of Edward Weston*, Vol. 1

happenings in Mexico prior to him leaving for that country. He was neither naïve, nor uneducated on the matter.

PAUL STRAND'S TIME IN MEXICO DURING THE 1930S

Like Weston, Paul Strand's Mexican (1932-1934) works fit in with the revolutionary art and aesthetics being expressed during his time in Mexico. However, unlike Weston, Strand's works correlate specifically to politics of the 1930s and the political mobilization of the Indian. While in Mexico, Strand was employed by the Mexican government and held multiple posts, from art teacher to Director of Film and Photography with the Secretariat of Education (SEP). Many of Strand's views on politics paralleled those of the SEP. As a result, Strand's works are more politically charged than those of Weston. Like Weston, Strand was deeply transformed by his experience in Mexico. Prior to Mexico, Strand had already developed a modern aesthetic; however, in Mexico Strand's art moved him more towards the political left where he fused modern art with a social vision.

Once Strand began to work in Mexico, his alliance to that country's political ideologies became evident. Strand's shift towards a political esthetic is seen in his two major Mexican endeavors: *Redes* (The Wave),⁴⁹ a politically oriented film, and his portfolio *Photographs of Mexico* later, renamed *The Mexican Portfolio*. *Redes* is an educational film funded by the Mexican Secretariat of Education, whose audience was Mexico's rural poor peasants and Indians. The film was a critique of the prevailing

⁴⁹ *Redes* directly translate to nets (meaning the nets fisherman use) from Spanish to English. However, when the film was released in the United States, the title *Redes* was given in English was *The Wave*. The title *The Wave* is a reference to the imagery of the ocean and the turbulent waves at the end of the end.

corruption among Mexico's *hacendados*⁵⁰ and their exploitation of the proletariat and peasant classes. It is about a fisherman and his village that unite against a tyrannical landlord or *hacendado*.

Strand's *Photographs of Mexico* is a portfolio of twenty photographs taken while in Mexico. *Photographs of Mexico* consists of portraits, *bultos*⁵¹ and architecture. It shows a concern for quotidian life, the present conditions of the common folk, and themes of national identity circulating among artistic circles at the time. *Photographs of Mexico* was first printed in 1940 and reissued in 1967 under its new name *The Mexican Portfolio* that include the photographs from *Photographs of Mexico* some from Strand's second trip of Mexico in 1966. In fact, the introduction to Strand's *Mexican Portfolio* of 1967 was written by David A. Siqueiros—who called Strand an “American-Mexican.”

This was strong compliment from Siqueiros and is indicative of how well received the *Photographs of Mexico* and *The Mexican Portfolio* were at that time. Since their original publication, the portfolios have received strong critical acclaim in Mexico and the United States. *Photographs of Mexico* became the model for later portfolios that focused on places ranging from New England to Ghana by Strand in the 1950s and 1960s.

Photographs of Mexico does not contain all of Strand's Mexican photography. Its format was not designed until six years after Strand's returned to the United States from Mexico. In addition, Strand's *Photographs of Mexico* is very particular in nature—its

⁵⁰ *Hacendados* usually refers to those of the upper classes with political and economic clout. *Hacendados* were also landowners.

⁵¹ *Bultos* refer to religious sculptures of Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, virgins, saints and other religious figures

photographs were taken in rural areas, and efface traces of urban Mexico. It is unclear why Strand only chose to focus on rural Indians, and not Mexican modernity. It may have been in part due to his posts with the SEP that required Strand to be in rural areas. However, we do know from the record that prior to Mexico, Strand had a specific interest in the Indian.

Politically and aesthetically Strand was in line with his Mexican peers, however, his vision of Mexico is limited to Indians in rural areas. Thus, like Weston, Strand's images are complicated by his role as both an insider and outsider. Strand is an insider due to his status as a Mexican employee and member of the avant-garde, but an outsider with a restricted vision of Mexico that romanticized the rural Indian. Strand's outsider status is also evident through the distance he maintains from Indians. Strand did not ask Indians for permission to photograph them. Rather, he chose to photograph Indians without their knowledge through the use of the right prism angle in his camera.

Scholarship on Strand

Paul Strand, as a pivotal figure of modern photography, has been of considerable interest to scholars. The majority of the writings on Paul Strand have focused on his early works and his experiments with modern aesthetics (teens through 1932), and his mature works (post Mexico). Strand's time in Mexico has also been an area of interest, but not to the extent of other phases in his career. Nonetheless, Strand's time in Mexico has been documented and written about. The leading voices on Paul Strand's time in Mexico have

been Elisabeth McCausland, Nancy Newhall, Naomi Rosenblum, Katherine Ware, David Peeler, John Mraz, and most recently James Krippner.

One of the first people to write about Strand in Mexico was Elisabeth McCausland in 1940 in relation to Strand's *Photographs of Mexico*. According to McCausland, Strand's time in Mexico concluded a humanist cycle that he began twenty years earlier with his street photography of New York City. McCausland discusses Strand's photographs as a window onto the essence of what it meant to be Mexican, from a history of hardship, to endurance. Since McCausland was the first person to give significant attention to Strand's Mexican works, the writings of later members of the field echo McCausland's. Although McCausland's views on Strand have been fundamental to the field, I would like to propose that scholarship on Strand and Mexico has taken for granted that Strand was *not* demonstrating a "window onto the essence of what it means to be Mexican." McCausland presumes that Strand was presenting Indians as indicative of Mexican-ness with objectivity, while in fact the idea of Indians as representing Mexican-ness was an ideological construction espoused by the leadership of post-Revolutionary Mexico and by Strand.

Within the field other themes related to Strand's time in Mexico have developed. According to Nancy Newhall, in Mexico Strand dignified Indians and was able to focus on his need for social observation. Additionally, it has been noted by Naomi Rosenblum that Mexico was critical to Strand's development because it is there where he began to have a deeper appreciation of the social structures that governed people's lives.

Rosenblum also argues that in Mexico Strand found a way to express quotidian life. The theme of expressing quotidian life has also interested other members of the field and has been used as a springboard to deepen our understanding of Strand. For example, one of the most relevant contributions to the field has been from scholar Katherine Ware, who states that in Mexico Strand broke new ground through his combined use of early experimentation with formalism, and his interest in dignifying the human experience. In addition, for Ware Mexico was not an end point (as opposed to McCausland), but the beginning of a new cycle that was a prototype for future portfolios of the 1950s and 1960s

The most current scholarship on Strand argues that in Mexico, Strand showed concern for economic and social forces rather than the metaphysical, and that Strand absorbed the ideas of the people he worked with. In addition, Strand's most recent scholar, James Krippner discusses Strand as creating a visual record of Mexico and its character, while furthering its revolutionary transformation. Krippner also states that Strand was demonstrating instances of national identity. The issue of national identity is an important tenet of this essay. However, I approach national identity or *Mexicanidad* from a different vantage point than Krippner because I aim to be inclusive of the specific political nuances of the time, rather than a more general description of Mexican revolutionary themes in politics that Krippner provides. In addition, unlike Krippner and Ware, I take into account Strand's increasing leftist politics and the ways in which Strand's views echoed those of the SEP. I also discuss him as being an active member of the Mexico's avant-garde, and not just a foreigner. Moreover, I believe that in Mexico,

Strand was transformed by his experience in that country aesthetically and politically as he became more and more concerned with the ‘human situation’ and saw communism as the answer to a more just society.

Paul Strand Bibliography

Paul Strand was born in New York City in 1890 to a prosperous, secular middle class Jewish family of bohemian descent. The original family name was Stransky, however, Paul’s father Jacob changed the family name to Strand shortly before Paul was born.⁵² Paul Strand grew up in a brownstone in New York City’s upper West Side.⁵³ The household was comprised of Strand’s parents, his maternal grandmother (Catherine Arnstein), and an unmarried aunt (Aunt Frances).⁵⁴

Strand enjoyed an economically comfortable childhood and was sent to study at the Ethical Culture School where he was exposed to photography and ethics as a student. What was significant about the school was its philosophy, which I believe may have to an extent, impacted Paul Strand’s interest in the ‘human situation’ that became more pronounced when he traveled to Mexico.

During his tenure at the Ethical Culture School, Strand took an extracurricular photography class taught by Lewis W. Hine. Hine took his students, including Strand, to Alfred Stieglitz’s Little Galleries of the Photo-Secessionists⁵⁵ at 291 Fifth Avenue where

⁵² *Paul Strand: Sixty Years of Photography*. (New York: Aperture, 1976), p. 16

⁵³ Nancy Newhall, *Paul Strand: 1915-1945*. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1945), p. 3

⁵⁴ *Paul Strand: Sixty Years of Photography*, p. 16

⁵⁵ The Photo Sessions were a group of photographers organized around Alfred Stieglitz in 1902 that promoted photography as an art form. Most of the Photo Secessionists worked under the Pictorialist Style. Leading members of the group included Alfred Stieglitz, Gertrude Käsebier, Edward Steichen, Clarence H. White and Joseph Kelly among others.

Strand was introduced to the works of photographers such as Clarence White, Gertrude Käsebier, Frank Eugene and Alfred Stieglitz. On that day, at seventeen years old, Strand decided that no matter what he had to do to support himself, he would become an artist of photography.⁵⁶

Upon graduation Strand worked for his father for about a year. When his father's company was bought out in 1911, Strand used his savings to travel to Europe for six weeks—visiting as many museums and monuments as possible. On his return, he began to work for an insurance firm, but quit shortly after, deciding to go into “business for himself as a professional photographer.”⁵⁷

Strand joined the Camera Club of New York and used its darkroom as a portrait studio. In the beginning Strand worked a great deal with portraiture. He also travelled throughout the country working as a commercial photographer. He took photographs of colleges that he would hand tint and sell to students.⁵⁸ During this time, Strand's vision sharpened and he began to develop his style. Although he was working within the rubric of Pictorialism, Strand was always experimenting, particularly with diffused light, as he worked his way through the current trends of gum-prints, soft-focus lenses, carbon prints and manipulations that were esteemed for their “artistic” effect.⁵⁹

Wanting genuine criticism, Strand began to visit Alfred Stieglitz whenever he felt that his works were improving, even though he felt that Stieglitz “terrified everyone, me

⁵⁶ *Paul Strand: Sixty Years of Photography*, p. 18

⁵⁷ *ibid*

⁵⁸ *Paul Strand: Sixty Years of Photography*, p. 18

⁵⁹ Newhall, *Paul Strand: 1915-1945*, p. 3

included.”⁶⁰ Stieglitz soon became a major influence and guide for Paul Strand, aesthetically as well as socially. Stieglitz was a crucial figure in American photography and modernism because he rejected elements of society he felt hindered American culture, promoted American cultural modernism, and acted as a guide to many artists that held his viewpoint.⁶¹ In addition, Stieglitz promoted a specific vision of American modernism⁶² rooted in themes of a “usable past” and things he felt were culturally relevant. Moreover, the artists he supported sought to create an American modernism that was on par with their European counterparts culturally and aesthetically.⁶³

As we begin to think about Strand’s time in Mexico, I would like to suggest that whether conscious, or not, Strand’s interest in Mexican culture, through the Indian, demonstrates a search for something authentically Mexican and culturally relevant. While Mexican cultural nationalism is different than that of the U.S., there is a shared attitude of looking inward to things that they felt represent a sense of national authenticity and culture.

⁶⁰ *ibid*

⁶¹ Corn, *The Great American Thing; Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935*. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1999), p. 4
According to Wanda Corn, Boosters are often regarded un-provincial and unpolished men and women who “blindly believed in American made products, xxx finish writing and then say the promote each other pg. 38

⁶² American modernism is a bit of loose and problematic term since there were multiple movements occurring simultaneously at the time, particularly in New York. For examples, there were the Dadaists who were a separate group from the artists that associated with Alfred Stieglitz. They both contained elements of modernism (from abstraction to the rejection of the old guard), but approach art in different ways. This essay is not concerned with the various modern movements occurring in New York at the time, but with what is relevant to Strand and his molding as an artist.

⁶³ It should be noted that the American avant-garde did not reject European modernism. In fact they recognized their debt to it. However they wished to be freed from being considered provincial and backward—under the shadow of great European Art.

A turning point for Strand was “the great Armory Show of 1913.” According to Strand, his artistic development was influenced by the “new controversial developments in painting, Picasso, Braque, Matisse...”⁶⁴ Initially, Strand found the artists puzzling. In order to try to make sense of them, Strand began to experiment with abstraction by taking close ups of things such as patterns of shadows on a front porch and close ups of pottery. This helped him to understand how shapes are related to one another, what a picture consists of, and how space is filled, while creating a sense of unity.⁶⁵

Strand recalls that around 1914,

Sheeler and I were aware we were beginning to experiment with abstraction. We all talked the same language—Sheeler, Schamberg, Stieglitz. It had to do with understanding a painting like a Villon or a Braque—in which there is an enormous amount of movement and no recognizable content as a whole. You have to go into the picture; it has to have three-dimensional movement...⁶⁶

As he began to understand the above artists’ need to re-examine reality as a search for “elements—form, line, tone rhythm,”⁶⁷ Strand soon began to find structural sense in Picasso and artists like El Greco. This led Strand to turn from the pictorial style of the Photo-Sessionsists and instead concentrate on his ideas and feelings about New York City.⁶⁸ During an interview, Strand stated,

Soft focus is something that weakens a picture, although it gives the photographer an easy way of simplifying reality. I started with a soft-focus lens, and Stieglitz was very helpful in showing me that I was destroying the individual quality of life

⁶⁴ See, Paul Strand, “What was 291?” October 1917, unpublished manuscript, Center For Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Tucson and Paul Strand, “Photography to Me.” p. 44

⁶⁵ *Paul Strand: Sixty Years of Photography*, p. 18

⁶⁶ Paul Strand, Conversation with Naomi Rosenblum, July 2, 1975

⁶⁷ *Paul Strand: 1915-1945*, p. 4

⁶⁸ Paul Strand Interview, Philadelphia, 1971

of things that I was photographing. It made grass lose its quality of grass, water lose its quality of water. So I stopped my soft-focus lens? to f/22 to get as much sharpness out of the lens as I could.

I used to wander around New York City, all over it: the Bowery, Wall Street, uptown, the viaduct that leads to Grant's Tomb. I could see everything, but to be able to do something with it, that's another matter! I was not ready until 1915. Before that I was groping, trying to feel my way. I would ask myself, what do Picasso and those other painters mean?⁶⁹

The years 1913-1917⁷⁰ were key to Strand developing a succinct style that he could qualify as his own. Moreover, his association with Alfred Stieglitz, 291,⁷¹ and artists connected with the Modern Gallery such as Marius De Zayas, Charles Sheeler, Morton Schamberg, Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia further spurred his interest in abstraction, particularly cubism and the modern day machine.⁷²

According to Strand, "In 1915, I really became a photographer... Suddenly there came that strange leap into greater knowledge and sureness..."⁷³ That is when he began working with movement—particularly New York traffic seen from above, "the hurt, eroded people in the streets, seen close and unawares; common objects such as bowls and fences seen as forms and rhythms."⁷⁴ Strand had three main aesthetic concerns at the

⁶⁹ Paul Strand, Interviewed by Lou Stettner, 1972

⁷⁰ The reason I am specifying these years is because from 1915-1917 Paul Strand broke with convention. In 1915 one finds Strand experimenting with abstraction and breaking with Pictorialism. In 1916 he photographs candid portraits of individuals in the streets of New York with a right angle prism so that his subjects are unaware. By 1917 he is integrating abstraction with his interest in machinery as seen in *Wheel Organization* 1917. Strand's style and polemics became known as straight photography, meaning that it did not incorporate a soft focus lens or any of the light diffusing tricks Pictorialists used.

⁷¹ 291 was originally known as the "Little Galleries of the Photo-Sessions." It was created and managed Alfred Stieglitz. "291" derives from its address, 291 Fifth Avenue in New York City.

⁷² Rosenblum, Naomi, "The Early Years." in *Paul Strand Essays on His Life and Work*, edited by Stange, Maren (New York: Aperture, 1990), pp. 36-37

⁷³ Paul Strand, "Photography to me." *Minicam Photography*, May 1945

⁷⁴ Newhall, Nancy and Beaumont Newhall. *Masters of Photography*, (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1958), p. 102

time: 1) experimenting with purely abstract forms; 2) photographing movement; and 3) photographing people without them being aware of it.⁷⁵

When Strand took his new body of work to Stieglitz in 1915, Strand recalls that Stieglitz was surprised at the new direction he had taken. He was particularly moved by *Wall Street*, 1915⁷⁶ and told him (in reference to 291), “This is your place. You belong here. Come whenever you want.”⁷⁷ In addition to inviting him to be a part of 291, Stieglitz gave Strand his first one man show at 291 titled, “Photographs of New York and Other Places,” from March 13-28, 1916. *Wall Street* was a catalyst in the sense that with it he was able to find a way in which to “integrate such geometric shapes into a seamless statement expressive of the tenor of urban life.”⁷⁸

Strand’s new formal approach to subject matter brought him accolades and secured him a place among American moderns. Strand’s works from “Photographs of New York and Other Places” were coined ‘straight’ photography and deemed significant in terms of subject matter and aesthetics. According to Charles H. Chaffin, the exhibit’s photographs,

...are known as “straight” photographs, done by the platinum process. There has been no tampering with the negative nor have any alterations been made at any part of the process...It is significant that they should be exhibited just at the

⁷⁵ Paul Strand, transcript of interview with Milton Brown, November, 1971 for the Archives of American Art, The Smithsonian Institution, pp. 1-6

⁷⁶ Some publications on Strand have dated *Wall Street* to 1916, and others to 1915. The correct date is 1915

⁷⁷ Strand, “Photography to me” *Minicam Photography*, May 1945

⁷⁸ Rosenblum, Naomi, “The Early Years.” in *Paul Strand Essays on His Life and Work*, edited by Stange, Maren (New York: Aperture, 1990), p. 37

present moment when the comparative methods of objective and abstract art are occupying so many minds...⁷⁹

In addition to having a successful first exhibit, Stieglitz also published Strand's photographs in *Camera Work*⁸⁰, and dedicated the final issue of *Camera Work*, 49-50, 1917 to Strand's works.⁸¹ In the final issue of *Camera Work*, Stieglitz wrote of Strand:

His work is rooted in the best traditions of photography. His vision is potential. His work is pure. It is direct. It does not rely upon tricks of process. In whatever he does, there is applied intelligence... The man [Strand] has actually done something from within. The photographer who has added something to what has gone before. The work is brutally direct... These photographs are a direct expression of today.⁸²

Blind Woman is indicative of the type of straight photography Strand was creating at the time. *Blind Woman* and other street portraits are also a stark departure from what Strand considered the artificiality of Pictorialism—from its sentimentality to its posed scenes.⁸³ What is particularly relevant about *Blind Woman* for this study is that with it, one sees a development in Strand that parlays more than formal aesthetics and techniques; it is inclusive of social commentary. In Mexico Strand further explores this relationship as he fused modern aesthetics, social relevance and material culture.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ Charles H. Caffin, "Paul Strand in 'Straight' Photos," *New York American*, 1916. Paul Strand also received a very good review from Royal Cortissoz in the *New York Tribune*, where he wrote that Strand had, "a good sense of composition and the faculty for seeing possibilities of beauty in the most common place objects and places."

⁸⁰ *Camera Work* was a photographic journal published quarterly by Alfred Stieglitz from 1903 to 1917. Its purpose was to promote photography as a fine art. *Camera Work* published article on technique as well aesthetics, leading photographers and high quality photogravures.

⁸¹ *Camera Work* ceased to publish due to financial issues.

⁸² Alfred Stieglitz, "Our Illustrations." *Camera Work*, No. 49-50, June 1917, p. 36

⁸³ Palmer, Daniel. "IN NAKED REPOSES: the face of candid portrait photography." *Angelaki Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*. Vol. 16, No. 1, March 2011, p. 113

⁸⁴ Strand's work's of the late teens seem to have elements of Hine, the ideas Stieglitz espoused, and his own experiments and polemic vision of the world. Also, while Strand travelled within the Lyrical left and

However, Strand's esthetic in Mexico is also largely indebted his experiments, and time spent in the Northeast and New Mexico. In addition, Strand was also interested in film. He collaborated with Charles Sheeler in the film project *Manhatta*; and worked in various capacities in the film and entertainment industry during the 1920s in New York.

Young Americas, by the 1920s, he begins to be less bound by their spiritual and romantic vision—instead one finds that Strand maintains interest in the “Left” and is socially concerned, but begins to incorporate a more materialism into his aesthetics. Strand's interest in the material sets him apart from Stieglitz, despite Stieglitz's influence. In fact, their relationship begins to be troubled by the late 1920s. For more information on Strand and materialism, See David Peelers, essay “Materialism,” in *The Illuminating Mind in American Photography*, (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2001), p. 106

SOCIO HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF MEXICAN REVOLUTIONARY WAR

Pre-Revolutionary Mexico is often discussed as the ‘Porfiriato’ and it was governed by the dictator Porfirio Díaz between 1876 until his overthrow in 1911. During his thirty-five year reign as dictator, Díaz’s regime was “marked by a concentrated effort to push Mexico into the twentieth century. To this end, he encouraged massive foreign investment in Mexico.”⁸⁵ The regime highly favored elite white landowners and their encroachment of free “unused” land to increase crop or product production. This led to mass dispossession of lands and the rights of rural populous, and villages being swallowed.

As a result, in many parts of Mexico the hacienda became the only source of arable land or employment. By 1910, roughly half of rural Mexicans were reckoned to live or labor on the haciendas...many villagers became renters, sharecroppers, or seasonal day laborers on the estate, subject to the terms set by the landlord...The estate’s *peones*⁸⁶ would receive a meager wage, along a small plot and a roof over their heads, in exchange for their labor, personal services, and loyalty to the landlord. In some cases they were paid in scrip rather than cash, which had to be spent on goods sold at the *tienda de raya*, the landlords’ monopolistic “company store.” Corporal punishment, including whippings, was also not uncommon, but the most feared punishment was to be evicted from the *hacienda* entirely. Meanwhile, landlords would frequently make a show of their paternalism, giving out articles of clothing and candy when they arrived at their estates...The life of the resident *peon* was far from comfortable, but it was assumed that if they remained under the landlord’s protection, at least their families would not starve.”⁸⁷

By 1911 the United States was the largest investor in Mexico (William Randolph Hearst owned an estate of 350,000 hectares and the Richardson Construction Company of

⁸⁵ Rochfort, *Mexican Muralists: Orozco, Rivera, Siqueiros*, p. 11

⁸⁶ A *peon* is normally regarded as an unskilled laborer or a farm worker, particularly in Mexico

⁸⁷ Stuart Easterling, “Mexico’s Revolution 1910-1920” *International Socialist Review*, Issue #74

Los Angeles owned 547,000 hectares), and in the same year Mexico was the world's third largest producer of oil.⁸⁸ Under the Díaz regime, Mexico experienced incredible and unprecedented economic growth through the building of railroads, the solidification of the hacienda system, modernization, increased exports, and a rise in the middle class.

Díaz and his advisors considered themselves to be positivists who meant to “extricate Mexico from the poverty and backwardness of its past.”⁸⁹ However, the problem, or flaw in the regime's approach was that it favored the white Mexican and foreigner over Mexico's predominant *mestizo* and Indian population. More specifically, they favored elite white Mexican landowners.

While the middle class did grow and the country experienced a massive economic boom, the disparity between the ‘have’ and ‘have nots’ widened—there was little room for social mobility in the truest sense of the word. The middle class was shut out from entering the upper echelons and the *campesino*⁹⁰ became ever increasingly dependent on the landowners.

Other important factors leading to the outbreak Revolution was: the exclusion of the middle class in terms of political privilege; limited economic growth; and heavy taxation. The middle classes' exclusion from the economic growth of the Díaz regime was largely political in nature. Historian Stuart Easterling notes that those that were well connected fared better than those that were not: “In any legal dispute, for example, judges could invariably be expected to issue a decision that benefited the nephew of a

⁸⁸ Easterling, “Mexico's Revolution 1910-1920” *International Socialist Review*, Issue #74

⁸⁹ *ibid*

⁹⁰ A *campesino* is a Mexico peasant living in rural land.

government minister, or the cousin of a state senator, or the son of a municipal president. Indeed, merely challenging such influential people could land you in jail.”⁹¹ Political power was highly centralized; its officers often handpicked, and more often than not power lay in the hands of the white Mexican elite.

Consequentially, white Mexican landlords rarely paid taxes. Moreover, political connections went hand-in-hand with evading taxes. The result of the Díaz political and economic structure was cross-social resentment that ultimately led a revolt that united “people across social classes against the power of the central government.”⁹² Much of this resentment is discussed in *Los grandes problemas nacionales*, published in 1909 by Andrés Molina Enríquez who explains the social and political inequities of the time. To the Mexican Revolution, *Los grandes problemas nacionales* became what Jean Jacques Rousseau’s *Social Contract* was to the French Revolution. *Los grandes problemas nacionales* was widely read by scholars, intellectuals and students—lining up the middle class without political power, and liberal elites seeking change in Mexico. While the Mexican Revolution united people of different classes against the central government, it did not consist of a single movement, nor did it have a clear leader. As a result, there were numerous power struggles within the Revolutions’ leaders that furthered resentment, chaos and confusion that lasted nearly ten years.

⁹¹ Easterling, “Mexico’s Revolution 1910-1920” *International Socialist Review*, Issue #74

⁹² *ibid*

THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION

The Mexican Revolution was complex and at times contradictory. Its leaders not only rose against the ruling regime, but also fought one another for power. It elicited confusion among Mexicans and its northern neighbors. President Wilson once stated, “I am very confused because the narrative does not tally up.”⁹³ Mexican historian Luis Cabrera wrote that the

Mexican situation...is of absolute chaos. The causes of each Government, each caudillo, each conspirator, each politician, or each writer gives as the reason for the Mexican Revolution, are as numerous as they are diverse, some are immediate, others are remote, but it is almost impossible to understand.⁹⁴

Scholars have associated the impetus for the Mexican Revolution with an interview given by Díaz in March of 1908 to James Creelman of *Pearsons Magazine*. In the interview, Díaz stated that Mexico would be ready for free elections by 1910 and called for a development of an opposition party as “proof of Mexico’s ability to develop a true democracy.”⁹⁵

Interestingly enough in that same year, Francisco Madero (a landowner and liberal democrat), published *The Presidential Succession*, a book that called for universal “suffrage and no re-election” of Díaz. Madero also became the opposing candidate to Díaz in 1910. However, Díaz imprisoned Madero. This made it possible for Díaz to be

⁹³ This statement is attributed to President Wilson by Carlos Pereyra, and is quoted in Peter Calvert’s, *Mexico*, (New York: Praeger, 1972), p. 153

⁹⁴ Luis Cabrera, “México y los mexicanos,” in Cabrera, *Obras Completas. Obra Política* (México: Ediciones Oasis, 1975), Tomo III, p. 398. Trans. Thomas Benjamin.

⁹⁵ James Creelman, “President Diaz, Hero of the Americas,” *Pearsons Magazine*, Vol. XIX, No. 3, March 1908

once again elected president. Once Madero was released, he fled to San Antonio, Texas where on November 20, 1910 he wrote the revolutionary document “El Plan de San Luis Potosi” that called for a violent revolt. Additionally, Madero proclaimed himself president of Mexico. The masses stood behind Madero, as well as those with grievances against the Díaz regime.

The unexpected outcome to Madero’s revolt was that it also inspired other revolutionary groups to form. Among them; Emiliano Zapata, son of a poor Mexican peasant rallied people in the southern province of Morelos to break the hacienda system. In the north former bandit Francisco “Pancho” Villa (originally named Doroteo Aragono), organized Mexico’s cowboys into a powerful army. Pascual Orozco, a peasant, also formed a strong army in the south. In the beginning Orozco and Villa worked together (each with his own army). However, Orozco and Villa soon became adversaries—creating further chaos and divisions.⁹⁶ It is estimated that one to two million people died as a result of the war.

In 1917 Venustiano Carranza (son of a landlord) became president, and created provincial government that lasted until 1920. The Carranza regime was moderate, and favored political reform; but not drastic social and land reform. This led to continued armed conflict between Mexico’s revolutionary groups who called for drastic reforms.

⁹⁶ For a more detailed account of the Mexican Revolution, see the writings of Alan Knight, a British historian who is a leading authority on Mexican history and the Revolution. More specifically, see Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution Vol. 1: Porfirians, Liberals and Peasants*. (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1986) and Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution Vol. 2, Counter-revolution and reconstruction*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). More recent and revisionist accounts of the Revolution include: Michael J. Gonzales, *The Mexican Revolution 1910-1940* (University of New Mexico Press: Albuquerque, 2002), Thomas Benjamin, *La Revolución: Mexico’s Great Revolution as Memory Myth and History*. (University of Texas Press: Austin, 2002), and the classic Octavio Paz’s, *The Labyrinth of Solitude and other writings*. (Grove Press: 1984).

This was primarily the case with Zapata. However, while Carranza was president, he did published a constitution that was deemed fair and acceptable.

In the final days of the Revolutionary War, a general who was believed to be a defecting from Carranza's camp ambushed Zapata. When Zapata went to meet the general, he was killed. While Carranza managed to quell some armed conflict, the masses lost respect for him due to the manner in which he killed Zapata, a hero in their eyes.

General Álvaro Obregón capitalized on Carranza losing favor with the masses, and when elections were held in November of 1920, Obregón was elected president and the Revolutionary War officially ended.⁹⁷ Yet the Revolution's ideals remained and a "new" Mexico with a new identity began to take form from the ashes of war, betrayal, idealism, and revolution. It is from this socio-historical-political aspect that the Mexican Renaissance developed—attracting social revolutionaries, artists, writers, and more from around the world—creating a hub of artistic, cultural and political expression.

It is within the above context that Edward Weston and Paul Strand travelled to Mexico. Moreover, both Weston and Strand were aware of the Mexican Revolution and it's after math. In fact, within weeks of the Mexican Revolution starting, the majority of U.S. newspapers had sent correspondents and photographers to chronicle its events.⁹⁸ For example, Walter Horne of the Mexican War Photo Postcard Company chronicled the war, and actively sold war photos and postcards to the American public. On March 21, 1916,

⁹⁷ For additional details on the war and politics see Krauze, *Mexico: Biography of Power: A History of Modern Mexico, 1810–1996* (New York: Enrique HarperCollins, 1997) and Hall Linda B., *Alvaro Obregón: Power & Revolution in Mexico, 1911-1920* (Texas: Texas A & M University Press, 1981)

⁹⁸ *Mexican Suite*, by Olivier Debroise translated and revised in collaboration with Stella de Sá Rego, University of Texas Press, Austin, Originally published as *Fuga Mexicana: Un recorrido por la fotografía en Mexico*, by Oliver Debroise, Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1994, p. 177

alone, Horne sold 2,600 photographs of Pancho Villa's raid on Columbus, New Mexico.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ *ibid*, p. 178

POLITICS AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN POST REVOLUTIONARY MEXICO

Post Revolutionary Mexico and its successive leaders used the rhetoric of the Revolution or *la Revolución* for legitimacy; as they claimed that the Revolution was indispensable to Mexico, and that its goals had yet to be completed.¹⁰⁰ However, the ways in which different governmental and intellectual leaders interpreted and defined the goals of the Revolution was contested terrain. Thus, ideas on national identity and reconstruction were influx until the 1940s. However, the decade of the 1920s contained the most conflicting ideas and was constantly re-interpreting and re-defining itself.

For the purposes of this study, the key political figures were former Presidents: Álvaro Obregón (1920-1924), Plutarco Elías Calles (1924-1928), and Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1938) that set out to unify and reconstruct the nation. During their presidencies, there were conflicting ideas on land reform, and on the extent to which the government should be leftist or rightist. For that reason, there was a substantial amount of controversy and instability during the 1920s. As a result of the ensuing political instability, there was occasional armed conflict in Mexico's rural areas, even though the armed conflict of the Revolution had 'ended.' Nonetheless, there was a consensus on the need for government reform, education and land redistribution. Thus, intellectuals such as "Molina Enríquez, Manuel Gamio and José Vasconcelos took the ideology of Liberal Patriotism and

¹⁰⁰ Benjamin, *La Revolución: Mexico's great revolution as memory, myth and history*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), p. 68

transformed it not only into an idea of Mexican nationhood but, equally important, into the basis of a specifically Mexican nationalist theory.’¹⁰¹

Although the Revolution was fueled by leftist and populist ideals, Mexico did not become a communist or socialist state; but it did create an environment in which communist, socialist and leftist avant-gardes could thrive. It is within this political framework that the avant-garde, along with political leaders helped forged post-Revolutionary Mexican identity, or ‘cultural nationalism.’¹⁰²

President Álvaro Obregón

President Álvaro Obregón had leftist inclinations. He was originally a farmer who entered military service in 1912. He served as Minister of War under President Venustiano Carranza (1917-1920) and became president in 1920. During his presidency, Obregón (1920-1924) oversaw educational reforms and the Mexican muralism project that was initiated by his Secretary of Education José Vasconcelos. In addition, Obregón began moderate land reforms and supported labor laws.¹⁰³ However, it is important to note that not everyone was in favor of Obregón’s reforms. In fact, Obregón himself believed in economic liberalism and modernism. He approached reform from a middle ground that included being pragmatic and compromising with former “Porfirian elites,

¹⁰¹ Rochfort, *Mexican Muralists: Orozco, Rivera, Siqueiros*, p. 15

¹⁰² For more information and the avant-garde, muralism and the new cultural identity that was being formed, see Ruben Gallo’s *Mexican Modernity: The Avant-Garde and the Technological Revolution* and Mary K. Coffey’s *How Revolutionary Art Became Official Culture* that explains how art was utilized by artists and the government in forging a new national identity that was mostly a result of murals being painted on public buildings. Gallo states that the impact that the avant-garde had on the new cultural identity was a second revolution, a cultural revolution.

¹⁰³ For more information on Obregon, see Emile, J. Dillon, *President Obregón—A World Reformer*. (Boston: Small, Maynard and Company Publishers. 1923)

foreign business interests, ruthless caudillos, and land-hungry peasants. The general's political alliance with organized labor, a new force in Mexican politics stabilized his government."¹⁰⁴

Obregón's middle ground was not radical enough for many revolutionaries, and that is why he lost the presidency to Plutarco Elías Calles in 1924. It is also part of the reason Obregón was murdered in 1928, after he ran for president again and was re-elected. What is important to this study in relation to Obregón, was the impact Obregón's Secretary of Public Education, José Vasconcelos (1920-1924), known as the father of *indigenismo* philosophy, had on the Mexican revolutionary aesthetic that developed.

Vasconcelos promoted the mixing of races and believed in the ideology of a "fifth race." According to Vasconcelos, by mixing races and promoting *mestizaje*, there would be a new universal era of humanity, or futuristic race that would not take into account color or race. He believed that the Mongoloids (native Amerindians), Caucasians (colonizing Europeans), and Negroids (African slaves) would create a new civilization of knowledge and cosmic spirituality that would transcend the people of the "old world".¹⁰⁵ Vasconcelos called this new or "fifth race" *La Raza Cósmica* (The Cosmic Race).

As a result of his belief in a Cosmic Race, and the possible intellectual and spiritual elevation of society, Vasconcelos felt it was crucial to educate the masses (approximately 80% of the population was illiterate at the time), which were mostly

¹⁰⁴ Michael J. Gonzales, *The Mexican Revolution, 1910-1940*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002), pp. 182-183

¹⁰⁵ Jose Vasconcelos, *La Raza Cósmica: Mision de la raza Iberoamericana, Notas de viaje a la América del Sur* (Agencia Mundial de Libería: Madrid, 1925)

Indian.¹⁰⁶ Hence, he began a massive education program and initiated a number of reforms that increased “the number of primary schools available, he also insisted that Indian children should be educated in Spanish only. He set up schools to integrate Indian pupils into Mexico’s mainstream *mestizo* culture.”¹⁰⁷ It was through programs such as those created by Vasconcelos that Paul Strand was able to obtain employment through Mexico’s Secretariat of Education (SEP). In addition to supporting the visual arts and primary education, Vasconcelos officially endorsed the National Symphonic Orchestra (1920) and the Symphonic Orchestra of Mexico (1928).

In terms of art, Vasconcelos was largely responsible for the Mexican Muralist movement because he commissioned leading avant-garde figures such as: Diego Rivera, Jean Charlot, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and Clemente Orozco to paint the inner walls of public buildings like the National Palace. Vasconcelos was able to follow through on his educational reforms and arts programs because he had the support of then President Àlvaro Obregón.

President Plutarco Elías Calles

One of Mexico’s most important developments was the presidential election of Plutarco Elías Calles, 1924-1928. Calles’ presidency is significant for Mexico because his rise to power was based on a populist campaign—becoming the nation’s first populist

¹⁰⁶ For more information see Stacy Lee’s *Mexico and the United States*. (Marshall Cavendish Corporation, 2002)

¹⁰⁷ *ibid*

elected president—but moved towards repression and dictatorship after elected.¹⁰⁸ It was specifically at the end of Obregón’s regime, and during the Calles administration that Edward Weston was in Mexico.

Calles advocated land redistribution, equality, labor rights, improved education and democracy. During his first two years in office Calles attempted to follow through on his campaign promise of land redistribution. This created a significant number of disputes between wealthy landowners and the government. In fact, occasional armed conflict continued to disrupt the country; and Weston does refer to it in his personal diaries, *Daybooks*. Another tenet of Calles was his move to dissolve private militias such as those that had fought and won the Revolutionary War, in favor of a national army.

Calles’ initial radicalism dissipated, as he became a landowner and financier himself. As result, Calles’ doctrine moved from being a populist, towards dictatorship. Additionally, his government began to be overshadowed by his violent anti-clerical legislation that was primarily anti-Catholic, and led to an armed conflict between the Catholic Church and the federal government called the *Cristero War* (or *Las Cristiadas*). In 1930, Calles also decreed that the Agrarian reform movement was a failure.

Las Cristiadas’ officially dates from 1926-1928, when armed violent conflict was at its height. However, anti-clerical sentiments within the government continued well into the late to mid 1930s. The government of Calles constitutionally curbed religion in an effort to promote a modern, socialist and secular state that valued education over superstition and dogma. In some regions of Mexico, it became illegal to openly practice

¹⁰⁸ For more on Calles, read: John J. Johnson. *Political Change in Latin America*. (Stanford University Press, 1958)

any religion. Churches were closed, priests had to register with the government, and in some cases, limited amounts of priest were allowed to provide limited amounts of sacraments.

For largely Catholic and devout Mexico, this was a problem. As a result, a considerable segment of Mexico's Catholic population rose against the government, leading to a bloody conflict between church and state.¹⁰⁹ This internal conflict over religion represents the dark side or underbelly of the Post-Revolutionary period's reconstructions ideals. It is also interesting that at the time that *Las Cristiadas* were occurring, Edward Weston collaborated with Anita Brenner in her governmental sponsored project Idols Behind Altars¹¹⁰ that included studying and photographing churches. It was also shortly after *Las Cristiadas*' armed conflict that Paul Strand visited Mexico and photographed *bultos*—making those religious images interesting to consider politically, as well as spiritually.

Calles Presidency ended in 1928, but politically, he was for all intents and purposes a *defacto* president. For the 1928 presidential election, the Mexican electorate nominated former President Obregón to run for office. Obregón ran unopposed for office

¹⁰⁹ For specific details on “Las Cristiadas,” see Jean Meyers, *La Cristiada* that contains first hand accounts of the conflict. Meyer’s *La Cristiada* was the first significant body of work that explored this dark chapter in Mexican history that up until its publication was rarely discussed. There are many publications on “Las Cristiadas,” but this is the most comprehensive.

¹¹⁰ *Idols Behind Altars* explores Mexico’s cultural, historical and artistic heritage from Pre-Columbian times to the present 1920s when it was written. This book is a result of an anthropological project by Anita Brenner funded through the Mexico’s National University (UNAM)

and obviously won.¹¹¹ Unfortunately soon after winning the election, Obregón was assassinated

After Obregón's assassination, people expected Calles to fill in the presidential vacuum. Calles however, had a more strategic position in mind, that of counselor to government officials, particularly presidents. He was called the "Jefe Máximo," and wore the Presidential sash of office although he did not have the title. More importantly, Calles dominated politics authoritatively. However, by not being the official president, he was free of official and constitutional limitations.¹¹²

Calles was also the leader and founder of the *Partido Nacional Revolucionario* or National Revolutionary Party (PNR)¹¹³, an oligarchy that consisted of himself and the older statesmen of the party. The PNR dominated Mexican politics until late twentieth century. After Obregón's assassination Calles arranged for Emilio Portes Gil to be president from 1928-1930. In 1929, Calles nominated little known Pasqual Ortiz Rubio to run for president during the 1930 elections.

Calles, however was not unopposed. Former Minister of education José Vasconcelos challenged Ortiz Rubio for the Presidency. Most of Mexico's leading intellectuals, as well as large urban crowds rallied in favor of Vasconcelos. And yet, Vasconcelos lost because the presiding government controlled election booths.

¹¹¹ Albert Louis Michaels, *Mexican Politics and Nationalism from Calles to Cardenas*. (University of Pennsylvania, 1966), p. 10

¹¹² *ibid*

¹¹³ The PNR changed its name to The Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) in 1938 and continues to have that name.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Calles became increasingly more conservative politically, targeting the very communist unions that got him elected into office. In addition, the Calles oligarchy alienated Mexico's most numerically significant social groups: the Catholics, the agrarians, and urban labor. Although the Mexican intelligentsia was also alienated, the power of numbers lay in the above groups. Not only was the government religiously oppressive, but it had also failed to conduct significant agricultural reform and to integrate the nation's largely agricultural population into mainstream Mexican society.¹¹⁴ Unions in the city were also highly discontent. This opened the door for opposition to Calles.

By the early 1930s it was clear to the Calles oligarchy that they would not be easily able to elect a puppet president to office again. The intelligentsia also understood that the next president would need to come from the PNR itself if elections were to be truly electoral.

The PNR looked within its ranks for a presidential candidate that would appease the populous and would follow the dictates of the Calles oligarchy. Thus in 1933 the Calles oligarchy chose as its presidential candidate General Lázaro Cárdenas, governor of Michoacán—the area in which Paul Strand was highly active and was commissioned to write a report for the SEP on the status of Mexican folk art in that region. Additionally, most of Strand's photographs were taken in Michoacán.

¹¹⁴ For additional information see Valentín Campa, "Comentario al estudio de Paul Nathan," *Problemas agrícolas e industriales de México* VII (July-September, 1953), p. 226 and Marte Gómez, *La reforma agraria de México: su crisis durante el período 1928-1932* (Mexico, D.F.: Privately Printed, 1962), UNAM Special Collections.

It was during this political capricious and transitory period that Paul Strand was in Mexico. However, it should be acknowledged that although Calles was repressive, the political left was equally as vociferous. This allowed the continuation of the Mexican Renaissance artistic movement to flourish well into the 1940s, for Paul Strand to be given the post of Director of Film and Photography and his boss, Narciso Bassols, as a Marxist to hold such a high ranking governmental post in Mexico at that time. Moreover, communism was still very strong in Mexico, and vanguard movements were “still in full force.”¹¹⁵

President Lázaro Cárdenas

Prior to becoming President, General Lázaro Cárdenas became governor of Michoacán in 1928. At that time, Michoacán was in a state of turmoil; land redistribution had almost ceased, there was little social reform occurring, and education was declining as opposed to increasing. In addition, the state hosted many Catholic *Cristero* rebels who were militantly fighting the government’s religious oppression.

In religious matter, Cárdenas followed the national governments anti-clerical stance.¹¹⁶ Cárdenas also successfully quelled and ended the *Cristero* War in the state of Michoacán in 1930, two years before Strand began to work in that state. In terms of education, Cárdenas was very active, building over 100 new schools and would often inspect schools himself. Education was a cornerstone of his governorship. In his desire to

¹¹⁵ Valentín Campa, “Comentario al estudio de Paul Nathan,” *Problemas agrícolas e industriales de México* VII (July-September, 1953), p. 226

¹¹⁶ Carlos Alvear Acevedo, *Lázaro Cárdenas, el hombre y el mito* (Mexico, D.F.: Editorial Jus, 1963), pp. 29-34 discusses Cardenas treatment of the clergy and his view on religion.

promote secular, revolutionary values, Cárdenas would not hesitate to have a teacher fired if he/ she was not in line with secularism and anti-clerical stances.¹¹⁷

What is most significant about Cárdenas and useful for the Calles oligarchy was that when the federal government had slowed down land reform, Cárdenas increased land reform in his home state. For example during the eleven-year period of 1917-1928, the federal government redistributed 131,283 hectares of land. Cárdenas surpassed the government's reform in his home state of Michoacán in four years. From 1928-1932, Cárdenas redistributed 141,673 hectares of land.¹¹⁸ Cárdenas also united all the state's workers and peasant syndicates under the auspices of the *Confederación Michoacán de Trabajo* (the Michoacán Confederation of Workers). While in Mexico, Strand was highly active in the state of Michoacán that was open to addressing social reform.

Cárdenas also fostered anti-capitalist legislation. He was able to be radical when other parts of Mexico were not because he enjoyed autonomy, and was a friend and supporter of Calles. In fact Cárdenas and Calles served together during the Revolution. Most importantly, when it came to national politics, Cárdenas was loyal to Calles, ably filled administrative roles in the PNR, and on three separate occasions helped the federal government with armed and political threats.¹¹⁹ Because he had a dual image in politics: in line with the federal government, but a radical reformer, he was the perfect presidential

¹¹⁷ Partido Nacional Revolucionario, *La jira del general Lázaro Cárdenas, síntesis ideología* (Mexico, D.F.: Turanzas de Valle, 1934) p. 34 This was a governmental publication by the PNR outlining Cardenas ideologies and works in Michoacan.

¹¹⁸ Lázaro Cárdenas, *Informe que el Gral, de Div. Lázaro Cárdenas rinde al H. Congreso de estado al terminar su periodo constitucional, 1928-1932*. (Morelia: Michoacan, September 15, 1932), p. 5. This is the official report Cardenas gave to the state congress when he finished his governorship.

¹¹⁹ Michaels, *Mexican Politics and Nationalism from Calles to Cardenas*, pp. 47-48

candidate. Once in power, Cárdenas would break with Calles (to his dismay) and bring national reform on a larger scale.

By the time Cárdenas took office and the immediate years leading to his presidency, “specific thematic material had become more prominent than suggestive ambience, simple narration was favored over experimentation, nationalism predominated, cosmopolitanism declined.”¹²⁰ A fragile relationship and collaboration developed between the government and the avant-garde. It was this relationship that fostered projects such as Strand’s *Redes*, and funded the posts he held within the SEP.

¹²⁰ John S Brushwood, “Innovation in Mexican Fiction and Politics (1910-1934),” *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos*. p. 86—Although Brushwood is primarily referencing literature, there is a spill over into the plastic arts and Strand.

THE POST-REVOLUTION AND MEXICAN ARTS

Mexico in its post-revolutionary period sought to redefine its national identity politically, socially and culturally—leading to an upsurge in nationalism.¹²¹ In addition, Mexico became attractive to social revolutionaries, artists, writers, and more from around the world—creating a hub of artistic, cultural and political expression. Barry Carr explains:

In the interwar era, cities across the Americas became network that linked radicals and revolutionaries of all kinds: anarchists, Wobblies, Socialists, Communists, Garveyites, political exiles, and vanguard intellectuals. While there were a number of these urban hubs—New York, Tampa, New Orleans and Havana all played a role—the largest by far was Mexico City... Push-pull factors brought exiles émigrés, refugees, revolutionaries and dreamers to Mexico City throughout the 1920s. The Álvaro Obrégon (1920-1924) government's embrace of literary campaigns and educational and artistic vanguardism was part of this magnet's attractive powers. No man was more instrumental than José Vasconcelos, Obrégon's Minister of Education. Modeling himself in part on the Soviet Union's cultural czar Anatoly Lunacharsky.¹²²

The Mexican Renaissance as a visual expression and vanguard movement included different styles of representation—from *muralism* to *los estridentistas*. Regardless of style representation, the Mexican Renaissance's key tenant was to express the values of the revolution and to create a national and cultural identity that was distinctly Mexican in character. As a result, Mexican leaders turned to indigenous themes, Mexico's pre-Columbian past, folk art and traditions for inspiration. These

¹²¹ David A. Brading, "Manuel Gambio and Official Indigenismo in Mexico" *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (1998), p. 75

¹²² Barry Carr, "Radicals, Revolutionaries and Exiles: Mexico City in the 1920s," *Berkeley Review of Latin American Studies*, February 2013

themes were then incorporated into Mexico's visual revolutionary aesthetic. For example, both Edward Weston and Paul Strand photographed Mexican folk art for its aesthetic and cultural qualities. Turning to the past was a common practice within the Mexican avant-garde, particularly the muralists whose principle aim was to have an "accessible visual dialog with Mexican people."¹²³ This visual dialog was based on culturally specific images, or things, that Mexico's general populous could readily recognize in art.

Indigenismo as part of Mexicanidad

Indigenismo is an important tenant of *Mexicanidad*. *Indigenismo* exalted some aspects of Mexico's indigenous heritage, promoted the mixing of races and rejected many of the Eurocentric ideals that were valued in Mexico prior to the revolution. What is important to this study is that *indigenismo*, like national identity had not been clearly defined in Mexico at the time Weston and Strand were in that country. As an aspect of national identity, *indigenismo* was also being created. Moreover, the Indian, and things Indians, had recently begun to acquire value in Mexican cultural discourse. Yet, there were conflicting ideas on what *indigenismo* was and how it should be utilized in relation to *Mexicanidad*.

The above is important to mention as it can become normative to utilize the term *indigenismo* in a general way, however, in different decades of twentieth century Mexico, some of its connotations changed. What has been constant is its denotative quality of emphasizing the importance of the Indian. In this project, I emphasize the importance of

¹²³ Carr, "Radicals, Revolutionaries and Exiles: Mexico City in the 1920s," *Berkeley Review of Latin American Studies*, February 2013

understanding the specific ideas on Indians during the decades Weston and Strand lived in Mexico. In the 1920s the rhetoric of *indigenismo* was a celebration of the Indian culture, while in the subsequent decade, 1930s *indigenismo* became about the valorization of the Indian, and regarding Indians as political actors.¹²⁴ Further, since ideas on *indigenismo* were being created and in flux, it is not surprising to find that the Mexican avant-garde's approach to *indigenismo* varied, from: 1) up close and personal, 2) detached and distant, 3) celebratory, and 4) and political. Weston and Strand were similar to their Mexican peers because their representation of Indians fell into one or more of the above categories.

Adopting an ideology that focused on the Indian as part of Mexico's post-revolutionary identity did not happen in a vacuum. Rather, it was a result of Liberal Patriotism that began to take root, but was by no means fully actualized in the late nineteenth century through intellectuals such as Justo Sierra that believed that *mestizaje* was an important cultural aspect of Mexico. Sierra was known for having distaste for the Díaz regime and as a supporter of liberal patriotism. And yet, he served as Secretary of Education under Porfirio Díaz. Liberal patriotism incorporated both Social Darwinism and Romantic idealism. It was an ideology not easily accepted and required "reversing a century of 'liberal scorn' for the Indian."¹²⁵ Not everyone was in favor of liberal

¹²⁴ Alexander S. Dawson, "From Models for the Nation to Model Citizens: Indigenismo and the 'Revindication' of the Mexican Indian" *Journal of Latin American Studies*. Vol 30, No. 2, (May 1998), p. 279

¹²⁵ *ibid*

patriotism, and as such, it was “highly contested in public spaces on national, regional and local levels.”¹²⁶

In addition to Sierra, there were other key liberal thinkers that challenged the Eurocentric doctrines and ideologies that characterized Mexico in the late nineteenth century.¹²⁷ One of the most notable proponents of *indigenismo* was Manuel Gamio (1883-1960), an anthropologist, archeologist and sociologist. Not only did Gamio propose ideas on *indigenismo*, but conducted ethnographic studies to support his theories. Gamio’s ideas became in many ways the foundation for the ideology of *indigenismo*.¹²⁸ Vasconcelos, mentioned earlier, is regarded as the father of *indigenismo* because he disseminated it on a large scale. However, it was Gamio’s ‘scientific’ studies that laid an important foundation for accepting *indigenismo*.

Gamio earned a PhD from Columbia University in anthropology and studied under Franz Boas, who is considered to be a pioneer in modern anthropology. Boas rejected popular ideologies of the time such as scientific racism in favor cultural

¹²⁶ Alexander S. Dawson, “From Models for the Nation to Model Citizens: Indigenismo and the ‘Revindication’ of the Mexican Indian” *Journal of Latin American Studies*. Vol 30, No. 2, (May 1998), p. 280. Not all members of Mexican society were in favor of *indigenismo*. There were still members of Mexican society that supported the ideals of the old guard and as stated in Chapter 1, there was still armed conflict in some rural areas of Mexico during the 1920s. There were also leading Mexican liberals such as Lorenzo Zavala, Ignacio Ramirez, Jose Maria Luis Mora and Francisco Bulnes that rejected the idea of *indigenismo* and instead favored 18th century European ideas put forth by William Robertson and Abbé Aynal that regarded Indians as backward. Helen Delpar’s, *The Enormous Vogue of Things Mexican: Cultural Relations Between the United States and Mexico* (Tuscaloosa, 1992), pp. 84-85; Mary Kay Vaughan’s, *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930-1940* (Tucson, 1997), pp. 37-38, 47-66, 191-194; Alexander S. Dawson’s, “From Models for the Nation to Model Citizens: Indigenismo and the ‘Revindication’ of the Mexican Indian” p. 280 (note 4) address this issue well.

¹²⁷ Brading, “Manuel Gamio and Official Indigenismo in Mexico” *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (1998), p. 75

¹²⁸ For more on this study see Manuel Gamio (ed) *The Population of the Valley of Teotihuacan*, (Two Volumes) (Mexico, 1972); facsimile edition, divided into 5 Volumes, introduction by Eduardo Matos Moctezuma (Mexico, 1979)

relativism that he introduced to the field of anthropology. Cultural relativism is the belief that one cannot objectively rank cultures as higher or lower. Rather it explains that humans should be characterized through the lens of their specific culture and acquired norms. Boas considered Gambio one of his best students, and Gambio implemented many of Boas' teachings in his own works.

Gambio's contributions to the ideology of *indigenismo* began with his book *Forjando Patria* (1916) that translates to "Forging a Nation." *Forjando Patria* supported the Mexican Revolution because it challenged the old guard and presented an opportunity to create a new Mexican 'patria.' Gambio rejected Eurocentric ideologies and the continuation of granting privilege to white Mexicans simply because they were a minority. According to Gambio, Mexico's Eurocentric belief system and ruling white minority did not take into consideration the bulk of the citizens of the nation that were Indian. In *Forjando Patria* Gambio stressed the importance of the Indian because he believed that if the majority of the Mexican populous is defined in cultural terms, instead of by language, then it's more Indian in character, than white or European.¹²⁹ In addition, Gambio argued that Mexico lacked four important features that defined a nation: a common language, common character, a homogenous race, and a common history.

In addition, Gambio also rejected neo-classical canons of aesthetics and called for a "reevaluation of native art forms."¹³⁰ Moreover, Gambio called upon Mexican artists to find inspiration in native sources. Gambio believed that by doing so, the native Indian populous would find 'native' inspired art far more accessible than European art. This

¹²⁹ This is the main thesis found in Manuel Gambio's *Forjando Partia*.

¹³⁰ Brading, "Manuel Gambio and Official Indigenismo in Mexico", p. 76

didactic view led Gambio to propose the establishment of a State funded Department of Fine Arts.¹³¹ According to Gambio, this would encourage the development of national art and stressed that national art is “one of the great basis of nationalism.”¹³²

Although Gambio sought to incorporate Indians into mainstream society, he like Vasconcelos, sought to destroy Indian communities and create a new society based *mestizaje*, that would be inclusive of the Indian and some of the Indian qualities that were being valued.¹³³ While the ethics of destroying Indian communities is highly questionable, Gambio’s and Vasconcelos’ idea was to remove obstacles to *mestizaje* by incorporating the Indian into society in order to create a homogenous nation.¹³⁴ There were other cultural leaders who were also promoting *indigenismo*; however, they did not represent a unified voice or ideological perspective.¹³⁵ Their power lay as a collective who

were singularly important in creating a public space for the Indian in post-revolutionary Mexico... Through their art, written texts, and bureaucracies, Indigenistas constructed a series of archetypes of the Indian which radically reinterpreted both the Indian and the Mexican nation. Furthermore, these archetypes ultimately became important signifiers of the political spaces and

¹³¹ *ibid*, 79

¹³² Manuel Gambio, *Forjando Partia*. (Mexico, 1960, 2nd edition), pp. 40-47, 55. The first edition was published in 1916 and is largely out of circulation.

¹³³ See Jose Vasconcelos’ essay “La Raza Cósmica” (The Cosmic Race) (Madrid: Agencia Mundial de Librería, 1925), and David A Brading’s “Manuel Gambio and Official Indigenismo in Mexico”, (Bulletin of Latin America Research), Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 77

¹³⁴ To promote his ideologies through scientific data and analysis, Gambio reconstructed the archeological site of Teotihuacan. This was a huge archeological achievement at the time. Gambio conducted a survey of the ceremonial center, cleansed the citadel, revealed the temple of Quetzalcoat and conducted several excavations. In the processes of the doing the above, Gambio also conducted an ethnographic survey of the area. His aim was to show that the native population had an intransient identity and that it had not changed much in the twentieth century as it had been in the time of the Spanish conquest. For more on this study see Manuel Gambio (ed) *The Population of the Valley of Teotihuacan*, (Two Volumes) (Mexico, 1972); facsimile edition, divided into 5 Volumes, introduction by Eduardo Matos Moctezuma (Mexico, 1979)

¹³⁵ Dawson, “From Models for the Nation to Model Citizens: Indigenismo and the ‘Revindication’ of the Mexican Indian” *Journal of Latin American Studies*. Vol 30, No. 2, (May 1998), p. 282

possibilities which were opened up to Indian actors in the post-revolutionary period.¹³⁶

In addition to looking to Indians as vehicle for creating a homogenous society through *mestizaje*, the Indian began to be idealized as having high virtues such as: fidelity, bravery, frugality, adaptability and moral character. At the same time, it is important to remember that *indigenismo* was being created from the top down. Meaning it was primarily white Mexicans who were attributing value to Indians. Thus, whites Mexican also demonstrate the tensions and limitations of their own thinking. Carlos Basuri, a contemporary and colleague of Gambio, wrote of Indians that:

Their intelligence gives them a great capacity for the acquisition of scientific knowledge. Their discipline, love of hard work, and innate constancy facilitates their success in many endeavors. Their moral moderation separates them from the common vices of other races. However, the Indian, as a member of a social group belonging to a lofty civilization, has always maintained characteristics, both physiological, which immediately reflect the weight of his ancestral heritage. While these racial characteristics make the Indian different from other groups, they could be beneficial. If they were adapted to modern civilization, these virtues would be converted into a potent and unquestionably valuable element for human society.¹³⁷

Although Basauri was attempting to elevate the Indian, his views nonetheless betray a long-standing tradition of regarding Indians as uncivilized. According to Basauri, the Indian heritage, that he called it a “weight,” could be transmuted if the Indian adapted into modern civilization. Moreover the Indians that were the model for *indigenismo*, and perceived as the of the future of Mexico, was limited to those that came

¹³⁶ Dawson, “From Models for the Nation to Model Citizens: Indigenismo and the ‘Revindication’ of the Mexican Indian” *Journal of Latin American Studies*. Vol 30, No. 2, (May 1998), p. 282

¹³⁷ Carlos Basauri, *La antropología en México. Panorama histórico, vol. 9, Los protagonistas* (Mexico, 1988), pp. 5-6

from Nahua Indian cultures because they had a history of a strong empires and could be linked to Mexico's pre-Columbian past. Basauri, along with other *Indigenistas*, excluded groups in the peripheral of the Nahua speaking cultures.¹³⁸ Despite traces of racism lingering in the language of *Indigenistas*, as a whole, they sought to elevate the Indian and revoke nineteenth century ideas of Indian inferiority.

It is within this context that Weston and Strand engaged with *indigenismo* in relation to *Mexicanidad* to varying degrees. Weston's works celebrated *indigenismo* through his photographs of Mexican folk art whose traditions, through technique and design were regarded as being linked Mexico's Indian heritage. Weston also photographed Mexican white women dressed in traditional Indian garb, bringing further attention to the richness and influence of Indian culture on Mexican culture. Paul Strand's works brought attention to the quality of life of the Mexican Indian in rural areas through the mediums of photography and film. More than celebratory, Strand's works have a political dimension of humanism and leftist ideologies that were widely held during the decade of the 1930s.

¹³⁸ See Dawson, "From Models for the Nation to Model Citizens: Indigenismo and the 'Revindication' of the Mexican Indian", p. 283 (Note 20)

THE CHAPTERS

Chapter One: *Weston: Border Crossings, Portraiture and the Face of the Nation* will examine Edward Weston's Mexican nudes and portraiture. This chapter will look at the ways in which nudes and portraiture portray elements of *Mexicanidad* and *indigenismo*. It will discuss nudes and portraiture as contributing to ideas on nationhood that were specific to the 1920s. It will also address the ways Weston's portraits hold a revolutionary aesthetic that is related to politics, but is grounded in rebelling against the Establishment, and holds modern sensibilities.

Chapter Two: *Strand: Photographing the Face of the Nation* will examine Paul Strand's portraits of Mexican Indians. This chapter will consider the ways in which ideas on *indigenismo* evolved and changed during the 1930s and how Strand's portraits of Indians are indicative of the 1930s official rhetoric in relation to Indians. It will examine Paul Strand's dual role as a Mexican governmental employee and the ways in which Strand's political views aligned with those of SEP. It will also take into consideration the human and social vision that informs Strand's Mexican works.

Chapter Three: *Objects of Nation-From Folk Art* will examine how folk-art—from crafts to toys, and religious sculptures were represented in the works of Edward Weston and Paul Strand. It will examine the ways in which Weston's and Strand's folk art engages with *indigenismo* and *Mexicanidad* and contribute to the revolutionary aesthetic of Mexico.

CHAPTER 1

*The Mexicans still refuse to accept me as an American. I have a secret delight assuring them that I am a type of the real American now already extinct—that our aristocracy is dead...The Mexicans have such contempt for Americans as they know them that I have begun to think that God Almighty sent me here to bring about more amicable relations between the two nations!*¹³⁹

Edward Weston wrote the above words in his personal diaries, *Daybooks* while living in Mexico. It is a testament to how well received and liked Weston was by the Mexican avant-garde. It also provides a glimpse into the type of relationship Weston had with his Mexican peers. As will be seen, in Mexico, Weston created deep and meaningful friendships with leading avant-garde artists that promoted each other's works, and engaged with the ideas on national identity that were circulating at the time. This becomes evident as one considers Weston's portraits were primarily of key political figures, intellectuals, and avant-garde artists in Mexico.

Edward Weston's residency in Mexico is often discussed as transformative in terms of aesthetics. His time in Mexico is complex, and while scholars have begun to discuss Weston in relation to Mexican national themes, scholars have had a difficult time situating Weston within the rubric of a more traditional leftist oriented visual production because he never articulated a clear political outlook. However, during the specific decade that Weston was in Mexico, ideas on politics, nation and art were in flux. Thus, one finds that there are multiple expressions of national identity in the arts—from a clear call to political arms, to a rebellion against Mexican academic art.

Closer examination of Weston's works reveals that his works reflect some of the ideas on nationhood that were circulating during the 1920s in Mexico. This is seen as one

¹³⁹ Edward Weston, *The Daybooks of Edward Weston*, Vol. 1, edited by Nancy Newhall, (New York: Aperture Foundation, 1990), p. 35

considers that Weston photographed Mexican themed subject matter that fit into ideas of *Mexicanidad* and *indigenismo* that were gaining momentum in the decade of his residency. In addition, the Mexican avant-garde also valued modernist ideals related to form; as they were considered a rebellion against academic art. Further, one finds that Weston held similar formal and subject matter interest as his Mexican contemporaries. Additionally, through the friendships Weston developed with various members of the Mexican avant-garde, Weston participated in a visual exchange of art, where artists promoted themselves, and certain ideas about Mexican national identity. As a result of the above, I believe that Weston was more than a foreigner in Mexico, but an active participant within the Mexican avant-garde; whose interests extended to political and non-political subject matter that was valued and considered to hold a revolutionary aesthetic.

By looking at portraits and nudes as historical documents, Weston can be more readily examined in a more complex way. Weston was clearly interested in Mexican life, but not necessarily in the struggle of humanity. Instead of viewing this as the end of a conversation, and labeling Weston as “apolitical,” I believe it is the beginning of thoughtful contemplation on the subtle ways in which *Mexicanidad* is a definitive part of Weston’s works. What is more, artists did not have to display overt politics in their art to be considered members of the Mexican avant-garde and as contributing to national identity. And while it is true that creating a rhetoric of national identity required political and visual expression, national identity in Mexico was more than political in nature. It

was inclusive of turning to things ‘Mexican,’ particularly those with indigenous qualities to forge a sense of homogeneity and national consciousness.

For example, Mexican photographer Agustín Jiménez is similar to Weston in that he takes an interest in Mexican themes, but not human struggle. One can then ask; *should artists be analyzed differently based on country of birth rather than subject matter? Are Weston’s works any less aligned with Mexico’s Re-constructionist period than Mexican artists producing similar works at the same time, in the same place?*

I believe not. Neither do several Mexican art historians such as Mariana Figerella and Gerardo Estrada who have placed value on Weston’s oeuvre and consider it to be “Mexican.” However, I am different than Estrada and Figeralla, because in addition to thematically being Mexican, I argue that Weston’s works form part of the narrative of national identity in Mexico during the 1920s and a shared vision of art among the vanguard in Mexico. I also believe there is a resonance between Weston’s works and those of other members of the avant-garde. Thus, I will examine Weston’s portraits as resonating with the Mexican avant-garde’s ideas on *Mexicanidad*. I will also argue that Weston created a hero/ artist sensibility.

I also propose that Edward Weston’s Mexican portraits be regarded as part of a revolutionary aesthetic that contributed to the many ideas on *Mexicanidad* that were circulating at the time. Weston photographed famous artists and politicians that were shaping the Mexican nation in a heroic manner that celebrated those individuals. By celebrating key Mexican figures, Weston was commemorating those individuals, as well as what they symbolized—Mexico’s new identity.

Weston's Mexican nudes are equally important and form part of Mexico's revolutionary aesthetic because of Weston's interest in form and his membership in the *estridentistas*. Weston's nudes also display an interest in *indigenismo* that is an aspect of *Mexicanidad*. Moreover, although painting in Mexico had adopted many of Europe's modern ideas; photography in Mexico had not explored modern ideas and techniques to the degree that painters had. Thus, in Mexico, Weston was learning modern ideas from painters and was also contributing to a Mexican modern photographic sensibility that was new, fresh and revolutionary.

WESTON, MEXICO AND THE CREATION OF A NATIONAL IDENTITY

When Edward Weston embarked for Mexico in 1923, he was aware of the thriving arts movement in Mexico, and of it being a socio-political result of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). In addition, Weston was aware that even though the “armed”¹⁴⁰ conflict was over, and that an arts movement was flourishing, the political climate was unstable. Nonetheless, he still chose to move to Mexico.

Weston’s decision to go to Mexico was a result of multiple factors: a limited modern art community in Los Angeles; a desire to develop technically and aesthetically as an artist; dissatisfaction with his family life; his mistress Tina Modotti, who had moved to Mexico a few months prior to Weston and had successfully exhibited some of Weston’s works in that country; and because Mexico had a thriving arts movement and was a popular artist destination for expatriates, revolutionaries and modernists. More than anything, Weston felt very frustrated with his work and wanted a change. The catalyst that may have prompted Weston to move to Mexico was the success his photographs had in Mexico.¹⁴¹

When Tina Modotti, moved to Mexico in 1922, she took with her several of Weston’s prints. Modotti had them exhibited at the *Academia de Bellas Artes*, where

¹⁴⁰ As noted in the introduction, there were numerous articles printed on weekly basis in the *Los Angeles Times* discussing the Mexican Revolutionary War. It is highly unlikely that Weston, an avid reader was uniformed on the matter. If he did not read the Times, his anarchist friends most certainly did. In addition it should be noted that although there was a cease firm and armed conflict was technically over, there would be an occasional violent conflict that surfaced. An example is the *Cristerio* War and regions of Mexico were land distribution was still highly contested. However, the Revolutionary War, in and of itself had ended.

¹⁴¹ Amy Cogner, *Edward Weston in Mexico 1923-1926*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983), p. 4

they were well received and praised.¹⁴² What is more, although Weston was in Glendale at the time, his creative works sold for the first time—and in a foreign country, at that.¹⁴³

Weston had not mastered abstraction and form in the manner that photographers Alfred Stieglitz, Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler had prior to moving to Mexico. However, he did experiment with abstraction in the early 1920s and his image *Armco Steel*, 1922 (Figure 1), taken before Mexico, appears to be Weston's first clear departure from Pictorialism. With *Armco Steel*, it is evident that Weston was trying to align himself to the machine/ industry oriented aesthetic of the east coast. It was only one experiment and most of his works primarily focused on portraiture, nudes, and some geometric forms. Nonetheless *Armco Steel* is important in Weston's trajectory, because it was photographed shortly before Weston made a special trip to visit Alfred Stieglitz (November 1922) while in New York,¹⁴⁴ and before he moved to Mexico. It also demonstrates Weston's interest in modern subject matter, which he explored more in Mexico. However, the majority of Weston's transformation in Mexico was a result of the environment he encountered in that country—from the people he interacted with, to the modern aesthetics he was exposed to.

¹⁴² Amy Cogner, *Edward Weston in Mexico 1923-1926*, p. 4

¹⁴³ Weston, *The Daybooks of Edward Weston*, introduction by Newhall, p. xxi

¹⁴⁴ Weston, *The Daybooks of Edward Weston*, pp. 4-6

Foreigners' Influences in Mexico during the 1920s

During the 1920s, the decade Weston was in Mexico, Mexico had acquired a reputation for having a thriving arts movement that was revolutionary in nature, and was supported by the government of Àlvaro Obregón through the programs initiated by his Secretary of Education José Vasconcelos. This time period is often discussed as the Mexican Renaissance. The most well-known movement that formed part of the Mexican Renaissance was muralism. Mexican muralism has been extensively researched and discussed by art historians. However, for our purposes, Octavio Paz, Mexican art historian, poet, writer and Nobel Prize winner, in his recent revisionist approach to Mexican muralism states that it would have been very difficult to fuse the modern qualities of clean lines and simple form, with an interest in native themes, had there not been a revolutionary aesthetic that swept Europe in the nineteenth century, from the romantics that turned to other non-European civilizations, the traditions of the east, African, Oceana and Pre-Columbia.¹⁴⁵ Further,

Sin los artistas modernos de occidente, que hicieron suyo todo ese conjunto de estilos y visiones de las tradiciones no occidentales, los muralistas mexicanos no hubieran podido comprender la tradición Mexicana indígena...El nacionalismo artístico mexicano fue consecuencia de cosmopolitismo del siglo XX.¹⁴⁶

Without the modern artists of the west, who made theirs all those combinations of styles and visions of the traditions of the non-west, the Mexican Muralists would not have been able to understand the Mexican indigenous tradition...The Mexican artistic nationalism is a consequence of the Cosmopolitanism of the XX century¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Octavio Paz, "Re-visiones: la pintura mural", in *México en la obra de Octavio Paz*, vol. III Los privilegios de la vista, México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1987, p. 231 Trans. by Cindy Urrutia

¹⁴⁶ *ibid*

¹⁴⁷ *ibid*, Trans. by Cindy Urrutia

It is fascinating to consider that *Mexicandad* as an artistic expression that is deeply rooted in Mexican themes and ideas is partially a result of the cosmopolitanism of the early twentieth century that turned to non-western cultures for inspiration. In fact, Mexico's native tradition was another reason that foreigners were attracted to Mexico. Foreigners were supporters of *indigenismo*. "In the 1920s and the 1930s advocates of an ethnicized identity lamented that their fellow Mexicans had less appreciation than did foreigners for things Mexican."¹⁴⁸ Mexican art critic Justino Fernández stated that during the 1920s there was a "knock out fight between Indianists and Hispanophiles, with foreigners acting as referee."¹⁴⁹ Thus, foreigners' role in Mexico's nationalist project was more than that of expatriates living in a foreign artist colony; they were active participants with a voice. For example, Jean Charlot, French expatriate and member of the Mexican avant-garde in the 1920s was an active promoter and expert on Mexican folk art. Charlot also wrote extensively on both Mexican crafts and the Mexican Renaissance.

Charlot was one of the first four painters to accept a mural commission by Vasconcelos. In addition, Charlot was the first to officially finish a painting in the fresco technique in Mexico. Charlot's mural is called *Massacre in the Templo Mayor* (1921–1922). While Charlot was working on *Massacre in the Templo Mayor*, he would also assist Diego Rivera in Rivera's first Mexican mural *Creation*. In *Massacre in the Templo Mayor*, Charlot incorporated images of himself, Diego Rivera and roommate Fernando Leal into the mural.

¹⁴⁸ Rick Lopez, *Crafting Mexico: Intellectuals, Artisans, and the State after the Revolution*. (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 95

¹⁴⁹ Justino Fernández, *Textos de Orozco* (Mexico: UNAM, 1952), p. 112 quoted in Rodriguez Prampolini, "La figura del indio en la pintura del siglo XIX: Fondo ideológico," p. 217

Prior to Weston's arrival in Mexico, one begins to see an element of boosterism¹⁵⁰ where artists had begun to promote each other in their art. This element of boosterism becomes particularly evident in the works that Charlot, Rivera and Weston. For example, Edward Weston's, *Diego Rivera*, 1924 (Figure 2) was the basis for Diego Rivera's, *Self Portrait*, detail from murals of the Secretariat of Public Education Building (*Autorretrato, murales de le Secretaria de Educación Pública*), 1923-1927 (Figure 3). Jean Charlot paid homage to Weston in *Portrait of Edward Weston*, Mexico, 1924 (Figure 4), and Edward Weston to Charlot in *Jean Charlot*, 1926 (Figure 5).

For our purposes, *Massacre in the Templo Mayor* is interesting to consider because in it Charlot used emblems that were inspired by Aztec ideographs. The use of ideographs is significant for several reasons. First it begins to link present-day Mexico with a pre-Columbian past. Secondly, although Charlot utilized ideograms as a reference point and placed importance on the use of cubism's qualities in his works,¹⁵¹ the most important element for him was storytelling.¹⁵² Thus one sees that:

emblems are no longer placed on the planes of a strict Cubist composition but are given a realistic setting. This change is the result of a major decision that was made by Charlot and by the two other muralists who had passed through an avant-garde period [in Europe], Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros: they would use the

¹⁵⁰ *In the Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), Wanda M. Corn uses the word boosterism, and discusses its importance and as "paying tribute to one another" and that it help create success among the Stieglitz Circle, pp. 3, 11, 12, 38-40, 214, 336. The Mexican avant-garde acted as boosters to one another in a similar fashion.

¹⁵¹ John Charlot, son of Jean Charlot, interviewed Jean Charlot between 1970-1979 on his life works, including Mexico. The transcripts of February 18, 1972 are part of a page of notes in, *Charlot and Charlot 1970-1979*. In this particular section, Jean Charlot discusses "idéographie aztèque et Gleizes" (1921b, [Appendix I](#)), written in 1921 in late August or after in reference to the use of ideograms. Jean Charlot also states that although Rivera, Siqueiros and himself decided to use an experimental form of expression, they would use a more representational style.

¹⁵² *Bullet* differentiates itself from other Cubist works by the importance placed on subject matter and the characteristic element of story-telling. *Charlot and Charlot 1970-1979*: February 18, 1972

experimental means of expression that they had learned, but within a more representational style appropriate to mural painting.¹⁵³

This is significant because one finds that stories (that became part of Mexico's larger narrative of *Mexicandad* and *indigenismo*), through visual representation were important for didactic purposes during Mexico's post-revolutionary period because approximately 80% of Mexico was illiterate, and because the purpose of murals was to educate and promote ideas on nation. Although Weston did not portray specific stories in his works like the muralists, he contributed to Mexico's narrative on nationhood. For that reason I believe his works are part of Mexico's nationalist project and are historical documents that contributed to *Mexicanidad*. Moreover, other foreigners (in addition to Weston) such as Charlot were valued and formed Mexico's cultural and visual aesthetics. Thus, Mexico City was a true international artist hub where domestic and foreign artists interacted with one another, supported each other, and formed the Mexican Renaissance's revolutionary aesthetic.

Modernist Sensibilities in Mexico

The Mexican Renaissance was more than a movement that brought attention to Mexico's pre-Columbian past and revolutionary esthetic, but is one that fused those very ideas with European modernist ideas on sharpness, simplification of form, volume and depth—elements that define Weston's Mexican oeuvre and later works. In terms of

¹⁵³ *ibid*

Weston's portraits, and their relation to the above, they are sharp, and mostly focus on the head alone as opposed to the body.

Edward Weston, *Diego Rivera Smiling*, 1924 (Figure 6) is a close up of Rivera smiling. It displays an interest in lines, shapes, shadows, and contours. What is striking about this piece is that Rivera's smile and expression dominates the portrait, as much as Rivera's dark round hat that creates depth and fullness. This piece, like Weston's other Mexican portraits (discussed below) is straight forward, neither adding nor detracting from its subject matter. Its simplicity, along with the attention to subject and form, allowed Rivera's personality to be expressed. This was considered new and innovative because most of Mexico's photographers at that time were Pictorialists. *Diego Rivera Smiling* was published in *Mexican Folkways* No. 5, 1926 (Figure 7), next to an article, "Mexican Painting," written by Rivera that discusses the goals of muralism, and the importance of the movement. Rivera was considered an authority in art due to his strong academic training and because of time spent in Europe. I would like to propose that by publishing Weston's *Rivera Smiling* alongside his article, Rivera legitimizes Weston's status as a Mexican avant-garde because: 1) Rivera's celebrity status in Mexico granted him the privilege of deciding who photographed him; and 2) as art director of *Mexican Folkways*,¹⁵⁴ Rivera could have chosen any other 'Mexican' photographer to publish next to his article. Instead Rivera chose Weston's rendition of him. At the same time, in publishing Weston, Rivera helped forge the friendship that developed between the two artists.

¹⁵⁴ *Mexican Folkways* was a tri-monthly educational magazine that focused on Mexican culture, history, arts and tradition. More on Mexican Folkways is written below.

Several Mexican avant-gardes such as Dr. Atl,¹⁵⁵ Diego Rivera, David A. Siqueiros had all actively been members of the European avant-garde at some point in their careers. Diego Rivera in particular, had vacillated between Spain and France from 1907 until 1921, and acquired a reputation as a cubist. For Weston, Rivera represented a vehicle for modern art and its sensibilities.

Weston apreciaba la formación y la información que traía Rivera del ambiente artístico parino de las primeras décadas del siglo: su contacto con los principales artifices de la vanguardia moderna europea, su relación personal con Picasso, Modigliani, Reverdy y otros artistas.¹⁵⁶

Weston appreciated Rivera's formation and the information he brought of the Parisian artistic ambiance of the first decades of the century, his contacts with the principal artists of the European modern vanguard, his personal relationship with Picasso, Modigliani, Revery and other artists.¹⁵⁷

There were other artists with modern European sensibilities with whom Weston interacted. Like Rivera, Charlot's extensive knowledge of European vanguard movements greatly influenced Weston's works, particularly his still life (discussed in Chapter 3). Cubism's influence on Charlot is seen in works such as *Bullet* (Figure 8). In

¹⁵⁵ Dr. Atl (atl means water in Mexican Indian language Nahuatl) was the adopted name of Mexican painter Gerardo Murillo. Dr. Atl was a central figure of the Mexican Muralist movement because he exerted considerable influence on the Mexican avant-garde, called for a democratic art and promoted the idea of muralism to Vasconcelos as a vehicle for education, and promoting cultural and political ideas. He was one of the first people to draw attention to indigenous Mexican art by organizing an exhibition on it. He also brought awareness to the Mexican countryside through his landscape paintings—particularly his impressionist images of volcanoes. In addition, Dr. Atl took a stand against academic realism and was a politically rebellious figure and stimulating teacher at the Academy of San Carlos [the academy leading avant-garde artists attended]. Dr. Atl also travelled extensively in Europe in the 1890s and early 1900s. When he returned from Europe, he spoke of the importance of murals and how they could be used for didactic purposes. This views greatly impacted Vasconcelos and the young artists around him.

¹⁵⁶ Mariana Figeralla. *Edward Weston y Tina Modotti en Mexico: Su Intersección Dentro De Las Estrategias Estéticas Del Arte Posrevolucionario*, (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma De México Instituto De Investigaciones Estéticas, 2002), pp. 84-85

¹⁵⁷ *ibid*, Translated by Cindy Urrutia

Bullet, Charlot employed a particular attribute of cubism that he and Albert Gleizes referred as “planiste,” ‘planerist,’ or “the articulation of the surface of the picture by means of different planes and to the suggestion of form by contoured planes.”¹⁵⁸

Although, Mexico’s avant-garde utilized elements of European vanguard movements, modern art in Mexico was not a derivative of European art. Rather it embraced its qualities, but fundamentally was driven by a subject matter that told a story to the majority of its illiterate population. As a result, modern art in Mexico encompassed a wide spectrum that rebelled against academic art, employed modernist formal qualities,

¹⁵⁸ Charlot's fullest definition of "planisme" 'planarism' is found in his notes "de Picasso" (1921a) written in June 1921:

PLANISME sujet entrevu.

puis P. supprime toute représentation physique de volumes : le tableau présente une série d'à-plats à limites géométriques dont les rapports de couleur et de forme suggèrent *levolume*, l'état d'esprit, (gaieté, tristesse, etc.) et l'ordonnance d'un sujet entrevu cérébralement plutôt que connu. La technique est soignée : contours nets, pureté de couleur.

Le tableau existe physiquement comme une décoration agréable.

Quelquefois la toile n'a que ce but décoratif, sans sujet recomposable.

'PLANARISM subject glimpsed.

then P. suppresses all physical representation of volumes: the picture presents a series of flattened surfaces with geometric limits whose relations of color and form suggest *thevolume*, the state of mind, (gayety, sadness, etc.) and the arrangement of a subject glimpsed cerebrally rather than known. The technique is finished: neat contours, purity of color.

The picture exists physically as an agreeable decoration.

Sometimes the canvas has only this decorative purpose, without a recomposable subject

For additional information, see John Charlot’s Presentation at *Congreso Internacional de Muralismo: San Ildefonso cuna del muralismo mexicano, Reflexiones historiográficas y artísticas*, Mexico City, February 16-20, 1998. An augmented Spanish translation, "El Primer Fresco de Jean Charlot: *La Masacre en el Templo Mayor*," and appendices were published in the conference volume, *Memoria Congreso Internacional de Muralismo: San Ildefonso, cuna del Muralismo Mexicano: reflexiones, historiográficas y artísticas*, Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso, Mexico City, 1999, pp. 243-299. Also, it should be noted that the idea of Planarism seems to be mostly utilized by Charlot and Gleizes. It is not a term that can be easily found in relationship to cubism and seems to appear mostly in Charlot’s writings. For more information on planarisme see Jean Charlot and John Charlot writings.

but maintained the importance of telling a story. One also finds that Mexico's revolutionary aesthetic engaged with qualities of modern art to varying degrees: some artists were more literal, while others were more concerned with form. Edward Weston's portraits and nudes include various elements of Mexican vanguardism, from an interest in modernist formal elements, to engaging with the larger narrative of national identity.

As in Los Angeles, in Mexico Weston associated with anarchists, bohemians, artists and people on the political left. With the above in mind, I am not suggesting that Weston was a leftist, but rather he did have a proclivity associating with the left, and was perhaps more sympathetic to its cause than has been previously believed. In addition, one can infer that Weston admired and was sympathetic to the Mexican avant-garde's political leanings through his personal diaries where he writes about the parties he and Tina Modotti had [in Mexico City], and refers to the contributors of the newspaper "El Machete"¹⁵⁹ as follows:

We certainly have been plunged into a swirl of communism here. Almost all our acquaintances are active participants in revolutionary activities...A new revolutionary newspaper is being published "El Machete." I know nearly every one among the contributors and editors, most of them appear at our Saturday nights, and most of them are artists. There are no groups of pleasant parlor politicians here in Mexico. The movement is flamingly alive and direct. The leaders open and fearless of consequences.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ "El Machete" began to be published by el *Sindicato de Obreros Tecnicos, Pintores y Escultores* (Union of Technical Workers, Painters, and Sculptors) in early 1924. It advocated the goals of the Mexican Revolution. The slogan on the masthead read: "The machete is used to reap cane, To clear a path through an underbrush, To kill snakes, end strife, And humble the pride of the impious rich." In addition, "For artists, this meant making art and culture accessible to all people through public murals and graphics of social criticism and political statement." Aliza Azuela in "El Machete and Frente a Frente: Art Committed to Social Justice in Mexico" *Art Journal*, Vol. 52, No. 1, Political Journals and Art, 1910-40 (Spring, 1993), pp. 82- 87

¹⁶⁰ Weston, *The Daybooks of Edward Weston*

Not only was Edward Weston part of the Mexican avant-garde, but also associated with Mexican politicians, and leading members of Mexican society. This is seen in letters found in his personal papers housed at The Center for Creative Photography in Tuscon, AZ. In a letter written to Weston by Esperanza V. Bringas on June 19, 1924, one finds that she had arranged for Weston to go to the Presidential Palace and photograph the then Mexican President, General Calles. It is not clear if this sitting took place. However, Bringa's letter demonstrates the extent to which Weston carved a spot for himself in Mexican society and art.¹⁶¹ Receiving an invitation to photograph President Calles was significant. Moreover, Weston published in several leftist magazines such as *Irridiador*, *El Machete* and *Forma*. Weston was not the only American involved with these publications. In fact, radical leftists Bertram and Ella Wolfe arrived in Mexico in 1923; and Bertram Wolfe wrote for *El Machate*. Weston knew the Wolfes and photographed Bertram and Ella while in Mexico.

"Mexicanidad" and the "Estridentistas" Movement

The Mexican Renaissance was not about politics alone. It was concerned with modern ideas and subject matter, folk art, form, technical veracity and with breaking the conventions of nineteenth century representation. For example, many of Weston's artist friends, and Weston himself were involved with the *estridentista* movement—a movement that fell within the umbrella of the Mexican Renaissance and complimented

¹⁶¹ Edward Weston Archive, Center for Creative Photography, Tuscon, AZ. Box 16, Item 16

Mexicanidad due to its respect of the revolution as subject matter. However, the Mexican Revolution was not a primary subject of focus for the *estridentistas*.

Estridentista translates to Stridentism in English. Manuel Maples Arce founded the movement in Mexico City in 1921. Its core values were those of rebelling from traditional ideals (hence its revolutionary concern), and shared some of the technical characteristics of Cubism, Dadaism, Futurism and Ultraism.¹⁶²

The *estridentistas* admired not nationalism, but rather a sense of place; they refused to romanticize the revolution; they respected it as a subject for art, not as a motivation, they saw “no need for revolutionary rhetoric and sophistry.” The most prominent artists supported the movement “for its desire to break old moulds and heavy structures” and because of its “rebellious and un-submissive spirit” One of its founders described it as: ... We saw later that it was a rebellion that was in the air of the world... It called to the youth of Mexico to search for new directions.¹⁶³

According to Maples Arc, “Estridentismo is not a school, it is not a tendency, nor is it an intellectual mafia... is a message of strategy, an expression. An interruption.”¹⁶⁴

Estridentistas “presented rambling opinions intended to cause inquietude, anguish, instability, and simultaneously distress...”¹⁶⁵ The *estridentitas* and other members of the Mexican avant-garde were creating a very specific type of modernity; of which, Weston was a part of and “played a key role in Weston’s Mexican period.”¹⁶⁶ And while

¹⁶² For additional information see, Luis Mario. *El estridentismo o una literatura de la estrategia*, México: Conaculta, 1997

¹⁶³ For additional information see: Baciu, Stefan. *Surrealismo latinoamericano: preguntas y respuestas*. (Valparaiso, Chile: Ediciones Universitarias, 1979); Beals, Carlton. *Mexico: an Interpretation*. (New York: E.W. Huebsch, 1923); and Cogner, Amy. *Edward Weston in Mexico 1923-1926* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983), p. 17

¹⁶⁴ Manuel Maples Arce quoted in Luis Mario Schneider, *Estridentismo: una Literatura de la estrategia* (Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1970), p. 11 Translation by Cindy Urrutia. Amy Cogner has a similar translation in *Edward Weston in Mexico 1923-1926*, p. 17

¹⁶⁵ Baciu, Stephan, *Surrealismo latinoamericano: preguntas y respuesta* (Valparaiso, Chile: Ediciones Universitarias, 1979), p. 100. Translation by Cindy Urrutia

¹⁶⁶ Furth in “Starting Life Anew: Mexico 1923-1926, Stebbins, Quinn, Furth. Edward Weston” *Photography and Modernism*, p. 37

Weston's did not necessarily cause anguish, or distress in his Mexican works, he did share the *estridentistas*' formal interests, as well as their desire "to break old moulds...because of its rebellious and un-submissive spirit"¹⁶⁷ that called Mexico to "search for new directions."¹⁶⁸ This is particularly the case with the nudes of Anita Brenner and *Excusado* discussed below.

In *Mexican Modernity; The Avant-Garde and the Technological Revolution*, Ruben Gallo argues that there was a second Mexican Revolution that occurred in the 1920s and 1930s—one of cultural representation. According to Gallo, the revolutionaries were not rebels or outlaws, but rather artists and writers. Gallo further notes that the artists' weapons of choice were: cameras, typewriters and other technological artifacts—the goal was to dethrone nineteenth century aesthetics.¹⁶⁹

Weston fits well into the rubric of the *estridentistas*, as he was breaking his own conventions with Pictorialism and its sentimentality through the machine aesthetic of the camera. Additionally, several of Weston's pieces were published in leading Mexican publications that were offsprings of the *estridentistas* movement.¹⁷⁰ For example, Weston's *Armco Steel*, 1922 was published as a cover to *Irridador* (Figure 9).¹⁷¹ *Excusado*, or *Urinal*, Mexico, 1925 (Figure 10) was published in *Forma*.¹⁷²

Armco Steel, forms part of American machine age modernism. It demonstrates a modern machine aesthetic through its interest in American industry; as well as its

¹⁶⁷ Cogner, Amy. *Edward Weston in Mexico 1923-1926*, p. 17

¹⁶⁸ *ibid*

¹⁶⁹ See Gallo, Ruben. *Mexican Modernity; The Avant-Garde and the Technological Revolution*.

¹⁷⁰ Cogner, *Edward Weston in Mexico 1923-1926*, p. 18

¹⁷¹ *Excusado* was on the cover of *Irridador* Cover #3, 1924

¹⁷² There are multiple versions of *Excusado*.

increasing sharpness, flattening of form, cylindrical shapes and verticality. Except for Tina Modotti's *Tank #1*, 1927 (Figure 11) and a few of Agustín Jiménez's works such as *Tolteca Cement Plant*, 1932 (Figure 12) there were not other Mexican's artists experimenting with Industry at that time. Additionally, Modotti's and Jiménez's works were both done after Weston's.

Weston's *Excusado* is clearly reminiscent of Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (Figure 13). However, Rivera and Charlot preferred Weston's piece to Duchamp's because they felt it was more visually intense.¹⁷³ This may be because Duchamp's *Fountain* is inverted and taken from a frontal position, while Weston placed the camera on the bathroom floor—providing a different angle that emphasized form more than an idea or function.

The first person Weston showed *Excusado* to was his friend Felipe Teixidor, an *estridentista* poet whose opinion was highly valued by Weston, the *estridentistas*, and other members of the Mexican avant-garde.¹⁷⁴ Teixidor congratulated Weston on *Excusado*. Based on Teixidor's observations and feedback, Weston wrote of *Excusado*:

“Form follows function.” Who said this, I don't know, but the writer spoke well. I have been photographing our toilet, that glossy enameled receptacle of extraordinary beauty. It might be suspicioned that I am in a cynical mood to approach such subject matter when I might be doing beautiful women or “God out-of-doors,”—or even considered that my mind holds lecherous images arising from restraint of appetite.

¹⁷³ Figarella, Mariana *Edward Weston Y Tina Modotti en México: Sus Inserción dentro del arte posrevolucionario* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 2002), p. 101

¹⁷⁴ Weston, *The Daybooks of Edward Weston*, p. 133. In this entry, Weston writes of Teixidor's importance as follows: “Felipe is one of the first...among my friends whose opinions is invariably sought for and well considered.”

But no! My excitement was absolute aesthetic response to form. For long, I have considered photographing this useful and elegant accessory to modern hygiene life, but not until I actually contemplate its image on my ground glass did I realize the possibilities before me. I was thrilled!—here was every sensuous curve of the “human form divine” but minus the imperfections.

Never did the Greeks reach a more significant consumption to their culture, and it somehow reminded me, in the glory of its chaste movement of finely progressing contours, of the Victory of Samothrace.¹⁷⁵

Clearly for Weston, *Excusado* is more than a photograph of toilet, but a sensual delight of contours that he compares to classical sculpture. It is in no way a readymade, humorous, or a commentary in the manner of *Fountain*.

When one considers *Excusado* in relation to *Armco Steel* of three years earlier, one is able to see that Weston’s art was already transforming and evolving into a more modernist sensibility in Mexico. *Armco Steel* is not abstracted, nor does it have the depth and volume seen in *Excusado*. The roundness of the seat, as well as its contours, contrast with the steel bolts anchoring it to the floor, the back wall, and the mosaic glass floor’s tile and shapes. What is more, the dark shadows on the right side of *Excusado* further abstracts the piece, and brings attention to the fullness of front middle section of the urinal. This emphasizes the clean lines of the left side. These qualities are not present in *Armco Steel*.

Another interesting point to consider with these two pieces is; while *Armco Steel* is modeled after the American avant-garde, *Excusado* is filtered through a Mexican setting. The tiled glass floor, locates the urinal in Mexico, while the formal elements are indebted to European avant-gardes Marcel Duchamp and Constantine Brancusi. The

¹⁷⁵ Weston, *The Daybooks of Edward Weston*, p. 132

estridentistas venerated Brancusi, whose sculptures are known for their clean geometrical lines, balanced form and sensual contours. Brancusi influenced Weston's Mexican material. In addition, Weston kept a copy of the issue of *Little Review* that discusses Brancusi.¹⁷⁶

Mexico in the 1920s welcomed different aesthetics and styles, but within a revolutionary context. This created a space where Weston could experiment and explore elements of different movements, and subject matter. In this environment, Weston was able to flourish and create his own distinct style.

Photography in Mexico had not explored modern ideas in the manner that Mexican avant-garde painters had, and was still mostly working within the rubric of Pictorialism or documentary photography. For example, leading Mexican photographer of the time Victor Agustín Casasola is known for chronicling the Mexican Revolution. Hugo Brehme, who was highly active in the teens and 1920s, is remembered for his portrait photography, and picturesque images of Mexico that were romantic and pictorial. Another well-known Mexican photographer, José María Lupercio was a Pictorialist. Tina Modotti, a foreigner like Weston did explore modern aesthetics, but she was Weston's student and many of her works are in dialog with his. Jiménez does explore modern ideas like Weston, and like Weston was still working on mastering abstraction and finding his own style. Thus, in terms of modern photography, Mexico in the 1920s was still in its infant stage. For that reason, Weston's works were considered groundbreaking, fresh and

¹⁷⁶ Weston's copy of *Little Review* is part of his personal papers at the Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Tucson

rebellious in Mexico. That is why they were valued and fit into Mexico's revolutionary aesthetic.

When Weston arrived in Mexico, he began to exhibit his art and found success. Weston's 1923 exhibit in *Aztec Land* (Figure 14) granted him the status, fame and the recognition he desired; as well as the respect of renowned artists. It also solidified his membership with the Mexican avant-garde. Ricardo Gomez Robelo, Dr. Atl, Nahui Olin, Diego Rivera and Lupe Rivera (Guadalupe Marín de Rivera), among many, visited the exhibition.

In 1924, Weston had three more exhibitions: a second at *Aztec Land* (solo exhibit), *El Café de Nadie* (as part of the *Estridentista* movement), and at *la Exposición de Artes Gráficas* (as part of a group where he won first prize).¹⁷⁷ It was in his second *Aztec Land* exhibition where Weston received the most accolades, and exhibited almost 100 photographs. Of all the pieces, *Pirámide del sol*; portraits and nudes of Tina Modotti; and the heads of: [General] Senator Manuel Hernandez Glaván, Guadalupe Marín de Rivera, Nahui Olin, and Dr. Atl attracted the most attention.¹⁷⁸ It is significant that Weston's nudes would attract attention in Mexico, since at first glance, they do not appear to have a direct discourse of *Mexicanidad*. However, like *Excusado*, Weston's Mexican nudes represent qualities and aesthetics that were highly appreciated. In addition, closer examination will show Weston's nudes contain subtle references to *Mexicanidad* through the dialog they have with elements of *indigenismo*.

¹⁷⁷ Edward Weston, *La mirada de la ruptura: [exposicion]* (Mexico: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, Museo Estudio Diego Rivera. Septiembre-Noviembre, 1994) 1994, Translated by Cindy Urrutia, p. 56. This is an exhibition on Weston held in Mexico

¹⁷⁸ Weston, Edward. *The Daybooks of Edward Weston*, p. 97

Weston's nudes were well received and written about. Francisco Monterde García, an art critic reviewed Weston's second *Aztec Land* exhibition for the magazine *Antena*. Monterde García's review avidly discussed the sensuality of Weston's nudes calling them "simultaneously of spectator and respect (spectator due to its nature; respectful of complete beauty)."¹⁷⁹ Monterde García's review demonstrates art did not have to have a revolutionary rhetoric or express a political call to arms for it to be esteemed in Mexico at that time.

With *Excusado*, Weston's aesthetics moved more towards abstraction and was the bridge towards the more modern aesthetic he developed while in Mexico. After *Excusado*, Weston worked on a series of nudes of Anita Brenner that brought him closer to abstraction. Weston's Nude Brenner series "would extend the limits of the still life subject; indeed her isolated, rounded form anticipates Weston's later work with the nude, as well as with fruits and vegetables."¹⁸⁰

Nude, 1925 (Figure 15), demonstrates a move towards a more modern sensibility that abstracted form and de-contextualized Brenner's body.¹⁸¹ *Nude* shows Brenner's backside as she bends forward. Her body is truncated, and the emphasis is on the curvature of her lower back and buttocks. Her upper torso also demonstrates the contours of her bent back. She is starkly set against a black background, further emphasizing Brenner's form. In addition, Brenner's lower backside has similar smooth cool curves as

¹⁷⁹ Francisco Monterde García Icazbalceta "Arte. La exposición de Edward Weston". *Antena*. No. V, noviembre de 1924, pp. 10-11 Translated by Cindy Urrutia

¹⁸⁰ Furth in "Starting Life Anew: Mexico 1923-1926, Stebbins, Quinn, Furth. *Edward Weston Photography and Modernism*, p. 37 Furth discusses technical similarities between *Nude* and Aztec sculpture, but does not make a direct connection to *Mexicanidad*.

¹⁸¹ *ibid*

Excusado. As Naomi Rosenblum notes, *Nude* “transforms sentient flesh into stone hardness.”¹⁸² Like *Excusado*, *Nude* is in dialog with Brancusi’s minimalist aesthetics in relation to the human form. However, European vanguardism is not the only influence one sees in Weston’s *Nude*; it has a strong Mexican aesthetic.

Nude forms part of the visual economy of exchange Weston engaged with. Diego Rivera often portrayed the backside of women with and without clothes in his murals. In addition, Rivera, Jean Charlot and Weston shared their works with each other and included one another’s works in their pieces. As a result, there was an interexchange of art that spoke to friendships among the avant-garde, but also demonstrate a shared vision of art. For example, it has been pointed out that *Untitled, Back of Nude Woman* from Rivera’s Chapingo murals closely resemble Weston’s *Nude*.¹⁸³ However, a direct reference to *Mexicanidad* and Weston is not made.

I believe that although *Nude* incorporates elements of European vanguardism because it abstracts Brenner’s back and focuses on modern aesthetics, it is part of *Mexicanidad* and *indigenismo* for several reasons. With *Nude*, one finds a relationship to ancient American figurative arts like *Knotted Rattlesnake*, Aztec Period (Figure 16).¹⁸⁴ Although it is not clear if Weston was familiar with this specific piece, he was familiar with similar pre-Columbian figurines. Moreover, I would like to specifically point out that the seated bent over position of *Nude* also closely resembles Aztec period figurines’ poses. For example, *Moon Goddess Xuihtecuhtli* (Figure 17) from the Aztec period is

¹⁸² Naomi Rosenblum, *A World History of Photography* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1984), p. 430

¹⁸³ Furth in “Starting Life Anew: Mexico 1923-1926, Stebbins, Quinn, Furth. *Edward Weston Photography and Modernism*, p. 47

¹⁸⁴ *ibid*

posed in a similar manner as *Nude*. The only difference is that the contemporary photograph of this ancient Aztec figurine is frontal. The pose, however, is the same. Additionally, this pose is repeatedly seen in figurines of gods, warriors and animals found at Mexico's National Museum. In *Daybooks*, Weston discussed how he was moved by his visit to the National Museum, where he saw pre-Columbian native sculpture that was far beyond his expectations.¹⁸⁵ Weston was stimulated by the simplicity of form he encountered at the museum, and several days after visiting the museum, he wrote one of his most quote lines regarding photographing "the quintessence of the *thing itself*."¹⁸⁶

Visiting the museum last week focused my thoughts once more on the issue of photography. For what end is the camera best used aside from its purely scientific and commercial uses?

The answer comes always clearly after seeing great work of the sculptor or painter, past or present, work based on conventionalized nature, superb forms, decorative motifs. That approach to photography must be through another avenue, that the camera should be used for a recording of *life*, for rendering the very substance and quintessence of the *thing itself*, whether it be polished steel or palpitating flesh.¹⁸⁷

When one views *Nude* in relation to Aztec truncated, as well as egg like forms, and seated poses, one can see a direct relationship in presentation and aesthetics. Moreover, turning to sources related to Mexico's Indian heritage formed an integral part of *Mexicanidad* and *indigenismo*. Through form and the manner in which Brenner was photographed, one is able to see a relationship with Indian thematic subject matter. Additionally, Weston, through his friendship with Jean Charlot became increasing

¹⁸⁵ Weston, *The Daybooks of Edward Weston*, p. 54

¹⁸⁶ *ibid*, p. 55

¹⁸⁷ *ibid*

interested in Mexican folk art in terms of pottery and toys due to their formal qualities and relationship to Mexico's Indian heritage. Thus, Weston highly valued and looked to indigenous subject matter for inspiration.

Nude broke conventions in Mexico on what a nude was, or looked like. It can be considered an 'interruption' in Mexican representation that defied 'old moulds' and 'structures.' For example, Anonymous, *Untitled*, post card, Mexico, 1924 (found in the Archivo General de la Nación) (Figure 18) is contemporary with Weston's *Nude*. *Untitled* clearly holds a different aesthetic sensibility than *Nude*. While *Nude* abstracts, *Untitled* romanticizes the female nude and is reminiscent of Titian like pastoral nudes. *Nude* is about lines, contours, and form. *Nude* is also done with a sharp focus camera. *Untitled* on the other hand references satires and nymphs, is Pictorial and uses a soft focus camera to create softness and atmosphere. Additionally, the few nudes found in Mexico from this time period fall within Pictorialism. Therefore, Weston was original at that time through his use of modern and indigenous aesthetics in Brenner's nude series. *Nude* was also as a rebellion against academic Mexican art. Hence one can see that *Nude* has many of the qualities valued by *estridentistas* and forms part of Mexico's revolutionary aesthetic.

Anita Brenner's¹⁸⁸ status as a leading member of the Mexican avant-garde is also important to the significance of *Nude*. Like other members of the avant-garde, Brenner

¹⁸⁸ Anita Brenner is a Mexican born author of Mexican art and history. She was most influenced by the Mexican revolution and is best remembered for the seminal book *Idols Behind Altars*, a critical study of Mexico from the pre-Columbian times to the early 20th Century. It explores Mexico's intrinsic association between art and religion; the role of iconography in Mexican art; and the return to native values. Moreover the book examines the early works Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and

contributed to the creation of national art and identity through publications such as *Mexican Folkways* (Brenner was the editor) and her book *Idols Behind Altars* that explored Mexico's cultural, historical and artistic heritage. In addition, many of the poses Brenner did for Weston, were her ideas. Weston took Brenner's ideas and gave them life—immortalizing Brenner in nudes, and furthering Weston's exploration of abstraction. Therefore, *Nude* celebrates a key figure of the post-Revolutionary movement and its aesthetics. According to Weston, "the nudes of A [nita] have caused more comment than any work I have done."¹⁸⁹

Brenner's nude series was not the only one that Weston did. Prior to Brenner's nude series, Weston extensively photographed Tina Modotti. Weston's photographs of Modotti were not as abstracted as those of Brenner. Yet, they too speak to Weston's formal exploration and transition into abstraction, as well as his interest in *indigenismo*.

Weston's *Tina Nude en la asotea*, 1924 (Figure 19), and *Nude on Roof*, 1924 (Figure 20) were photographed one year prior to *Nude*. In the Modotti nudes, one sees Weston's interest the female form, and the way in which lines contrast with lighting and textures. In both nudes, Tina lays on a *petate*, or a woven Mexican rug. In these pieces Weston's creates an interesting tension that contrast the verticality, straight lines, and textures of the *petate* with the curvature and smoothness of *Tina's* body. In addition, the angle at which the photographs were taken was from the top down, giving the viewer a voyeuristic gaze directed at *Tina*. *Tina* seems unaware of the viewer since her face, in

Francisco Goitia through the early to the mid 1920s. Edward Weston was commissioned by Brenner to photograph Mexican landscapes, folk art or any other thing relevant to her study.

¹⁸⁹ Weston, *The Daybooks of Edward Weston*

both cases is turned away from the viewer. Like *Nude*, Tina's nudes broke ground when compared to *Untitled* above. While *Untitled* is soft, romantic and distant, Tina's nudes invites the viewer's gaze; from her exposed buttocks in *Nude on the Roof*, to her pubic area and breasts in *Tina Nude en la asotea*. The postures of both pieces, and the use of a sharp focus lens camera created a different sensibility than that of *Untitled*. Tina's nudes invite objectification and sensuality. In addition, *Tina Nude en la asotea* "unabashed showed her pubic hair, something that would have raised eyebrows in the United States but was thought to be perfectly natural in the circles Weston moved in Mexico."¹⁹⁰

Weston's Mexican nudes form part of *indigenismo* and *Mexicanidad* through the use of the *petate*. The *petate* is a reference to *indigenismo* because *petates* were usually hand woven by Indians, and represented a type of folk art that was considered to be a part of Mexico's cultural heritage. Weston was aware of the importance of *petates*. One of Weston's copies of *Mexican Folkways* that is found with his papers is the June-July 1925 edition that includes an article by Anita Brenner titled, "The Petate, A National Symbol."

¹⁹¹ In this article Brenner writes, "The petate is Mexican, synthetically Mexican in use and spirit."¹⁹²

The *estridentistas* were not the only ones that influenced Weston's technical development. The muralists also played an important role in Weston's development. For the muralists, pictorial order and proportional harmonies, as seen in Rivera's murals were

¹⁹⁰ Van Deren Coke, Forward to Cogner, *Edward Weston in Mexico 1923-1926*, p. xi. Nudes of Tina Moddotti were well received. This is evident in a review written by Francisco Monterde Garcia. *Antena V*, "Arte", Mexico, noviembre de 1924, pp. 10-11. This article was also published in *FORMA, Revista de artes plásticas*, No. 7, Mexico, 1928, with the title "Fotografías de Weston" pp. 33-332

¹⁹¹ Anita Brenner, "The Petate, A Nation Symbol," *Mexican Folkways*. (June-July 1925). Vol. 1 No. 1, p. 15

¹⁹² *ibid*

important. In the case of Rivera, Cezanne's compositions, and the influence of his cubist period were foundations for his work. As a cubist working along side intimates Pablo Picasso, Fernand Léger, Robert Delaunay and Juan Gris, Rivera had incorporated into his works mathematical arrangements expressed through abstraction. Once in Mexico, Rivera continued to utilize mathematical arrangement, but through a sensibility oriented toward realism and narration.

Weston greatly admired Rivera and considered him to be master.¹⁹³ When Weston arrived in Mexico City, he and Rivera soon became friends. Weston often visited Rivera at work and studied his murals. In fact, on November 8, 1923, while celebrating Rivera's birthday, Rivera and Weston exchanged works and Rivera let Weston select drawings Rivera had made in his sketchbook for his murals. According to Weston, "Seldom, if ever; have I so thoroughly enjoyed a portfolio."¹⁹⁴

The idea of pictorial order and using geometrical structural plans was not unique to Rivera. Charlot also employed similar techniques. In fact, when Charlot saw that Weston's works were moving more towards pictorial arrangement and order, he told Weston, "I am going to work out the geometrical plans from some of your photographs which are so exact as to appear calculated."¹⁹⁵ Although Weston rejected Charlot's offer, Weston's pictorial arrangements articulated geometric shapes. This is evident in *Nude on Roof* where the *petate's* vertical patterns, the triangular shaft of light, and Tina's body all intersect and compliment each other.

¹⁹³ Weston, *The Daybooks of Edward Weston*, p. 31

¹⁹⁴ *ibid*, p. 31

¹⁹⁵ *ibid*, p. 99

Through his involvement with the Mexican avant-garde, the art that Weston was exposed to, and Weston's own explorations, one is able to see how deeply Weston's art was transformed by his experience in Mexico. However, as I have previously stated, Weston's time in Mexico is more than an aesthetic transformation, but also demonstrates how ideas on nation informed his art and how his art also contributed to those ideas in Mexico.

A REVOLUTIONARY AESTHETIC WITHOUT A CALL TO ARMS—HEROES

Weston's portraits depict key politicians and artists as revolutionary heroes—heroes that were shaping the nation, its identity and politics. More specifically, the people that Weston photographed represented the face of the nation that was creating itself, because they were the driving force behind Mexico's cultural and nationalist project. They were people such as: [General] Senator Galván, Dr. Atl, Diego Rivera, Jean Charlot and other key leading figures of Mexico's post-Revolutionary period.

In the beginning of the Mexico's Re-constructionist period there was not a clear sense of what Mexican identity (or *Mexicanidad*) was. The only thing that was clear was that after a ten-year bloody revolution, the Mexican people shared a sense of class struggle, hero worship of the Revolution's leading figures, and a desire for national unification and stability. Within this context, the people that were concerned with Mexico's cultural and nationalist project such as: politicians, artists, and intellectuals were the very people invested in national stability. Those were the people with whom Weston formed close friendships and photographed. Thus, Weston's Mexican portraits do more than demonstrate a technical shift from a soft-focus lens to sharp focus lens; they represent a narrative based on a visual language of heroes and cultural identity. Specifically, Weston's narrative is about the individual photographed—an individual that represents *Mexicanidad* or national identity by virtue of his/ status and position in Mexico. One can also find a direct relationship between the works of Edward Weston, Diego Rivera and Jean Charlot.

Mexican Art Historian Mariana Figarella in *Edward Weston y Tina Modotti en Mexico: Su Intersección Dentro De Las Estrategias Estéticas Del Arte Posrevolucionario*, states that a certain modern militancy unites them; a modern militancy that has a direct relationship to Mexican themes.

En el caso de Weston, el descubrimiento que hace de México y su cultura, su relación con estos mexicanos modernos, le permitió desarrollar su concepto de modernidad en fotografía a través un proceso similar: plasmando temas mexicanos mediante un lenguaje de formas depuradas y sintéticas en deuda con el cubismo y los movimientos que la vanguardia cubista desencadena hasta llegar a la abstracción. Del mismo modo que lo expresara Siqueiros en su manifiesto... Especialmente fructífera fue la relación de Weston con Diego Rivera, entre quienes se generó un mutuo respeto y admiración. Intercambiaban trabajos, discutían sobre las nuevas tendencias del arte y los artistas de vanguardia.¹⁹⁶

In the case of Weston, what he discovers about Mexico and its culture, his relationship to those Mexican moderns, allowed him to develop his concepts on modern photography through a similar process: using Mexican themes mediated through a language of forms and synthesis in debt with cubism, set free from chains until reaching abstraction. In the same way that Siqueiros expressed it in his manifesto... In particular one sees the relationship flourish between Diego Rivera and Weston, where mutual respect and admiration was generated. They exchanged works, discussed the newest art tendencies and the avant-garde artists.¹⁹⁷

One of the most important attributes of Weston's Mexican portraits is that they are straightforward. For that reason, they are considered honest, direct and unsullied in Mexico—in contrast to Pictorialism. I believe that the above, combined with Weston's ability to capture the essence of whomever he photographed defined Weston's Mexican portraits, and enabled him to contribute to Mexico's narrative of nationalism. However, because Weston's works do not have a direct call to arms, and are orderly, with a sense

¹⁹⁶ Figarella, *Edward Weston y Tina Modotti en Mexico: Su Intersección Dentro De Las Estrategias Estéticas Del Arte Posrevolucionario*, pp. 84-85

¹⁹⁷ *ibid*, Trans. by Cindy Urrutia.

formal presentation, it can initially be difficult to find a connection to *Mexicanidad*. Nonetheless, once Weston's narrative is clear, *Mexicanidad* in his works becomes clear. Weston engaged with *Mexicanidad* by producing portraits that herocized leading individuals of the post-Revolutionary era, in addition to producing a visual language of exchange with other Mexican avant-gardes.

In fact, it is Weston himself who first calls his portrait heads "heroic" in his *Daybooks*. Of Lupe Rivera's portrait (Figure 21) Weston wrote, "I am just finishing the portrait of Lupe. It is a heroic head, the best I have done in Mexico; with the Graflex, in direct sunlight I caught her, mouth open, talking, and what could be more characteristic of Lupe!"¹⁹⁸

Lupe Marin was a tall and statuesque figure and Weston was in awe of her "barbaric splendor."¹⁹⁹ In many ways Marin coincided with fantasies of the "noble savage" that were circulating in Mexico²⁰⁰; as well as the views Weston had on Indians, that were, at times problematic.²⁰¹ This piece in particular represents a Mexican type, one that ethnicizes and references *indigenismo*. This is evident in Weston's description of Marin in *Daybooks* where he describes her as walking like a panther.²⁰² A panther is a direct reference to Mexico's pre-Columbian past because of the importance it, and other

¹⁹⁸ Weston, Edward. *The Daybooks of Edward Weston*, p. 42.

¹⁹⁹ *ibid*, p. 41 The use of the term "barbaric" is highly problematic and suggests that Weston's may have associated being barbaric with Indian-ness. Lupe however, was *mestizo*.

²⁰⁰ Furth in "Starting Life Anew: Mexico 1923-1926, Stebbins, Quinn, Furth. *Edward Weston Photography and Modernism*, p. 42. In addition, throughout out *Daybooks* Weston makes many racist remarks in relation to the Mexican Indian. I am not the only person to have found these "remarks", James Oles has observed and remarked upon them in *South of the Border: Mexico in the American Imagination 1914-1947*. (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), pp. 84, 89

²⁰¹ See the section below titled "A Limited Honesty"

²⁰² Weston, *The Daybooks of Edward Weston*, p. 26

felines had with Mexico's indigenous groups. Thus, *Lupe's* portrait is a complex piece does more than present a Mexican subject. It herocizes Marin and references ideas related to *indigenismo*. Moreover, Rivera in his own writings also discusses Marin as having Indian like qualities. It is unclear in the record if Weston was aware of Rivera's views on Marin. However, there is a strong probability that Weston was, given his friendship with Rivera's. Weston's other portraits followed a similar paradigm as with *Lupe* that includes: focusing on the head (or in a few cases head and body) as a close up; displays heroic qualities; and more importantly spotlights key leaders in Mexico. I believe Weston's choice of subject matter is very telling indeed. Weston could have chosen to photograph the everyday folk, or Mexican, in a similar manner that Paul Strand photographed Indians. Instead Weston photographed specific people, friends that were influential members of Mexican society—from politicians to artists. In addition, Weston published portraits of these individuals in the important journal *Mexican Folkways*.

Mexican Folkways (1925-1937) was a tri-monthly publication that discussed Mexican folklore, traditions, art, music, poetry, archeology, the Indian in terms of *indigenismo*, and any other relevant cultural topics. It was published in both English and Spanish. Its initiator and editor was Francis Toor (American archeologist), and the art director Diego Rivera. The goal of *Mexican Folkways* was to bring knowledge to its readers about Mexican culture. It was a staple publication for the Mexican avant-garde to read in order to educate themselves on Mexican themes, as well as, promote the ideas and people it believed were relevant to Mexico's cultural project. It was also a publication that promoted Mexico's project of forging national identity because its subject matter

often dealt indigenous themes. Moreover, one can surmise that Weston regularly read *Mexican Folkways* because he published in it, and due to the fact that one finds copies of *Mexican Folkways* with his personal papers housed at the Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona.

Forging Friendship, A Visual Exchange of Imagery and Nation

The interplay and exchange of imagery that one sees between Weston, Charlot and Rivera is a testament to the mutual admiration the artists had for one another, as well as friendship. Weston on his end continued to photograph Rivera and noted enthusiastically in his *Daybooks* every time Rivera said something positive about his works. Rivera on his end praised Weston in several articles in *Mexican Folkways*, particularly with respect to Weston's still life (see Chapter 3).

Edward Weston's, *Diego Rivera, Mexico, 1924* demonstrates Rivera's deep expression slightly masked by the shadows of the hat that he wears. His large and robust body seems to dominate the lower right two thirds of the image. The wool of his coat marks and blends into the shadows stemming from his hat and cuts across in a diagonal line from the lower left corner fading into the top right. This image is a series of diagonals cutting and overlapping across the vertical frame. It is full of weight and volume as a result of Rivera's body. It also creates many geometric shapes as a result of the angles and lighting. Clearly the angularity of the shadows and the coat's lines, along with the roundness of Rivera's body, face and shape, are reminiscent of the diminutive qualities of cubism. And yet, there is a personal sensibility that cannot be reduced to

form—Rivera's expression. It is at the intersection of form and the subject (in this case Rivera) where text is superimposed on image. By default of Rivera's character alone, one begins to map a series of personality traits on this image. And it is here, where Weston's contribution to Mexico's narrative begins.

What is Rivera thinking? What is he engaged in? Revolutionary struggle? Reform? Strife? Any of these readings become relevant given it was taken during Mexico's Re-constructionist period. At the time Weston photographed Rivera, Rivera had already established a reputation for himself, first in Europe as a cubist and modernist, then in Mexico as a revolutionary, communist and artist. His persona has in many ways become an extension of his body and physical attributes—larger than life. A hero if you will that takes on the responsibility of holding art to its highest ideals, and partaking in Mexico's post-Revolutionary esthetic.

For Mexicans, the idea of heroes has become a central cultural theme. This is a result of the Mexican Revolution having a populist language, and of its leaders fighting against Diaz's tyrannical dictatorship. Their courage to stand for justice made the Revolution's leaders heroes. Artists became heroes by being represented as larger than life, with a character, as part of a story—the story of Mexico and the men that support its ideals. Artists were readily able to have this dual role, because they were often both artists and revolutionaries. For example, muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros was at one point a combination of: a soldier in the war, art student, and provided artwork for newspaper reports on the war. Additionally, the majority of the Mexican avant-garde was leftists, in favor of land reform and all the ideals the Revolution stood for. In the case of Rivera, he

was very vocal in his political views; communist; favored the populist ideals of the revolution; and his art works contain a clear leftist ideology. By virtue of representing those in favor of Mexico's call for revolutionary change in photography, I believe that Weston is partaking in the Mexico's revolutionary aesthetic and narrative.

Another interesting aspect of Weston's portraits is that they show an interaction between photographer and sitter. This interaction is about friendships, as well as art, and ideas circulating at the time. Additionally,

What is revealed in these very great photographic portraits by Edward Weston is not the personality of the sitter; and not the personality of the photographer either. Instead, it is an invisible, indefinable interaction of the two. There are portraits by other photographers which are portraits not of the sitter, but of the photographer, whether dignified or clownish; and there are competent portraits which are neither; merely, and generally, a highly commercial image. But photographs become something more when they are a record of the interaction of photographer and subject...that is what we see, what we respond to, is the dialogue between subject and artist, unspoken, unspeakable.²⁰³

In his assessment, Weston biographer, Ben Maddow touches upon the relationship that Edward Weston had with his friends. However, Maddow does not make a connection to *Mexicanidad* and later states it may have not been Weston's intent to create such a relationship, but that he may have just meant to present subject matter, and that in the process of presenting subject matter he created the relationship quoted above.²⁰⁴

Maddow's view of Weston is contradictory and demonstrates that early scholarship of Weston is problematic and does not take into account the personal ties Weston formed in

²⁰³ Biography by Ben Maddow, an Aperture Book. *Edward Weston: Fifty Years* (New York: Aperture, 1973), p. 50

²⁰⁴ *ibid*

Mexico. Moreover, I find it very difficult to agree with Maddow's later assertion because Weston's friendships deeply influenced him in terms of aesthetics and subject matter. Additionally Weston's friendships are discussed throughout *Daybooks*. Thus, the importance of the friendships Weston formed is evident.

Nancy Newhall has a similar observation as Maddow in terms of the viewing relationship between Weston and his sitter. However, her analysis is different because she states that the portraits are part of Mexico's narrative. But beyond her words below, Newhall does not explain how the portraits are part of Mexico's narrative.

Weston's portraits, which usually crowd the frame and gain strength thereby, are like empathic punctuation marks in any narrative history of Mexico in the turbulent 1920s. They vibrate with life... Weston made the most beautiful distinctive heads while conveying his subjects' personalities. His photographs monumentalized these personalities, and spoke eloquently of a new consciousness of Mexico.²⁰⁵

As can be seen Weston has been contextualized with the Mexican Renaissance and its avant-garde. I am adding to this conversation by stating that not only was Weston an *active* member of the Mexican avant-garde, but his images are historical documents of icons of nationhood, and testify to an exchange among its artists that forged ideas on nation. In addition, the images that Weston produced are significant because as John Mraz notes, in Mexico there was a culture of images.²⁰⁶ By producing iconic images of Mexico, Weston carved a place for himself among the avant-garde, and contributed to

²⁰⁵ Nancy Newhall forward in Cogner, Amy. *Edward Weston in Mexico 1923-1926*, p. xiii

²⁰⁶ Mraz, John. *Looking for Mexico; Modern Visual Culture and National Identity*, p. 2

Mexico's visual language of heroes and nation. Further, there was genuine admiration among the artists discussed in this study.

Weston apreciaba la formación y la información que traía Rivera del ambiente artístico parino de las primeras décadas del siglo: su contacto con los principales artifices de la vanguardia moderna europea, su relación personal con Picasso, Modigliani, Reverdy y otros artistas.²⁰⁷

Weston appreciated the formation and information that Rivera had, as well as his artistic sensibility from the first decades of the century, his contacts with principal leaders of the modern European vanguard, his relationship with Picasso, Mondigliani, Reverdy and other artists.²⁰⁸

Additionally, Cogner states that Weston's subjects shared his political outlook. However, she does not elaborate on Weston's views and for the most part discusses him as 'apolitical' in her writings. Cogner's views on Weston point to the complexities of Weston's works, and difficulty scholars have had in fully categorizing him. On the one hand Cogner states Weston's subjects shared his views, on the other hand she writes while Weston photographed renowned members of the avant-garde or revolutionaries they were

...probably of little importance to him, since the subjects were often his friends and among the most progressive intellectuals in Mexico; probably he hoped that they would be sellable to a larger audience. Moreover, it was most likely a pleasure to work with these subjects since they respected him as an artist and generally shared his political views.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁷ Weston appreciated Rivera's formation and the information he brought of the Parisian artistic ambiance of the first decades of the century, his contacts with the principal artists of the European modern vanguard, his personal relationship with Picasso, Modigliani, Revery and other artists. Translated by Cindy Urrutia from Mariana Figeralla. *Edward Weston y Tina Modotti en Mexico: Su Interseccion Dentro De Las Estrategia Esteticas Del Arte Posrevolucionario*, (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma De México Instituto De Investigaciones Estéticas, 2002), pp. 84-85

²⁰⁸ *ibid.* Translation Cindy Urrutia

²⁰⁹ Cogner, *Edward Weston in Mexico 1923-1926*, p. 29

I believe the portraits Weston takes of his ‘friends’ were not of little importance to him because he greatly respected them as artists and valued their opinions. And while Weston may have chosen to sell some of those portraits, I do not believe that given Weston’s penchant for artistic exploration and improvement, he would photograph people, particularly those whose opinion he solicited and valued for pleasure and sales alone. Weston’s portraits of his friends were intended as art. Weston wished to be recognized as an artist first and foremost. Further, Weston had a portrait studio in Mexico City that was not always utilized for creative purposes, but to support him financially. His portraits of leading Mexican figures were creative endeavors that he exhibited and published.

As with Rivera, Weston established a similar relationship with Charlot. Charlot was a French expatriate²¹⁰ who moved to Mexico in 1921, and settled in the United States in the 1930s. In Mexico, Charlot is best remembered as a muralist, for his interest in folk art, and illustrations. Charlot heavily influenced Weston and it was through his association with Charlot, that Weston became fascinated with *pulquerias*²¹¹ and Mexican folk art (Chapter 3).²¹² Jean Charlot’s, *Portrait of Edward Weston*, Mexico, 192 is a testament to their friendship as well as Edward Weston, *Jean Charlot*. Of Charlot Weston writes in his *Daybooks*,

²¹⁰ Charlot’s father was French. However, his mother was Mexican. Charlot was raised in France and did not move to Mexico until he was an adult.

²¹¹ A *pulqueria* is a Mexican tavern where men consume *pulque*. *Pulque* is an alcoholic drink that dates back to the Pre-Columbian era. It is made of fermented sap from the maguey (agave) plant.

²¹² Figarella, Mariana *Edward Weston Y Tina Modotti en México: Sus Inserción dentro del arte posrevolucionario*, p. 89

Jean Charlot remains as the one whom I am most drawn too, and this despite a slight separation of through difference of tongue, albeit his English is sufficient...Charlot is a refined, sensitive boy, and artist.²¹³

In addition, Edward Weston and Jean Charlot,

...understood each other like colleagues...They seem to have had an exceptionally spontaneous relationship: they boxed, Charlot did caricatures of Tina's [Modotti] suitors...and several times tried to steal one of Edward's toys, a Chinese looking horse but Edward finally gave "Horsie" to him, and he, in turn gave Edward a caricature of it...He introduced Weston to the painter Carlos Mérida; he accompanied him [Weston] when he photographed pulquerías. He may have introduced Edward to Anita Brenner, for Jean and Anita were close friends, and may have encouraged her to include Weston in her contract with the university [leading to *Idols Behind Altars*], which gave him the opportunity and funds to travel Oaxaca to Guadalajara in 1926.²¹⁴

Weston's association with Anita Brenner was equally important because she posed for him and commissioned him to photograph Mexican subject matter for her renowned book *Idols Behind Altars*. It is a book on Mexico's cultural, historical and artistic heritage. Weston was indirectly commissioned to work for a governmental entity through Anita Brenner's who was commissioned by Mexico's National University (UNAM) that funded her investigatory project, which led to *Idols Behind Altars*. *Idols Behind Altars* is a very specific book on culture and art that not only discusses Mexico's past and culture, but also brings attention to current artists who were part of the Mexican avant-garde. Being the official photographer for this project clearly aligns Weston with Mexico's cultural project of looking within to forge nation.²¹⁵ Through this project

²¹³ Weston, *The Daybooks of Edward Weston*, pp. 79-80

²¹⁴ Cogner, Amy. *Edward Weston in Mexico*, p.16

²¹⁵ This will be elaborated on in Chapter 3 since many of Weston's photographs published in *Idols Behind Altars* are folk art.

Weston was able to expand his knowledge on Mexico and photograph places and folk art that might have otherwise been unlikely.

In fact, some of Weston's most iconic Mexican pieces, *The Hand of Potter Amado Glaván*, 1926, *Maguey*, 1926 and *Ollas*, 1926 are a result of this study. In addition to introducing Weston to leading members of the Mexican avant-garde and intelligentsia, it seems very likely that Charlot may have arranged for Weston to participate in the spring of 1924 exhibition held in Guadalajara, where Weston sold eight prints,²¹⁶ and received a very strong review in *El Informador* by Siqueiros. The admiring muralist wrote, "the majority of Mexican photographers were utilizing Pictorialism and tried to emulate painters. This creates a falsification. Weston on the other hand leaves behind 'tricks' and brings true beauty to photography."²¹⁷

Charlot, Weston and painter Rafael Salas often exhibited together at the *Café de Nadie*. Weston met Salas at his first *Aztec Land* exhibition. Like with Charlot, Weston formed close ties with Salas, and often accompanied him and his wife Monna Alfau on outings. Weston also photographed the Salas. As a group they visited pre-Columbian sites as well as quaint villages such as: San Juan, Teotihuacán, Tenayuca, Chrususco, the fiesta of the Virgin of Guadalupe, Tepotzotlán, San Cristóbal, and Azcopotzalco.²¹⁸ Additionally, they introduced Senator [and General] Manuel Hernández (discussed below), and sculptor Manuel Martínez Pintao to Weston. Weston greatly respected

²¹⁶ Cogner, Amy. *Edward Weston in Mexico 1923-1926*, p. 16

²¹⁷ Translated and paraphrased by Cindy Urrutia. [David] Alfaro Siqueiros, "Una Trascendental Labor Fotográfica. La Exposición de Weston Modotti." *El Informador. Diario Independiente*. Guadalajara, viernes 5 de septiembre de 1925, p. 6

²¹⁸ Weston, *The Daybooks of Edward Weston*, p. 15

Monna's opinion²¹⁹ of his works and upon his return to Los Angeles referred to the couple as among his "best friends."²²⁰ In his *Daybooks*, Weston writes, "in mentioning close friends I do not overlook the Salas. I have seen more of them than any other 'person."²²¹ However, Weston does write that Charlot "remains as the one whom I am most strongly drawn towards..."²²²

Thus far, we have been able to see that Weston formed close ties and friendships with multiple leading members of the Mexican avant-garde. He greatly respected their opinions and actively participated in a visual economy of exchange in which the artists created images of one another, wrote for publications about each other's works, but in the process staked claim to "who is who," amongst the members of the avant-garde. Thus, I believe through the influence they had on one another, and their respective ideas, a framework for the identity or spirit that the Mexican Renaissance was being created. One also finds that Weston canonized a group of artistic heroes of Mexico. In addition to having a heroic quality, Weston's portrait heads portray the intensity of the character of his subjects.

Weston's *Galván Shooting (Galván disparando)*, Mexico, 1924 (Figure 22) monumentalized and heroizes General Manuel Hernandez Galván. In this photograph, Weston demonstrates Galván in a three quarter view, staring off to the horizon. The title suggests that he is, or was shooting—an activity that a general in the revolution would have done. Like *Diego Rivera* above, *Galván Shooting* is angular, sharp, and larger than

²¹⁹ Weston *The Daybooks of Edward Weston*, p. 91

²²⁰ Cogner, *Edward Weston in Mexico 1923-1926*, p.15

²²¹ Weston, *The Daybooks of Edward Weston*

²²² *ibid*, pp. 79-80

life. His face takes up most of the space. However, it is not interplay of diagonals and shadows as with *Diego Rivera*. Rather, it is stark with clearly defined lines and expression. It is a visual menagerie of different perspectives: from Galván looking to the horizon; to Weston capturing him in the moment; to the viewer accessing/ seeing Galván through Weston's eye.

Galván Shooting is the epitome of the type of individuals Weston photographed, *figuras notables*, 'notable figures' that were members of Mexico's artistic personages, political figures, or cultural giants.²²³ At the time Weston photographed Galván, Galván was a general and senator. Galván had fought in Mexico's revolutionary war and was an important political figure.

Weston and Galván were good friends. Weston accompanied Galván on outings on a regular basis²²⁴, and at one point asked Galván for a favor—to grant him traveling documents through an unstable region of Mexico. In his *Daybooks*, Weston wrote,

I have approached Galván for passes. "Not on the basis of friendship, my dear friend,—only if you think the work I have been doing in Mexico has any value to the country so much loved by you."

Weston's manner of asking Galván for travel passes is food for thought. Weston seems to have seen himself as part of Mexico's nationalist project, and as contributing to the country's cultural nationalism. Further, at that time, Mexican artists and publications *were associating* Weston's works with Mexico. Weston's *Galván Shooting* published in *Mexican Folkways*, No. 3, 1926 (Catalog 64), side by side, an article written by Galván

²²³ Cogner, Amy. *Edward Weston in Mexico 1923-1926*, p. 103

²²⁴ Weston discusses specifics of many of his outings with Galván in various entries in his *Daybooks*

himself called a “Ranchero’s Psychology” (Figure 23). In a “Ranchero’s Psychology” Galván stresses the importance of *Ranchero*’s relationship to land and its people. It also makes reference to the ideas on land reform, and politics that Galván believed should be part of a *Ranchero*’s mindset.

Diego Rivera utilized Weston’s *Galván Shooting* as the basis for one of his works, *Manuel Hernández Galván yacente*, c. 1926 (Figure 24), a post human homage after the general was killed in a battle during an outbreak of armed conflict. Weston’s portrait of Galván is stern and powerful, while Rivera’s homage shows Galván as softer, less expressive—at peace, if you will, as a result of the death. Nonetheless, both images immortalize Galván, albeit in different ways as a hero that is part of Mexico’s revolutionary narrative. And according to Rivera, Weston’s Galván’s head, “Es un retrato—portrait—de México.”²²⁵

Weston was not alone in Mexico in being interested in the formal abstract values of photography, while spotlighting certain cultural figures. This was also the case with Mexican photographer Agustín Jiménez Espinosa (known as Agustín Jiménez), who was highly active from the late 1920s and onward. Jiménez is best remembered as a leading photographer within the Mexican avant-garde of the 1920s and 1930s and also had international recognition. Jiménez exhibited in New York and San Francisco between 1929 and 1931.

Most of Jiménez’s works display an interest in form, volume and abstraction. In fact, in 1926 Jiménez was contracted to be a photographer for *Forma*, where Weston and

²²⁵ Weston, Edward. *The Daybooks of Edward Weston*, p. 105

other leading members of the avant-garde published. In many ways, Weston and Jiménez are similar in terms of subject matter choice and esthetic. Jiménez was concerned with portraiture, still life, random objects, and industrial machinery. It is rare to see any politically revolutionary imagery in Jiménez's works.

Jiménez's *Máximo Pacheco*, 1928 (Figure 25) is a close up of a lesser-known muralist from the 1920s and 1930s. This image illustrates Pacheco in a slight frontal profile. Pacheco's face covers well over three fourths of the image. The emphasis is on the interweaving lines that are accentuated by the shadows of his deep-set eyes, and the curving shadows that blend onto the lower jaw. The dark texture of the hair contrasts with the smoothness of the face and emphasizes the upper lip and chin. Moreover, the fact that the eyes are not readily visible adds a slight air of anonymity and abstraction.

Self Portrait in Profile, 1929 (Figure 26), takes a similar formal approach as *Máximo Pacheco*. In *Self Portrait in Profile*, Jiménez photographed himself against a stark black background, making his facial profile's lines clearly defined—from the straight forehead to the curvature of his nose, lips and chin. Shadows intertwine with the light that shines on his face. The facial shapes and forms are further emphasized through the contrast of his white striped shirt and the textured wool of his coat. It is a menagerie of shapes, lighting and texture. For Jiménez, this image was experimental, and like many of Weston's pieces, shows an interest in the abstract qualities of modern art in portraiture. However, unlike Weston, Jiménez's portraits are not icon of nations.

Jiménez's *Portrait in Profile* lacks the forceful personality portrayed in Weston's *Galván Shooting*. It also lacks the heroic and revolutionary connotations Weston elicits.

If one were to show the above-mentioned images, without stating who the artist was and ask; which seems more Mexican? It is highly likely that Weston's *Galván Shooting* would be the response. The reason is twofold: 1) because of the title, and reference to guns and shooting, 2) and Galván's status as senator and general.

For Jiménez, photographing people and objects was an exploration of modern ideas more than ideology. There is not a narrative in the manner that one finds with Weston because there was not visual economy of exchange being presented. In addition, many of Jimenez's work were created two to four years after Weston's works. And yet, Jiménez is aligned with the Mexican Renaissance by Mexican scholars, and is considered a leading avant-gardist of that time period. For example, Mexican art historian Antonio Saborit notes that, "Agustín Jiménez fue un fotógrafo central de la expresión artística de la vanguardia en México,"²²⁶ because Jiménez's oeuvre demonstrates an interest in things Mexican like toys, industry and self-exploration. Many of the qualities seen in Jiménez's works were in line with the *estridentistas*—he was the official photographer for *Forma*. In addition, when the Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein visited Mexico to film *¡Que Viva México!* he wrote of Jiménez (for a catalog as a part of solo exhibition of Jiménez), "I believe that Agustín Jiménez is a great artist of photography and I have a lot of appreciation for his magnificent work."²²⁷ This is noteworthy, as it is now even clear; artists did not have to portray a politically charged aesthetic of hammers and sickles to be

²²⁶ "Agustín Jiménez was a central photographer of the artistic expression of the Mexican vanguard..." Saborite, Antonio, "La lente de Jiménez" in *El Ángel (Reforma)*, 29 January, p. 4. Translation by Cindy Urrutia

²²⁷ Carlos A Córdova, *Agustín Jiménez y la vanguardia fotográfica Mexicana.*, (Editorial RM; México MMV, 2005), p. 103. Trans. by Cindy Urrutia Avivi.

considered part of Mexico's vanguard. Photographs of Nahui Olín by multiple artists emphasize this point.

Edward Weston's *Nahui Olin*, 1923 (Figure 27) follows a similar paradigm as his other heroic heads. What is striking about this piece is the manner in which Weston captures her forceful personality and rebellious nature in a simple, straightforward fashion. Nahui Olín was born María del Carmen Mondragón Valseca. She was a model, poet, painter, revolutionary and member of the Mexican avant-garde. Nahui Olín's anti-establishment tendency is evident through her cut off her hair, and is considered to be the first female to wear a mini skirt in Mexico during the 1920s. For Nahui Olín, adopting a hairstyle *à la garçon* was a symbol of her liberation and independence. This was considered highly radical at the time.²²⁸ Prior to the Mexican Renaissance movement, Nahui Olín lived in Europe, primarily in Spain and France. While in France she met and interacted with Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse and Jean Cocteau. She was coined Nahui Olín by her lover Dr. Atl. The name itself is highly charged with pre-Columbian symbolism and hence *indigenismo*. It is a reference to the fifth sun, called Nahui Olín, the last cycle of creation that occurred in Teotihuacan, the sacred city of the gods for the Aztecs.²²⁹

Weston is able to capture Nahui Olín's intense and rebellious personality because he focused is on her face/ head alone, quite different than Antonio Garduño's *Nahui Olín*,

²²⁸Figarella, Mariana *Edward Weston Y Tina Modotti en México: Sus Inserción dentro del arte posrevolucionario*, p. 117

²²⁹Taube, Karl. *The Legendary Past: Aztec and Maya Myths*. (Great Britain: British Museum Press & University of Texas Press, Austin, 1995), pp 42-44. The Aztecs believed they were created several times. Each new creation was a time of rejuvenation and for humans to be created better, improved upon by the gods.

Mexico, c. 1927 (Figure 28) that is more romantic and incorporates parts of Nahui Olín's body, in addition to her head. Moreover, Garduño presents the viewer with a softer Nahui Olín. Her hair is curled, make up intact, and she is dressed. She appears more proper and less brazen than Weston's piece. It also appears to be more posed, as if she is acting for the camera, playing out a historic and glamorous role.²³⁰ Nahui Olín disliked Weston's portrait and the fact that he exhibited it in his second *Aztec Land* show because it exposed too much of her.²³¹

Weston and Garduño were not the only photographers to take interest in Nahui Olin's striking looks and personality. Tina Modotti also photographed Nahui Olín. Modotti's *Nahui Olin*, c. 1925 (Figure 29), is similar to Garduño's piece in that they both show Olin posed and wearing clothes. While Garduño's photograph is more conventional in terms of hairstyle and softness of the overall piece, Modotti's seems to be closer to Weston's image, due to the similar hairstyle. And yet, Modotti's representation of Nahui Olín is rather appropriate and reserved, albeit if one does not consider Nahui Olín's *à la garcon* hairstyle. Besides the hair, there is nothing technically striking or iconographical about this piece. This is a key issue to consider is; Tina Modotti's Mexican works are regarded by the field to be in line with a politically revolutionary esthetic and visual representation because of her use of symbols such as hammer, sickles and indigenous folks. Yet, many of her portraits do not follow that format. Like Weston, she photographed leading members of the vanguard. However, they often lack the heroic

²³⁰ Figarella, Mariana *Edward Weston Y Tina Modotti en México: Sus Inserción dentro del arte posrevolucionario*, p. 119

²³¹ In his *Daybooks*, p. 97 Weston writes of this particular piece, "Nahui is a bit "enojado" –annoyed – that I should display such a reveling portrait of her, though I had her permission before hanging..."

qualities that Weston's portraits have. Hence few comparisons are made between the two artists in terms of portraits.

Another example, Modotti's *Francesca Toor*, 1927 (Figure 30) is more conventional and subdued, when compared to Weston's works. It should be noted that *Francesca Toor*, does have some references to a revolutionary aesthetic through the use of the typewriter and from the *molcajete* (a three legged bowl used for grinding corn and other similar things) in front of the typewriter. However, it does not have any other any visual imperatives that would lead a person to believe Toor was a leading member of the Mexican intelligentsia, and founder and editor of the magazine *Mexican Folkways*. It does not focus on any racializing elements, as seen with Weston's *Lupe Rivera* or the revolutionary reference of *Galván Shooting*. Moreover, Toor does not read as an icon of nation. It is not a close-up that focuses on the personality of the subject, and lacks visual intensity.

The closest Modotti comes to demonstrating an element of grandeur or heroism in her portraits is that of *Carlton Beals*, 1924 (Figure 31). This image follows Weston's proclivity for focusing on the face and reducing unnecessary space and corporeality from the photograph. With *Carlton Beals*, the viewer is presented with a face that stares succulently back at the viewer, similar to Weston's *Nahui Olin*—creating a complex visual interaction. Yet Modotti rarely followed this paradigm. It should be remembered Modotti was Weston's student and often incorporated Weston's techniques in her works. Nonetheless, the majority of Modotti's Mexican portraits do not display strong references

to national ideals or *Mexicanidad*, and are at times still bound to the romantic elements of Pictorialism, as seen in *Dolores del Rio*, 1925 (Figure 32).

Weston's portraits demonstrate the multifaceted nature of his work; that is both formally concerned and culturally charged. The trend with Weston has been focus on formalism—particularly given the fact that his post-Mexican works have a very strong formal modern aesthetic—and elide cultural indicators that are at times subtle, if one is unaware of them. Such is the case with Weston's use of *petates*, Brenner's Aztec influenced poses, or the socio-political status of an individual. However, during the time period Weston was in Mexico, his peers were well aware of his visual language. That is why he received so much attention by his contemporaries in Mexico. In fact, Weston was struck by the number of people, in particular men, that attended his Mexican exhibitions. It was quite a contrast to the U.S. where attendees were mostly women, and the numbers smaller.²³²

²³² Of the first Aztec Land Exhibition, Weston writes in his *Daybooks*, "I have never before had such an intense and understanding appreciation. Among the visitors have been many of the most important men in Mexico, and it is the men who come, men, men, men, ten of them to each woman; the reverse was always the case in the U.S. The men form the cultural background here, and it is a relief after the average "clubwoman" of America who keeps our culture." p. 25

A LIMITED HONESTY

From his *Daybooks* and personal papers, one finds that Weston did not engage with the general populous (more specifically Indians), in the same manner that he did with Mexico's avant-garde, leading politicians, businessmen and intellectuals. Most of Weston's Mexican friends and associates were predominantly white, and some were *mestizo*. Those that were *mestizo* were educated and held a similar sensibility as that of Weston. However, through record left behind by Weston, it is apparent he did not form close ties with "commoners," or Indians. When he did photograph a "commoner," or Indian, his vision shows his outsider perspective as a visiting American with a bourgeoisie sensibility.

While a thorough discussion of Weston's representation of Indians is beyond the scope of this project, it begs to be touched upon because he engaged with Mexican themes—Mexico's Indian heritage is one of them. It also merits attention because the field has yet to elaborate on his vision as a foreigner in Mexico in terms of how Indians are depicted by Weston. To be fair, the number of images of Indians by Weston is considerably smaller when, compared to those of light skinned, or white Mexicans. Thus, there is less material to view. Nonetheless, it is a topic rarely discussed and should be addressed due to its cultural relevance. It also demonstrates the tensions in some of Weston's Mexican works. This is seen in his photographs of white women dressed as indigenous women; versus the limited number of times he photographed actual Indians.

Weston is mostly discussed as "honest" in terms of his Mexican trajectory. While Weston's Mexican images as a collective were mostly honest, at times they are

complicated by his concepts of beauty, and limited Indian interaction. Weston's overall Mexican photographs are done in a direct manner that is free of embellishments. They are straightforward, and have a genuine interest in subject matter and form. However, Weston was an American, and his vision as such, carries prejudices aligned with his own culture and upbringing.

Thus, I believe that Weston's honesty, as discussed in the field, is limited because it is a funneled vision based on his Mexican experiences, focused through the lens of his own American culture. Instead of photographing Indian women in their traditional garb,²³³ Weston chose to photograph the wives, or relatives of famous Mexican figures dressed as Indians. On the one hand, it continues to further solidify friendships within the Mexican avant-garde; on the other hand, it ignores the very thing the movement was promoting, an interest in Indians themselves. I am not stating all of Weston's images are limited. I am stating there are moments when his images show his distance as an outsider. Thus, Weston's works demonstrate a tension between that of an insider due to his status as a Mexican avant-gardist, with that of an outsider due to his distance from Indians. Moreover, using white women dressed as Indians, as opposed to actual Indians is a complication. And yet, the clothing white women wear; through their reference to *indigenismo*, is a celebration of *lo Mexicano*. However, by failing to photograph Indians

²³³ There is an exception with and *Woman Seated on a Petate*, 1926 (Figure 33). In this photograph, like with *Luz*, *Woman's* back is to the viewer. In many ways *Woman* is reminiscent of Rivera's many flower vendors whose back is to the viewer. However, Rivera's flower vendors celebrate things Indian. *Woman* is staged, posed and appears to be more interested in the formal qualities of *Woman* and the Indian qualities around her.

in their traditional clothing, Weston effaces them. It is these types of contradictions that make Weston's works exceedingly complex and difficult to fully categorize.

For example, James Oles addresses Weston's limited vision in relation to Indians. However, Oles only briefly discuss this in his general anthology of America artists that visit Mexico. In his view:

American artists tended to portray the rural Mexican as an abstract type, or even exclude his presence altogether. While in Mexico between 1923 and 1926, Edward Weston revealed little interest in photographing the average Mexican. Weston did frequently refer to "Indians" in his *Daybooks*, the published version of his journals, in passages that reveal varied and at times almost racist impressions.²³⁴

Figarella also briefly addresses this aspect of Weston, and like Oles does not take into account the celebratory elements of Weston's use of *indigenismo*.

Rosa Roland de Covarrubias, bailando (vestida de traje de tehuana), 1926 (Figure 34) and *Luz Jiménez, parada* (Figure 35) portray women in some sort of Indian or native sensibility. However, *Luz*, full Indian²³⁵ is photographed in a different manner than *Rosa*, who is white and the wife of the renowned Mexican painter, intellectual and muralist Miguel Covarrubias. This distinction is important, particularly when one regards *Rosa's* background. *Rosa's* birth name was Rosemonde Cowan. She was born in Los Angeles, California to Henry Charles Cowan and Guadalupe Ruelas. *Rosa's* father was Scottish and her mother first generation Mexican-American. *Rosa's* mother's race is unclear from the record; it may have been white or *mestizo*. Regardless of her mother's race, *Rosa* grew up with a predominately 'white' American sensibility. *Rosa's* hometown

²³⁴ James Oles, *South of the Border: Mexico in the American Imagination*, p. 89

²³⁵ We know from Weston's *Daybooks* that Luz is Indian.

was South Central Los Angeles, a middle class white neighborhood at that time. In addition, *Rosa* did not learn Spanish growing up. She had access to arts education and became a successful Broadway dancer with Irving Berlin's the Music Box Revue in New York, and with the Ziegfeld Follies, with whom she toured Europe in 1923.

Rosa met and married Miguel Covarrubias in 1924. The couple moved to Mexico, where *Rosa* changed her name to a more Spanish sounding one, and met Weston. Not only were *Rosa* and Weston friends, but also he became her photography teacher. *Rosa* was interested in different visual mediums, and is a lesser-known surrealist painter in Mexico. Relevant to this study is also the fact that *Rosa* had a history of being interested in non-Western cultures and dress. This may have contributed to her collaboration with Weston in dressing in full Indian regalia and posing for him. Weston may have also been interested in *Rosa's* good looks that attracted May Ray and Nicolas Murray, whom photographed her in various fashions—from *tehuana*, to flapper, and in trousers.

Rosa is photographed with respect and a certain amount of decorum, when compared to *Luz* that is naked. In *Daybooks*, Weston stated that he strove to avoid the picturesque that included clouds, landscape, Indians and churches. However, Weston's struggle with the 'picturesque' is evident. The Indian representation that *Rosa* performs can be read as picturesque, as opposed to the naked representation of *Luz* that is not picturesque, and carries underlying racial undertones. Weston's *Luz* is also highly problematic, and shows Weston's ambivalence towards Indians.

Luz Jiménez, standing, is perplexing and on the surface appears as an extension of Weston's general imagery—simple, direct, interested in form and native/ indigenous

subject matter because *Luz* is clearly Indian. The image also has other Indian references. However, a closer analysis can reveal Weston's trouble with breaking through cultural and racial lines. This is because one finds a complex set of power relations in which *Luz* is, feminized and seen as an "other." She is of interest, as a specimen and not an object of sensuality as with the nudes of Tina Modotti, wives of his friends, or his heroic heads. Nor does the photograph celebrate her personality. Yet, it should be noted that it *does* celebrate things Indian through the *petate*, since it takes up the space of the wall, and brings the viewers attention to its design and indigenous quality. The pattern of *Luz*'s dress or skirt is also indigenous.

Luz was photographed naked facing a hanging *petate*. Her back is turned away from viewer, and camera. Her hair is parted down the middle and braided. Each braid is tied with ribbons that have small indigenous designs. Her arms are tightly held against her chest, in a protective gesture. Her dress lies on the floor, around her legs—making *Luz* appear exposed, as if her dress was pulled down. This is neither a polite, nor a genteel pose. *Rosa Roland de Covarrubias, bailando*, on the other hand, is photographed in full Indian regalia, dancing, smiling, facing and posing for the camera. *Rosa*, as she dances upright and holds her skirt for the viewer is presenting her staged Indian-ness. *Luz* is Indian, but has nothing to present, except for her exposed back body that is slightly hunched.

Rosa was not the only white, or privileged²³⁶ woman dressed as Indian that Weston photographed. *Elisa Guerro* (Figure 36) is another example of a photograph that follows a similar paradigm as that of *Rosa*. One might ask; why not photograph Indians in their traditional costume instead of educated and cultured family members of the avant-garde? The record left behind by Weston does not reveal an answer. However, perhaps Mexico's drive to create a homogenous society through *indigenismo* and *mestisaje* may provide an answer because those were important attributes of Mexico's nationalist project and one does see other members of the Mexican avant-garde dress "Indian-like."

Renowned Mexican painter Frida Kahlo is often remembered for dressing in traditional Mexican garb. Kahlo may have chosen to dress in Indian clothing in order to retrieve some sort of Indian-ness that was not initially part of her upbringing. It may also have been to show her political sympathies with *indigenismo*. However, Kahlo did not begin to dress in Indian clothing until several years after Weston's photographs were taken, and ideas on what constituted Indian-ness were more ratified. Moreover, Kahlo's father was a white German, and her mother a mixture of Spanish and Indian. Thus, Kahlo was technically ¼ or less *mestizo*, depending her mother's mixture. However, growing up in Mexico prior to the Revolution, and being *mestizo*, or Indian did not hold value; whiteness did. Moreover, Kahlo's upbringing, like Rosa Roland de Covarrubias held a

²³⁶ I wish to make a particular distinction about race and privilege in Mexico. In Mexico, race is a tenacious matter. There was a small white and *mestizo* elite. While privilege was reserved for white Mexicans, there were some *mestizos* that were wealthy, part of the elite and key post-Revolutionary figures. However, Mexico's general populous was primarily Indian and *mestizo*. *Mestizos* that were part of Mexico's white ruling elite, often had a more 'white' sensibility. And, as has been discussed in the Introductory chapter, the idea of pushing for, and valuing *mestisaje* was post-Revolutionary construction.

more white sensibility. What is important to this study is; the idea that things Indian had value, and that it was being culturally constructed at the time Weston lived in Mexico. Moreover, while I do believe that Weston's photographs betray certain prejudices, I believe his Mexican peers may have had similar struggles (to varying degrees) because of many of them had a privileged background that held a white Euro-centric sensibility. Rivera's *Creation*, discussed in the latter, is an example of a Mexican mural with more European sensibility. Thus, I believe that Weston may have felt he had more in common with Mexicans that held a similar sensibility as he did. As a result, he photographed them with a certain sense of equality, respect and dignity that is not seen with Indians.

In the early 1920s Mexico, there were contests/ pageants held such as *La India Bonita*, "the pretty Indian." The idea was to find pretty Indian women to express value and show that Indians were beautiful. The first contest was held in 1921 and Maria Bibiana Uribe was the winner (Figure 37). This contest was significant because considering Indian women to be beautiful was new and novel at that time. And even though there was a drive to ethnicize Mexico, Mexicans also struggled with ideas of beauty and often utilized traditional western canons of beauty.²³⁷ Weston's arrival in Mexico was only two years after the first *La India Bonita* contest was held.

²³⁷ Lopez, *Crafting Mexico*, pp. 34-45 Also reference my introduction where conflicting views on *Indigenismo* are expressed. Mexicans struggled with their own ideas on Indian-ness. Considering Indians beautiful was initially a struggle for Mexican. Even the muralists' first murals followed traditional western canons of beauty and represented white Mexicans as leading figures in the murals. It was through trial and error that the murals shifted from representing whites to Indians in their early murals. Weston is similar to the muralists in his struggle to represent Indians in his works. However, unlike Weston, the Mexican muralists were able to celebrate the Indian him/ herself, not just elements of Indian-ness, and move past their own limitations on standards of beauty.

By dressing as Indian, white women were staging Indian-ness and aligning themselves with the narrative around finding value in things Indian. Weston and these women may have been trying to express Indian beauty. However, a more accurate representation of Indian-ness would have been to photograph actual Indians in their traditional clothing. Moreover, the photographs of *Rosa* and *Elisa* tend to be posed in order to fully display the craftsmanship that went into the native costume each of the women were wearing. In this sense, Weston's images are similar to Mexican-German photographer Hugo Brehme's²³⁸ *China poblana*, ca. 1925 (Figure 38). I concede that as early as 1910 there were a few photographers that photographed Indian women in full regalia. C.B. Waite's *Tehuantepec Woman*, 1910 (Figure 39) is an example. However, Waite photographed Indian women for commercial purposes, whereas Weston was working on developing a personal aesthetic that included standards of beauty.

In Mexico Weston found intellectual and artistic freedom, however, it was difficult for him to overcome racial and cultural barriers.²³⁹ In a letter to his wife from Mexico, Weston wrote, "You see this is an enlightened and free country. There may be bullfights, but we don't have the Ku Klux Klan nor lynching bees."²⁴⁰ And yet, when he first arrived to Mexico he also wrote in his *Daybooks*,

²³⁸ Hugo Brehme was a German born and immigrated to Mexico in 1908. Although German born, Brehme is considered to be a Mexican photographer more than German because he spent most of this life in that country and photographed Mexican subject matter. He chronicled parts of the Mexican Revolutionary War, and turned to Pictorialism after the war. He is also remembered for this post card photography.

²³⁹ Mariana Figarella briefly alludes to this in *Edward Weston Y Tina Modotti en México: Sus Inserción dentro del arte posrevolucionario*, p. 79

²⁴⁰ Edward Weston to Flora C. Weston, October 16, 1923, Edward Weston Archive, Center for Creative Photography, Tuscon, AZ

Beautiful women seem rare—maybe they do not walk the streets—and those of the upper class dress in execrable taste. Maybe I expected shawls and mantillas! Of course, I expect the Indian in native costume, both men and women.²⁴¹

This passage is rather telling. Moreover, to expect Indians in native costume can be considered patriarchal and essentializing. Thus, one can infer that it was one thing to bond with white, or even *mestizo*, well educated leading members of the vanguard, and another with the general non-white Indian populace. Thus there seems to be a tension between the intimacy with which Weston photographed key players (and friends) of the Mexican Renaissance, and the distance with which he portrays Indians such as *Luz*. This becomes more evident with the nudes of Tina Modotti.

Tina Nude and *Tina Nude en la Asotea* were both taken of Modotti lying down, versus *Luz* who is standing. The horizontal versus vertical position of Modotti by default can suggest a more sensual overtone. There is a certain eroticism and sensuality that one has in viewing Modotti from a standing position. However, the very fact that she is posing nude, particularly with *Tina Nude*, where she has her arms over her head, fully exposing her breast may be perceived as an invitation to look. *Tina*'s inviting pose is starkly different than *Luz*'s hunched and protective position. Thus, one is able see that Weston's portrayal of *Luz* is limited. This is also evident in *Pissing Indian, Tepotzotlàn*, 1924 (Figure 40). I believe that it is very unlikely that Weston would have photographed members of the Mexican vanguard conducting such a banal act. The name itself is also brash. The trench between a heroic head and a 'pissing' Indian is large indeed. Moreover, in terms of *Luz*, it lacks the grandeur and personal expression that Weston's

²⁴¹ Weston, Edward. *The Daybooks of Edward Weston*, p. 15

heroic heads display; the representation of the craftsmanship of the dresses *Rosa* and *Elisa* wear; and the sensuality of *Tina*. Instead one finds a sense of anonymity and coldness.

Yet, *Luz* can also be read as a historical document in a similar manner as Weston's other works that trace an interest in indigenous themes. Nonetheless *Luz* displays certain limits in Weston's Mexican oeuvre that I believe are a result of his outsider and American status. At the same time, with Weston we have been able to see that there was not one clear formula on how *indigenismo* and *Mexicanidad* should be represented in Mexico during the 1920s. There was, however a growing interest in indigenous subject matter, leftist politics, social justice, revolution, and art for the sake of art. This is clear when one has a nuanced understanding of Mexican culture and ideology of the 1920s. Thus, when one views Weston's Mexican works, it is evident that while he was transitioning from Pictorialism to a more mature modern aesthetic, his imagery is highly complex, and offers the viewer: icons of *Mexicanidad*, or national identity; provides a visual economy of exchange; can be interpreted as historical documents; is aligned with the values of the Mexican avant-garde; and on occasion displays a grey zone of cultural bias. Nonetheless, one thing is clear, Mexico greatly impacted and transformed Weston who recalled, "These several years in Mexico have influenced my thought and life...And I have been refreshed by their elemental expression,—I have felt the soil."²⁴²

²⁴² Weston, *Daybooks*, xxi

CHAPTER 2

Our Mexican pictorial movement with its plastic concepts and new realism in open rebellion against formalism, took as its basis Man, the physical world in which he moves, struggles and dies. Paul Strand, coming to Mexico in 1932, penetrated the terrain of moving pictures with an unquestionable documentary and technical power... Strand made an outstanding contribution, notably with his film "Redes" ...a work of dynamic realism, emotional intensity, and social outlook. It is a masterpiece, a classic of the Mexican, and by extension of the Latin American milieu. This is equally true of the photographs which make up the "Mexican Portfolio".

Strand's point of view paralleled that of the pioneers of Mexican mural painting...I wish to pay homage to the greatness of this "American-Mexican," or better, this citizen of the world... ~David Alfaro Siqueiros 1967²⁴³

David Alfaro Siqueiros wrote the above as part of the introduction to Paul Strand's reissue of *Photographs of Mexico* under its new name *The Mexican Portfolio*.²⁴⁴ In calling Paul Strand an "American-Mexican," not only is Siqueiros aligning Strand's works with those of the muralists and other Mexican artists from the 1930s, but he is also praising technique, subject matter and social vision as a reflection of that time period in Mexico. It is for this reason that I will propose that Paul Strand's Mexican portraits fit in with the revolutionary art that was being expressed during the decade that he was working in Mexico.

While in Mexico, Paul Strand focused on photographing Indians and *bultos*, and also filmed the movie *Redes*. In this essay, I will primarily discuss Strand's portrayal of Indians in his Mexican photography, the majority of which represented the Indian as dignified, heroic and brought attention to the everyday life of Indians. In addition, and of particular interest to this essay is the fact that Strand photographed Indians while

²⁴³ This passage is part of the introduction to the 1967 re-issue of Paul Strand's *Photographs of Mexico* that was re-titled *The Mexican Portfolio*. Strand asked Siqueiros for an introduction to the Mexican Portfolio re-issue. Siqueiros readily agreed.

²⁴⁴ The name was changed from *Photographs of Mexico* to the *Mexican Portfolio* because the Mexican Portfolio included photographs from *Photographs of Mexico* as well as from Strand's second visit to Mexico in 1966

employed by the Mexican Secretariat of Education (SEP). At the time that Paul Strand lived in Mexico (1932-1934), the SEP was concerned with educating Indians and bringing further awareness of Indians to the dominant white citizens of the Mexican nation.

There is a correlation between Strand's views and those of the SEP. This is particularly evident when one considers that Strand was deeply transformed by his experience in Mexico that moved him more towards the political left as he fused art with a social vision that included the Indian. Thus, this chapter examines the ways in which Strand's imagery is related to *Mexicanidad*, *indigenismo*, and the proletariat struggle as part of Mexican daily life, as well as to the party politics that leading members of the Mexican avant-garde were espousing. Moreover, Strand's photographs of Indians fit in with the effort in Mexico to define the Mexican nation around the every day folk (Indians) and its pre-Columbian past.

One of the most transformative elements of Paul Strand's Mexican oeuvre was his move towards the political left and need to express a social vision in his art. While it was in Mexico where this decisive shift occurred, it did not happen in a vacuum. Early on in his career Strand was interested in form and modernism. However, Strand also demonstrated an interest in social commentary.

Paul Strand developed an interest in combining form and a social message through his interaction with Lewis W. Hine, Alfred Stieglitz, his involvement with Young Americans, and his growing interest in material culture that reached an apex in Mexico. In addition, Paul Strand was exposed to ethics as a student at the Ethical Culture

School, which I believe may have to an extent impacted Paul Strand's interest in the 'human situation.'²⁴⁵ This ethical interest in the human condition became more pronounced when he traveled to Mexico.

According to Rosalind Singer, a graduate from the Ethical Culture School, the School,

was in a sense...non-deistic, humanist...taught ethics as a part of the curriculum beginning in first grade. The society and the school were dedicated to... advanced liberal concepts of social justice, racial equality, and intellectual freedom. They were havens for secular Jews who rejected the mysticism and rituals of Judaism, but accepted many of its ethical teachings. Additionally, because the institutionalized anti-Semitism of the times established rigid quota systems against Jews in private schools, the Ethical Culture School had a disproportionately large number of Jewish students²⁴⁶

During his tenure at the Ethical Culture School, Strand took an extracurricular photography class taught by Hine, who was a biology teacher. Hine is best remembered as a sociologist and photographer due to his interest in social welfare and reform movements. When Hine stopped teaching at the Ethical Culture School, he became an investigator for the National Labor Committee. Many of Hine's photographs of children in factories contributed to the passing of child labor laws. While his time at the Ethical Culture School was short, Hine's impact on students, in particular Strand, proved to be considerable—from social concern to the technical aspects of a camera.

²⁴⁵ Strand first used this terminology in a letter to Ted Stevenson 1932. See Paul Strand to Ted Stevenson, Taos, 1932. Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Tucson

²⁴⁶ Rosalind Singer, Letter to the Editors of the New York Times Review of Books, April 25, 2002 <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2002/apr/25/the-ethical-culture-school/>

Hine taught his students the “fundamentals of a camera and darkroom work, and how to use an open flash pan of magnesium powder for indoor photography.”²⁴⁷ More importantly, Hine took his students, including Strand, to Alfred Stieglitz’s Little Galleries of the Photo-Secessionists²⁴⁸ at 291 Fifth Avenue. At the Little Galleries Strand was introduced to the works of photographers that

...were expressing vital things. Every print bore the individuality of its maker. The range of color and surface seemed unlimited—the powerful chiaroscuro and rich blacks of Steichen’s gum prints, the shimmering tone patterns of Clarence White’s platinums, the dynamic portraits of Gertrude Käsebier and Frank Eugene...Stieglitz’s penetrating images of the rising, changing city.²⁴⁹

Blind Woman, New York, 1917 (Figure 41) is an example of Paul Strand’s early interest in ethical humanism. Blind and unaware, the woman depicted in this portrait is indicative of Strand’s candid straight street photography where he sought to photograph subjects without their knowledge.²⁵⁰ Although Paul Strand stated that *Blind Woman* held “enormous social relevance” for him, it grew out of his desire to solve what he termed a

²⁴⁷ Calvin Tomkins, *Paul Strand: Sixty Years of Photographs*. (Millerton, NY: Aperture, 1976), p. 17

²⁴⁸ The Photo Sessions were a group of photographers organized around Alfred Stieglitz in 1902 that promoted photography as an art form. Most of the Photo Secessionists worked under the Pictorialist Style. Leading members of the group included Alfred Stieglitz, Gertrude Käsebier, Edward Steichen, Clarence H. White and Joseph Kelly among others.

²⁴⁹ Newhall, Nancy. *Paul Strand: 1915-1945*, p. 3

²⁵⁰ In Paul Strand’s, transcript of interview with Milton Brown, November, 1971 for the Archives of American Art, The Smithsonian Institution p. 6 Paul Strand discusses how he was able to photograph people unaware. “I worked with the Ensign camera, and put a false lens on the side of the camera, screwed it onto the side of the camera’s very shiny brass barrel, and then shot with the brass barrel directed at right angles to the person I was going to photograph; but the other lens, came out under my arm because it was a long extension...It was quite nerve-racking because there was a possibility that you would be challenged either by the person being photographed or by some by standard who might realize that you were up to something not quiet straight.”

It is interesting to consider that photographs such as *Blind Woman* are considered “straight photography” given the fact that they were not photographed straight on, meaning face to face, and given the fact that Strand recognized there were some ethical issues to consider. However, his concern was more about what he termed, “how to solve a problem.” The problem was finding a way to photograph people unaware, regardless of social relevance or intrusions.

‘problem.’ “How do you photograph people in the streets without them being aware of it?”²⁵¹ Nonetheless, Strand’s tactic of photographing a person ‘unaware’ is ethically questionable and intrusive.²⁵² And yet, social undertones are a part of *Blind Woman*. As Milton W. Brown has pointed out in reference to Strand and *Blind Woman*,

American art during this time period was permeated by a general progressivism that seemed to focus on “living art,”...The Ashcan School of American urban realist painting as well as the more avant-garde entourage around Alfred Stieglitz and his gallery 291 and the Arensberg circle were all motivated by congruent imperatives such as “life,” “creativity,” or “modernity.”

The urban realism that arose to displace the genteel academic tradition in American art at the turn of the century was an expression of the general progressivism and intellectual ferment of the time. American society was undergoing a searching reexamination and questioning in all fields...²⁵³

One of the ways in which Strand questions, is by focusing on the city’s underbelly dwellers such as *Blind Woman*. Moreover, it is meant to be a more authentic image of a real situation as it moves away from the more genteel representation of the Pictorialists. And while the ethics of photographing people without their knowledge is highly questionable and can be interpreted as a tendency towards social surveillance or middle-class imperialism that was often associated with Progressive social photography,²⁵⁴ Curator Mark Haworth-Booth reminds us of *Blind Woman*, “In its force and complexity,

²⁵¹ Paul Strand Interview in Philadelphia, 1971 in *Paul Strand, Sixty Years of Photographs* (Millerton, N.Y. : Aperture, 1976), p. 144

²⁵² Several scholars such as Mark Whalan and Daniel Palmer have remarked upon the intrusive nature of *Blind Woman*.

²⁵³ Brown, “The Three Roads in Paul Strand Essays on his life and art”

²⁵⁴ Palmer, Daniel, In Naked Response; of face of candid portrait photography,” in *ANGELAKI; Journal of the theoretical humanities*. Vol. 16 No. 1, March 2011.

One can also note that according to David Peeler, Strand had little precedent for photographing social types, David Peeler reminds us that the literary naturalists and Ash Can painters that came before Strand by a few years had turned their attention “to social types that might seem below art.” Peeler, David *Illuminating Mind in American Photography*, p. 96

this picture surpasses the social realism of Ashcan School paintings and street depictions of Theodore Dreiser. The portrait conveys *qualities*: endurance, isolation, the curious alertness of the blind or nearly blind.²⁵⁵ In a similar manner, Strand's Mexican portraits will display certain qualities, however those will be related specifically to the Mexican Indian and some of the general qualities that have been prescribed to Indians such as pensiveness, resolve, strength and sadness.²⁵⁶ These 'qualities' are present in Strand portraits; and are regarded as displaying social concern, or as part of a social vision in Mexico.

Former teacher Lewis Hine was most likely a model for Strand when he began to look at social types. However there are clear differences between the two photographers. While Hine often provided a social context and his subjects were aware they were being photographed, Strand's subjects were unaware and often did not have a context. In addition, Strand often excluded bystanders or other superfluous elements from his street portraits. The focus was on the individual. This is another quality that will also be seen in Strand's Mexican portraits. For our purposes what is important is that early in his career, Strand showed an interest in social types, the marginalized and their circumstances.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁵ *Paul Strand, Sixty Years of Photographs* (Millerton, N.Y. : Aperture, 1976), p. 5

²⁵⁶ These qualities are attributed to Indians by Krippner in *Paul Strand in Mexico* and by Elizabeth McCausland "Paul Strand" (Springfield Mass: Privately Printed, 1933), un-paginated. Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Tuscon.

²⁵⁷ Strand's photographs of the social types and the marginalized are part of a series of New York street photography, and were part of a larger group of photographs that focused on experimenting with abstract forms. In 1915 Strand took this new body of work to Alfred Stieglitz. Stieglitz offered Strand a one man show at 291 titled, "Photographs of New York and Other Places," from March 13-28, 1916. Although *Blind Woman* was taken in 1916, it was part of the show.

Alfred Stieglitz was a major influence and guide for Paul Strand, aesthetically as well as socially in a different way than Hine. Alfred Stieglitz promoted modern art, and many of the artists he supported aligned themselves with the Lyrical Left that was grounded in Progressive Era ideals, with himself as its overseer. At its core, the Lyrical Left was ideologically romantic in the sense that it rebelled against America's genteel past and looked to Walt Whitman for inspiration—a prophet of sorts.²⁵⁸ Whitman was an inspiration to this generation of artists because he was considered to be a model for uninhibited creative expression. In addition, Whitman was deemed to be an example for non-repressed sexuality and social reform.²⁵⁹ Comparisons between Stieglitz and Whitman were made by leading cultural critics and artists because of their mutual interest in New York and their desire to spiritualize the material and industrial worlds of the

Blind Woman was part of the review Charles H. Chaffin wrote on "Photographs of New York and Other Places" called "Paul Strand in 'Straight' Photos," in *New York American*. Strand also received a good review for this show from Royal Cortissoz in the *New York Tribune*. In addition, *Blind Woman* was published in *Camera Work* 49-50 in 1917, the final issues, as a gravure. This issue of *Camera Work* was dedicated to Strand's New York street photography and abstract experimentations.

²⁵⁸ My discussion on the Lyrical is limited because it is meant to provide a backdrop for the ideas that formed Strand's views in the late teens and early twenties. However, it is not the focus of this essay. For more additional information on the Lyrical left, please see Edward Abrahams, *The Lyrical Left: Randolph Bourne, Alfred Stieglitz, and the Origins of Cultural Radicalism in America* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1986).

In addition, *Journal Seven Arts* (in which Paul Strand published) was monthly journal of social commentary and literature published between 1916-1917. It published avant-garde writing and promoted American national culture, and more specifically ideas associated with the Lyrical left.

²⁵⁹ Van Wyn Brooks perpetuated these ideas. However, similar philosophies had already been circulating at the time. Two years earlier, Harvard philosopher George Santayana discussed a similar dichotomy as Brooks and also looked to Whitman as a model. "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy," (1913), discusses two divisions in American culture: the skyscraper and the colonial mansion. The skyscraper represented the American "Will" and colonial mansion the American "intellect." Where the "Will" or skyscraper is American enterprise (this represents aggression), and the "Intellect" the colonial mansion (this represents a genteel tradition).

According to Santayana, the root of this division lies in Calvinism. For more on Santayana, see "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy," in David A. Hollinger and Charles Capper, eds., *The American Intellectual Tradition: A Sourcebook* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), vo. 2, pp. 97-109.

city.²⁶⁰ In addition to rejecting certain elements of society, Stieglitz and the artists he promoted felt hindered by some aspects of American culture. As a result they began to promote the type of American cultural modernism described in the Introduction, and acted as boosters to the movement and each other.²⁶¹

In the late teens and twenties, the Stieglitz Circle was promoting a specific vision of American modernism²⁶² rooted in themes of a “usable past.”²⁶³ Moreover, the artists sought to create an American modernism that was on par with their European counterparts culturally and aesthetically.²⁶⁴ As we begin to think about Strand’s time in Mexico, I would like to suggest that whether conscious nor not, Strand’s interest in Mexican culture, through the Indian, demonstrates a search for something authentically Mexican and culturally relevant. This was a result of this interest in culturally relevant material early in his career.

²⁶⁰ Marcia Brenann provides a good discussion on the comparisons made between Whitman and Stieglitz in *Painting Gender, Constructing Theory*, pp. 32-33

²⁶¹ Corn Wanda., *The Great American Thing; Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935*. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1999), p. 4

According to Wanda Corn, Boosters are often regarded un-provincial and unpolished men and women who “blindly believed in American made products.” Artists also promoted each other. p. 38

²⁶² American modernism is a bit of a loose and problematic term since there were multiple movements occurring simultaneously at the time, particularly in New York. For examples, there were the Dadaists who were a separate group from the artists that associated with Alfred Stieglitz. They both contained elements of modernism (from abstraction to the rejection of the old guard), but approached art in different ways. This essay is not concerned with the various modern movements occurring in New York at the time, but with what is relevant to Strand and his molding as an artist.

²⁶³ The idea of a “usable past” was first introduced in 1915 by Van Wyck Brooks *America's Coming of Age*. It alludes to reconstructions of history that defined the American experience. According to Brooks, arts in America, as opposed to those of Europe was filled with contradictions that were a result a lack of a binding tradition and the mixing of immigrant cultures. As a result, American culture was incoherent. For that reason, a “usable past” had to be constructed from historical referents.

²⁶⁴ It should be noted that the avant-garde at the time did not reject European modernism. In fact they recognized their debt to it. However they wished to be freed from being considered provincial and backward—under the shadow of great European Art.

Alfred Stieglitz and the Lyrical Left championed things they considered to be genuinely American: from skyscrapers, industry and the machine, to the material history of a town or the actual land and soil. In this sense, they echoed Waldo Frank's words, "We go forth all to seek America. And in seeking we create her. In the quality of our search shall be the nature of the American we create."²⁶⁵ These words are indicative of U.S. cultural nationalism at the time, and became more important for Strand when he became a member of Young Americans.

Young Americans were a group of influential writers and artists that centered around the journal *Seven Arts*²⁶⁶ that published articles on literature, the arts, cultural criticism, philosophy and politics. Notable members of Young Americans were: Randolph Bourne, Van Wyck Brooks, Waldo Frank, Lewis Mumford and James Oppenheim. In fact, Strand published in *Seven Arts* an article called, "The Seven Arts Chronicle: Photography," August 1917 where he wrote that photography, "found its raison d'être as an art form in its unique and absolute objectivity"²⁶⁷ In addition, Strand wrote that the photographer must maintain and develop "a real respect for the thing in front of him."²⁶⁸

Strand's involvement with Young Americans is significant because it demonstrates his early interests in examining the relationship between the self and the

²⁶⁵ Waldo Frank, *Our America*. p. 10

²⁶⁶ *Seven Arts* was in circulation between 1916 and 1917. The journal stopped circulating in October 1917 due to its outspoken opposition to the entry of the United States into World War I. At that time harsh regulations were being passed against those with strong anti-war sentiments.

²⁶⁷ *Seven Arts*

²⁶⁸ *ibid*

communal through photography.²⁶⁹ For Young Americans, the most complex relationship was between self-fulfillment and communal obligation. It was seen as romantic and as connected to the Lyrical left.²⁷⁰

Young Americans found personal fulfillment through the relationship one had with communities as a result of shared cultural traditions and a sense of the common good. They believed that American life would be renewed through politics and aesthetics. At the core of their beliefs was the idea that America was coming to an age of “national self-consciousness...In all such epoch the arts cease to be private matters; they become not only the expression of national life, but a means to its enhancement.”²⁷¹

Of interest to this project is; artists within the Young Americans movement were “intrigued by the boundaries of personal being, how they were both troubled and enriched at the moment of social contact,”²⁷² and the relationship with politics and aesthetics mentioned above. In relationship to street photography and *Blind Woman*, Mark Whalan notes Strand,

became fascinated by how photographs could isolate the momentary. Photographic instants mobilized the inherent ambivalence between dual commitments to community and personality, since they embodied the friction

²⁶⁹ It should be noted that Strand not only was part of the movement, but also maintained a correspondence with Waldo Frank, Sherwood Anderson, and Randolph Bourne. Young Americans also revered Alfred Stieglitz. It overlapped with the Lyrical left and the type of modernism that Stieglitz was proposing.

²⁷⁰ Although Young Americans were considered to have a ‘romantic’ sensibility, and Strand was actively involved with group; in the late twenties he will approach photography from a more realistic and material perspective. However, his interest in the moment, the self’s relation to the communal, and a leftist perspective will remain strong.

²⁷¹ James Oppenheim and Waldo Frank. *The Seven Arts*, 1 (November 1916): 52, Oppenheim and Frank were the editors of *Seven Arts*. This is a call to create a culturally based self reflective and communal movement. That was reflective of the views espoused by leading Randolph Bourne’s *Youth and Life* (1913), Van Wyck Brooks’ *America’s Coming of Age* (1915) Waldo Frank’s *Our America* (1919). In addition,
²⁷² Whalen, Mark. “The Majesty of the Moment: Sociality and Privacy in the Street Photography of Paul Strand.” *American Art*. Vol. 25, No. 2 (Summer 2011), pp. 38

produced when the sovereign artistic self of the photographer engaged in unruly social encounters that could imperil the distanced privilege of that self. Strand in particular began to explore this ambivalence.²⁷³

One sees this relationship with *Blind Woman* and later with his portraits of Mexican Indians such as *Old Woman and Boy*, 1933 (Figure 42). With *Blind Woman* one finds that the moment Strand photographs her there is social contact that elicits recognition and creates a series of interrelated relationships. Although *Blind Woman* is blind, she seeks recognition visually and emotionally for financial support through the sign she wears with the label “BLIND.” Strand grants *Blind Woman* recognition by photographing her. A relationship is established. However, it is a limited relationship because *Blind Woman* is apparently unaware of Strand and his control over her through his use of the camera. Moreover, Strand is conspicuously distant from *Blind Woman* because he does not verbally interact with her and photographs her without her knowledge. However, it is only a partial detachment because it is her very circumstances that most likely prompted him to photograph her.

In *Old Woman and Boy*, 1933, and many of his other Mexican photographs, Strand continues to explore the relationship between the self and the communal that he began in the teens. Through this exploration, Paul Strand was also creating a tension between the ephemeral and the eternal because Strand isolates moments. In isolating moments, or the moment of contact between himself and his subject, and Strand attempts

²⁷³ Whalen, Mark. “The Majesty of the Moment: Sociality and Privacy in the Street Photography of Paul Strand.” *American Art*. Vol. 25, No. 2 (Summer 2011), pp. 38, 43
Mark Whalen also notes that Alfred Stieglitz was also interested in the “moment,” but that Strand was decisively more interested and explorative of the moment.

to capture the ephemeral. However, Strand is also interested in capturing some sort of eternal Indian essence because he focused on what he believed were attributes of Indianness. This “essence,” can be regarded as a constructed idea on race in relationship to the Mexican Indian. And while I am hesitant to label Strand as racist, I do believe he was to an extent fascinated by the idea of the ‘other.’ However, Strand’s views on the Mexican Indian and the idea that they had an “essence” were not unique to Strand, nor were they purely a result of his position as a foreigner. Many Mexicans held similar views. This has been discussed in the Introductory Chapter in relationship to *indigenismo*. In addition, Strand’s photographs of Mexican Indians were well received in Mexico.

Old Woman and Boy is a photograph of an old woman and a boy that fit in with rhetoric of *indigenismo* and *Mexicandad*, belies a social perspective, and at the same time maintains a modern aesthetic. *Old Woman and Boy* are set against an austere white washed wall, perhaps made of adobe. The wall appears to be dirty and rugged, like the *Old Woman and Boy*. Close inspection reveals that *Old Woman’s* rebozo is exceedingly threadbare, with many holes. Her dress is dirty, as seen through the spots on her dress. Her hat and that of the boy show signs of wear, tear and old age. There is an inherent sense of poverty that may imply a criticism of the prevailing social and economic structures *Old Woman and Boy* live in.

Equally as important is what is not shown in Strand’s images—urbane, prosperous and illustrious individuals. Although a large portion of Mexico was rural, indigenous, and lived in poverty, there was industry, prosperity, and wealth in certain sectors of society—mainly in the cities or in *haciendas*. However, *Old Woman and Boy*,

are not part of that aspect of Mexican society, they belong to Mexico's under belly. In that sense it is reminiscent of *Blind Woman*.

The expressions of the *Old Woman and Boy* are difficult to read as they stare into what may be some sort of horizon, or may simply be looking at nothing in particular. There is a sense of solitude and desolation—an immutability of sorts. The woman and boy do not interact. They are just there. The starkness and directness of the piece is indicative of the straight photography style that Strand liked to employ. Like with his New York portraits, Strand stated that his Mexican portraits, such as *Old Woman and Boy*, did not know they are being photographed.²⁷⁴ Strand's ethics of photographing people without their consent is once again questionable, and problematic. In his defense, Strand stated of his camera right angle prism,

Also it turned out later on when I began to make portraits, especially in Mexico the following year, that is in 1933, it was perfect also for that purpose using the prism and photographing the people without their knowing they were being photographed. Which, in Mexico, was absolutely essential at the time for me because the Mexican Indians don't like being photographed much. In fact, there are a lot of people that don't very much like being photographed. So it solved that problem.²⁷⁵

And yet, while *Woman* seems oblivious to the fact that she is being photographed, the *Boy* appears to be aware of Strand. Perhaps *Boy* has guessed Strand's trick or is as

²⁷⁴ Paul Strand, transcript of interview with Milton Brown, November, 1971 for the Archives of American Art, The Smithsonian Institution p. 19

In an this interview, Strand begins by discussing how he switched 4 x 5 Graflex camera in 1931 while in New Mexico to a 7 X 9 Graflex. According Strand, the 5 X 7 had to be put on a tripod because it was too heavy to be hand held. However, it had many advantages from photographing landscape to people due to its speed and shutters. In reference to Mexico, Strand stated that he inserted a right angle prism into the 5 X 7 Graflex camera so that people would think he was photographing in a different direction.

²⁷⁵ Paul Strand, transcript of interview with Milton Brown, November, 1971 for the Archives of American Art, The Smithsonian Institution p. 19

curious about Strand as Strand is about him. There appears to be some sort of acknowledgement between *Boy* and Strand, as they both stare in each other's direction. As a result, *Woman and boy* become complicated in terms of the direction each participant looks at and their respective authenticity; *were Strand's subject truly unaware that Strand was photographing them?* The record and field states yes. However, I would like to suggest that even if *Old Woman* and *Boy* were not certain that they were specifically being photographed, Strand's presence and camera must have been evident. Hence it follows they *were aware* that Strand was photographing something.

While in Mexico Edward Weston made the following observation, "In Mexico most everyone has suffered, so they don't bother over another's affairs. One need not pose."²⁷⁶ Another possibility for Strand's subjects is that even if they were aware of Strand's 'trick,' it was uneventful to their lives, and thus went about their own business, as Strand conducted his. This becomes particularly important in Strand's other portraits such as *Boy in white shirt* (discussed below) (Figure 51) that contrary to what the record states, appears to be posed, and not unaware. What is clear for our purposes is that attributes present in Strand's subjects, from their facial expressions (whether sad or heroic), obvious poverty, sense of desolation and fortitude are genuine to the extent that those were the circumstances that they were experiencing at the time they were photographed.

Since the *Old Woman and Boy* are Indian and attention to their lives was being given through photography, they fit in with ideas on *indigenismo* that were circulating in

²⁷⁶ Weston, *Daybooks*, p. 157

Mexico. At the time that *Old Woman and Boy* were photographed, Mexico's nationalist project strove to ethnicize Mexican national identity by: focusing on the Indian; elevating the Indian's social status; utilizing the Indian as a source of national pride; *mestizaje*; and attempting to reverse a tradition of racism. This was at the heart of *indigenismo*.

Strand contributed to Mexico's nationalist project through photographs such as *Old Woman and Boy*. In addition, and as will be discussed later in this essay, in the 1930s, Indians were seen as an important class issue that needed to be addressed. *Old Woman and Boy* brought attention to the issue of class struggle, a central tenet of the Revolutionary War and post-Revolutionary Period. Historically the Indian had been socially, economically and politically oppressed. By bringing attention to the quality and material life of Mexico's Indian, not only does Strand parlay a social message, but engages with *Mexicandad* and *indigenismo*. Moreover, by focusing on class struggle, Strand moves beyond issues of race, to social and economic relevance. At the same time, Strand's photographs continued to express an interest in a modern aesthetic.

Old Woman and Boy was taken with a sharp lens camera 5 X 7 Graflex camera. As result, the lines are clean, crisp, and sharp. As with most of his portraits, *Old Woman and Boy* was a close up (as much possible given that there are two figures) and anything unnecessary is voided out. The focus is on the *Woman* and the *Boy*. The figures are compositionally integrated from the stark adobe wall to the wide rims of the *sombreros* they wear, and basket that diagonally intersects from the upper left corner to the lower middle right corner. In addition, the *Woman's* slouched position, follows the diagonal line of the *sombreros*. *Woman's* dress' vertical lines further emphasize this relationship,

and create a contrast with the horizontal tears of her *rebozo*. The above is accentuated through the concave and convex circular weaves of the basket next to the *Woman* and *Boy*. The basket not only highlights the diagonals of the *sombreros* and the woman's dress, but also creates more depth since it is positioned behind the *Woman* and *Boy*. One also finds depth and volume as a result of the shadows the *sombreros* cast on the *Woman's* and *Boy's* faces. *Boy with basket* (Figure 43) was the next photograph Strand took immediately following *Woman and Boy*. *Boy with basket* is the boy from *Woman and Boy*. The key difference between *Woman and Boy* and *Boy with Basket* is that *Boy with basket* is a close up of the boy alone; further accentuating lines, from the *sombrero* and basket, to the boy against the stark white washed dilapidated wall.

NEW MEXICO

Paul Strand traveled to Taos, New Mexico during the summers of 1926 and 1930-1932. During that time period Taos was a popular artist colony that hosted well known American figures such as: Willa Carter, Leopold Stokowski, Martha Graham, Carl Jung, Cady Wells and Spud Johnson to name a few. While in Taos, Strand developed new friendships with: art critic and historian Elizabeth McCausland, Carlos Chávez who was instrumental to Strand's time in Mexico, Philip Stevenson, Ella Young, and Ernie O'Malley. He was also re-united with some members of the Stieglitz Circle—Georgia O'Keeffe and John Marin.

New Mexico attracted many artists because of the landscape, the native and spiritual traditions of the Pueblo Indians, and its deep-rooted connection to a pre-Hispanic past. It provided an outlet for exploring the broad cultural search for a usable past that preoccupied intellectuals such as Van Wyck Brooks at that time. In New Mexico, Strand focused on clouds, adobe architecture and ghost towns. For Strand and other artists attempting to capture New Mexico's landscape, the difficulty lay in its spatial vastness, or "the spatial zeitgeist of New Mexico."²⁷⁷ According to Strand, New Mexico was challenging because of

the dramatic vastness of the Southwest—New Mexico. Here a new problem presented itself, that of trying to unify the complexity of broad landscape as opposed to the close-up of approachable and relatively small things. There are not many photographs but also paintings in which the sky and the land have no relation to each other, and the picture goes to pieces. For the photographer, the

²⁷⁷ Elizabeth McCausland, "Paul Strand" (Springfield Mass: Privately Printed, 1933), un-paginated. Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Tucson

solution to this problem lies in the quick seizure of those moments when formal relationships do exist between the moving shapes of sky and the sea or land...²⁷⁸

Strand was able to unite landscape and sky by photographing moments where he found formal relationships. This was a technique he had developed while anticipating weather patterns working in the Maine coast. This technique would prove useful in both New Mexico and Mexico.

Paul Strand's time in New Mexico is considered to be one of his most prolific periods that fulfilled "past aspirations, such as the lessons of abstraction, while helping to lay the groundwork for the increasingly humanist desires that remained latent in his work... The New Mexico period was a crucial opportunity for self evaluation and independent artistic development."²⁷⁹ Strand's self reflection may have been in part due to his marital struggles²⁸⁰ and distancing from Alfred Stieglitz—both aesthetically and personally. In addition, while in New Mexico, Strand's cross-influences of "filmmaking and photography grew more visible though they would become even more pronounced in the work that followed in Mexico."²⁸¹

During this time period, Strand also experimented with different cameras that were faster, smaller and more mobile. In 1931, Strand purchased a 5 X 7 inch Graflex camera that allowed more speed and mobility. This camera would not only prove useful

²⁷⁸ Beaumont Newhall, "Paul Strand, Travelling Photographer," in *Art in America* 50, 4 (1962), p. 1

²⁷⁹ Yates., "The Transitional Years" in *Paul Strand Essays on His Life and Work*, p. 87

²⁸⁰ Rebecca Busselle and Trudy Wilner Stack prologue, *Paul Strand*, Southwest p. 64 (New York: Aperture Foundation, 2004), p. 64

²⁸¹ Yates "The Transition Years: New Mexico," in *Paul Strand Essay on His Life*, p. 94

in New Mexico for capturing moments where there was a relationship between sky and landscape, but more importantly in Mexico for photographing Indians quickly.

From New Mexico Strand traveled directly to Mexico. Strand continued to be interested in similar subjects as he had explored in New Mexico. Ultimately there were three things that interested Strand about New Mexico “in addition to the landscape...the Indian quality of life—the Mexican—and those vestiges of the white pioneer.”²⁸² In a letter to John Marin describing his current work Strand wrote,

...Well, I would like to have seen that town or Cimarron in the old days—On that trip I ran on to a swell Mexican town beyond Cuesta called Cerro. That afternoon at any rate it was wonderful with houses in brilliant sunlight against the near mountains black under a storm sky—this year I am much more aware of the Mexican spirit here, that quality of life which he has taken from and given back to this country—²⁸³

Clearly the qualities Strand described to Marin ran parallel to looking for an American usable past, spirit, and soil grounded in material evidence of the Mexican heritage of New Mexico. Although New Mexico is different than Mexico, the ‘Mexican spirit’ that Strand references above may have one of the elements that fostered Strand’s interest in Mexico and the Mexican Indian. In Mexico, however, Strand included a social and political element that was previously not part of his works in New Mexico. In New Mexico Strand focused mainly on land and architecture.

²⁸² Paul Strand Letter to Herbert Seligmann, July 29, 1931. Paul Strand Archive, Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Tucson

²⁸³ Paul Strand to John Marin, Taos, August 7, 1931. Paul Strand Archive, Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Tucson

While Strand continued to embrace many of the ideas of the Lyrical Left and Stieglitz discussed above, one does see a departure with respect to Strand's more pronounced interest in social relevance. For Strand, Stieglitz's interest in what he called "equivalents"²⁸⁴ was different than what he wanted to explore at that time. Strand considered himself to be socially and politically conscious. This is evident in a letter Strand wrote to his friend Ted Stevenson stating, "I can not get out of my consciousness the human situation—here—everywhere—"²⁸⁵

Despite their earlier friendship, Stieglitz began to heavily criticize Strand's work (as overly technical and at times derivative).²⁸⁶ Strand and Stieglitz's friendship fractured in 1932 in New York during Strand's exhibition at the Intimate Gallery.²⁸⁷ In addition to Strand's break from Stieglitz, his marriage was falling apart and would soon lead to divorce. In 1932 Strand found himself at a crossroads, artistically and emotionally. Strand decided to go Mexico.

²⁸⁴ Stieglitz's equivalents have a double meaning. The first is the title that he gave to a series of cloud photographs he took from 1922 through the early 1930s. The second is what equivalents meant for Stieglitz—a symbolist aesthetic that was abstract and equating or an equivalent of his personal experiences, thoughts and emotions. According to Nancy and Beaumont Newhall, what Stieglitz did with his "Equivalents" was "to crystallize what usually remains in the unconsciousness, felt rather than known." Nancy and Beaumont Newhall, *Masters of Photography*, p. 9.

Although Strand and Stieglitz's friendship fractured, Strand continued to have admiration for Stieglitz and his work. Moreover, there were few photographers beside Stieglitz that Strand admired.

²⁸⁵ Paul Strand to Ted Stevenson, Taos, 1932. Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Tucson

²⁸⁶ Paul Strand, Rebecca Busselle, and Trudy Wilner Stack. *Paul Strand, Southwest*, (New York: Aperture Foundation), p. 78

²⁸⁷ Although Strand and Stieglitz friendship crumbled, the parting was never fully complete. The men did continue to communicate through letters, but it was distant and the friendship was never the same. For more on Strand and Stieglitz see the Paul Strand Archive at the Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Tucson, letters between Paul Strand and Alfred Stieglitz

MEXICO, POLITICS, THE SECRETARIAT OF EDUCATION AND PAUL STRAND

Going to Mexico after spending time in New Mexico was not unique to Paul Strand. Other American artists at that time such as Marsden Hartley and Laura Gilpin had followed this same route. As James Oles notes, each artist, Strand included, had sought in Mexico a spiritual atmosphere and ancient past that they felt was lacking in the United States.²⁸⁸ And as Paul Strand stated, Mexico, “was a continuation of New Mexico although quite different.”²⁸⁹ According to Strand there were things he would have liked to do in New Mexico, but did not—to photograph the ‘native’ population, or more specifically the Indian. Mexico provided Strand with this opportunity as a result of his employment at the SEP.

Paul Strand’s Mexican experience and his employment with the SEP was a result of the friendship he developed with Carlos Chávez, who had visited the United States multiple times. Strand’s friendship with Chávez began in the mid 1920s when Chávez visited New York, however, it did not strengthen until New Mexico, where the two men interacted more intimately.²⁹⁰ As Chief of the Department of Fine Arts in Mexico’s Secretariat of Education, Chávez was responsible for most of Mexico’s cultural

²⁸⁸ James Oles, *South of the Border: Mexico in the American Imagination 1914-1947* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), p. 147

²⁸⁹ Paul Strand, transcript of interview with Milton Brown, November, 1971 for the Archives of American Art, The Smithsonian Institution

²⁹⁰ It should be noted that most literature on Strand, with the exception of the writings of James Krippner state that Chávez and Strand met in Taos. While that seems to be the case because there is not any correspondence between Chavez and Strand prior to that, there are letters between Rebecca Strand and Chavez discussing a possible trip to Mexico as early as the 1920s. In addition, the men sent regards to each other. Lastly, during that period of Strand’s career, Rebecca handled a portion of Strand’s correspondence.

endeavors during its cultural Renaissance in the late 1920s and early 1930s. As a result, Chávez held considerable cultural and political clout in Mexico.

When Paul Strand made the decision to travel to Mexico, Strand sent a telegram to Carlos Chávez (Figure 44) stating,

Plan Driving in Car to Mexico City and Want Bring Along Examples My Work could you Get and Send Me Laredo General Delivery Some Official Letter Identification Perhaps From Saenz Facilitating Entry Photographs Into Mexico and Photographing While There Will Reach Laredo About Ten Days Thanks and Affectionate Greetings. Paul Strand.²⁹¹

Although Strand was only seeking assistance in getting through Mexican customs, he received an official governmental invitation from Chávez to visit Mexico. With the invitation in hand and two friends, Paul Strand set off for Mexico City in an old Model A Ford.²⁹²

In addition to extending an official governmental invitation to Strand, Chávez arranged for Strand to receive multiple government posts—the first was a post as an art schoolteacher.²⁹³ Strand then was contracted to provide a report on Mexican Folk Art in the region of Michoacán, as well as to prepare an exhibition of children’s art. Strand’s

²⁹¹ Telegram to Carlos Chávez from Paul Strand. Santa Fe, New Mexico November 16, 1932. Carlos Chávez Collection at the Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City.

²⁹² Paul Strand, transcript of interview with Milton Brown, November, 1971 for the Archives of American Art, The Smithsonian Institution

²⁹³ According to Mexico’s Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) records, Strand was officially hired as an elementary school teacher on May 3, 1933. However there is not much evidence to suggest he taught, if at all he taught. It has been proposed by James Krippner that it is most likely that this position was given by Chávez to Strand by Chávez so that Strand could work on his art with a salary and official status through the SEP. See:

James Krippner. *Paul Strand in Mexico*. (Mexico and New York: Fundación Televisa and Aperture, 2010), p. 41. Most importantly, and for the purposes of this essay, many of Strand’s photographs were taken during his employment with the SEP and portion of them would later be published as *Photographs of Mexico*, 1940, and re-issued in 1967 with the name the *Mexican Portfolio*.

next and final post would be that of Director of Film and Photography (Figures 45 & 46 copies of Strand's official work documents from the SEP).

What this meant for Strand was that he had at his disposal interpreters, worked on government-sponsored projects that offered official status, and enjoyed access to “a somewhat insulated population that was reticent with outsiders.”²⁹⁴ This was significant for Strand, because a decade earlier, in 1922, Strand had demonstrated an interest in native populations of the United States. At that time Strand had proposed to the Hays Foundation that he make educational films at Indian Reservations of the Southwest. Unfortunately for Strand, his proposal was denied. Strand did not pursue the matter further because he felt that without official sponsorship he would be received with hostility as an outsider.²⁹⁵ Mexico on the other hand, would prove to be more welcoming for Strand due to his friendship with Carlos Chávez and his employment with the SEP.

Strand's employment with the SEP came at a pivotal time in Strand's life where he was at a cross roads—becoming increasingly socially conscious and more sympathetic towards the political left. As a result, Strand's tenure with SEP led to a transformative experience where he focused on the Indian as representative of his new vision that was humanitarian, as well as socially and politically concerned. Moreover, it was during his employment with the SEP that Strand created his two major Mexican endeavors—

Photographs of Mexico and *Redes*.

²⁹⁴ Katherine C. Ware, “Photographs of Mexico” in *Paul Strand Essays on His Life and Work*, edited by Stange, Maren (New York: Aperture, 1990), p. 111

²⁹⁵ Naomi Roseblum, “Paul Strand: The Early Years, 1910-1932” (PhD Dissertation, City University of New York, 1978), p. 163.

Strand's portraits of Indians in Mexico in many ways reflected the ideals of the SEP. The SEP sought to address several issues: building more schools; disseminating revolutionary ideas; educating and training more teachers, particularly in the rural areas; and combating illiteracy among Mexico's largely rural poor Indian population. Moreover, in the early 1930s the SEP was the primary vehicle through which the ideologies of post-Revolutionary Mexico were propagated.²⁹⁶

In addition to securing employment for Strand with the SEP, Carlos Chávez arranged for Strand's works to be exhibited. Paul Strand had taken fifty-four prints with him to Mexico, including images from the previous summer's work in Taos (1932). Although Strand's photographs of New Mexico were not Mexican, their modernist approach and interest in pre-Hispanic themes were in line with the values of that time period in Mexico. Strand was not planning to hold an exhibition in Mexico. Strand recalls that when he showed his prints to Chávez, Chávez felt that "Mexico should have the opportunity to see 'photography' all they knew was Tina Modotti and Weston—not much in my humble opinion."²⁹⁷

Chávez and Strand showed the photographs to Narciso Bassols,²⁹⁸ Director of the Secretariat of Education (SEP). Bassols agreed to the exhibition. Having the SEP's

²⁹⁶ Humberto Trejera, *Crónica de la escuela rural Mexicana* (Mexico City: SEP, 1963). For additional information on this subject also see Guillermo Palacios, *La pluma y el arado: Los intelectuales pedagogos y la construcción sociocultural del "problema campesino" en México, 1932-1943* (Mexico City: Colegio de México-Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas, 1999)

²⁹⁷ Paul Strand Letter of Alfred Stieglitz, Mexico 1933, Paul Strand Archive, Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Tucson

²⁹⁸ Narciso Bassols was a lawyer and politician that became the Director or Secretariat of Public Education in 1931. Bassols was the first Marxist to reach such a high-ranking position in the Mexican government. He tried to overhaul Mexico's educational system by secularizing education and banning the teaching of religion. Promoting sex education and the learning of practical skills.

support was crucial to the success of exhibition.²⁹⁹ Because the exhibition was government sponsored, Strand was provided with all the support he needed for advertisement, and indeed, according to Strand, he was given everything he asked for. With the help of the gallery's director's assistant, and his good friend Marsden Hartley who was in Mexico at that time, Strand hung the prints.³⁰⁰ Strand's exhibition was held in Mexico City at the *Sala de Arte* (Figure 47) from February 3, 1933 to February 15, 1933.

Over a space of approximately thirteen days, thousands of people attended Strand's exhibition. In a letter to Ansel Adams, Strand wrote that "some 3000" people attended in 10 days.³⁰¹ However, according to the SEP's report, *nine* thousand people attended.³⁰² Whether it was three thousand or nine thousand visitors, Strand's exhibition was well attended and a success. In fact what struck Strand most about his exhibition at *La Sala of Arte* was the diverse character of his audience. According to Strand, "All sorts of people came: policemen, soldiers, Indian women with their babies and so on. I never had such an audience anywhere else."³⁰³ This was a new experience for Strand and may have had an impact on his increasing desire for his art to be socially relevant and for his films to reach large audiences. It is also interesting to consider that Edward Weston had a

²⁹⁹ Krippner, James. *Paul Strand in Mexico*, p. 37

³⁰⁰ Paul Strand Letter of Alfred Stieglitz, Mexico 1933, Paul Strand Archive, Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Tucson

³⁰¹ Paul Strand letter to Ansel Adams, October 14, 1933 Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Tucson

³⁰² Secretaria de Educacion Publica (SEP) *Memoria relativo al estado*, vol. 1, p. 417

³⁰³ Paul Strand, transcript of interview with Milton Brown, November, 1971 for the Archives of American Art, The Smithsonian Institution, p. 30

similar experience with the exhibitions he held while in Mexico.³⁰⁴ However, what Weston remarked the most about in his *Daybooks* was that a large number of the attendees were males, as opposed to the mostly female audience he was used to the United States.

In addition to having a large number of attendees, Strand's exhibition was well received and written about in leading newspapers such as *El Nacional*³⁰⁵ and the *Mexican City Post*.³⁰⁶ Albeit, Strand's critical supporters were drawn from Chávez's inner circle and members of the Mexican avant-garde, the exhibition surpassed Strand's expectations.

Gabriel Fernández Ledsema, renowned painter, art critic and writer on Mexican folk art contributed to the exhibition's text and stated that, "Paul Strand is before all else, a photographer in the highest sense of the word."³⁰⁷ Composer Silvestre Revueltas also contributed text to the catalog. There was an element of boosterism between Strand and the Mexican avant-garde; a similar relationship between Edward Weston and the Mexican avant-garde had developed in the previous decade. Thus, it was not uncommon for members of the Mexican avant-garde to support the works of artists that they believed were relevant to Mexico's revolutionary aesthetic.

During his stay in Mexico, Strand became friends with several leading members of the Mexican avant-garde such as Miguel Covarrubias, Manuel Álvarez Bravo and David Alfaro Siqueiros. The record is unclear as to how and when these friendships

³⁰⁴ For additional information on Weston's exhibitions while in Mexico, see Chapter 1 and *The Daybooks* of Edward Weston.

³⁰⁵ "Se Inauguro La Exposicion de Fotografias" *El Nacional*, February 4, 1933 Mexico City

³⁰⁶ Review, *Mexico City Post*, February 8, 1933, Mexico City.

³⁰⁷ Essay text accompanying the catalog to Strand's exhibition at *La Sala de Arte*, 1933

began. However we do know that although Strand spent the majority of his time in rural Mexico, he did spend some time in Mexico City where he met other members of the Mexican avant-garde and was exposed to the murals of Mexico City.

After his exhibition, Strand worked on a children's exhibition sponsored by the SEP with Agustín Velásquez Chávez, Carlos Chávez's nephew. Strand's next assignment was to conduct a report on folk art in the state of Michoacán. This project was done in collaboration with Velásquez Chávez who had been hired to conduct a study of arts education in that state. Velásquez Chávez served as Strand's interpreter, and both men traveled together throughout Michoacán conducting reports for the SEP. To the extent that Velásquez Chávez influenced Strand's views while in Mexico is unclear. However, Velásquez Chávez did play a strong role in Strand's photographs of 1933.³⁰⁸ A large number of Strand's Mexican photographs were taken in the state of Michoacán during the time this report was written and during the filming of *Redes*, when Strand was collaborating with Velásquez Chávez.

After completing his assignment, Strand submitted a ten-page report outlining his professional thoughts and opinions on the status of Mexican arts, crafts, and education in the regions of Uruapan, Paracho, Patzcuaro in the state of Michoacán. Of Uruapan Strand stated,

One is struck by the fact that here is rather remarkable craftsmanship devoted to the production of something completely without spirit, something mechanical and unaesthetic...which makes one feel that these people have never looked at or responded to their own surroundings...commercialization has led to the production of many forms completely alien to anything they would ever think of themselves...of course we realize that the problem of giving new life to these

³⁰⁸ Krippner, *Paul Strand in Mexico*, p. 41

crafts is bound up closely with the whole problem of the present economic system of commercial exploitation and enslavement of these people to it.³⁰⁹

Strand concluded his report by stating,

To summarize, though one would like to say otherwise, the truth demands the statement that the arts and crafts of Michoacan are predominantly corrupt. Conversations with the adults who practice them and our own observation made us feel that it is hopeless to re-educate them and that the only hope lies with the children and, as before mentioned, that there must be an educational program which would seek to liberate their imagination and to stimulate them to original effort—a program which would neither attempt to revive ancient racial expressions nor, on the other hand, to impose and theories of so-called “modern” art.³¹⁰

Paul Strand’s statements are striking given the fact that he had only been in Mexico for a few months when he wrote the above report, needed an interpreter because he did not speak Spanish, and had never been to Mexico before. Moreover, Strand had limited knowledge on Mexican culture and its folk art. And yet, he seems to recognize the impossible contradictions of the situation: encouraging native people to recover some “original” and so-called “authentic” practice is as ethically compromised as forcing them to conform to the strictures of the commercial marketplace. Moreover, by stating that the problem with the ‘state’ of Mexican folk art was a “problem of the present economic system of commercial exploitation and enslavement of these people to it,” Strand was criticizing the economic structures in which craftsmen in Michoacán lived. It also speaks to Strand’s political views that were moving more and more to left in relation to socio-

³⁰⁹Krippner, *Paul Strand in Mexico*, pp. 1-3

³¹⁰ Paul Strand, “Report of Paul Strand on the Trip to Michoacán, June 1933,” p.9 Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Tucson. A copy of this report is also held at the Archivo Nacional, Mexico City

economics. It is also interesting to note that Strand's language is similar to that utilized by many avant-gardes and intellectuals in Mexico at that time.

While Strand had begun to express an interest in material cultures and the 'human situation,' prior to departing for Mexico, Strand had not expressed such succinct political affinities until Mexico. In a letter to Kurt and Isabel Baach from Mexico, Strand wrote,

From all which you will gather that my interest in the social forces of to-day has grown considerably in this year.³¹¹ It has, for I don't see how anyone, the artist particularly, can stand aside, be completely above his battle... We who are still relatively young, certainly must eventually take sides, know where we stand—I don't know whether I can be labeled a Communist but I find the ideas of Marx which I have been reading very true to me—an ideal to be sure... but the only one left, that has any hope in it for a decent human life—That capitalism is doomed, I feel certain about...³¹²

As Strand's views moved more toward the left in Mexico, Strand developed a deep appreciation "of social structures governing the lives of ordinary people,"³¹³ and a leftist political outlook that fit well with post-Revolutionary Mexican ideas on *Mexicandad* and party politics circulating at the time. Moreover, Strand absorbed ideas from the progressives with whom he was interacting with in Mexico, as well as from friends back home such as Harold Clurman among others with whom he maintained regular correspondence.³¹⁴ In a letter to Ansel Adams from Mexico, Strand wrote "these

³¹¹ Strand is referring to 1933, the year he moved to Mexico

³¹² Paul Strand to Kurt and Isabel Baach, Mexico, 1933. Several of Strand's letters of late 1933 to Kurt Baach discuss his increasing radicalization towards the left.

³¹³ Rosenblum, "The Early Years." in *Paul Strand Essays on His Life and Work*, p. 27

³¹⁴ Peeler, *The Illuminating Mind in American Photography*, p. 130

Strand's friendship with Harold Clurman was significant. The men held similar views, and Clurman counseled and provided advice to Strand when his marriage was falling apart with Rebecca Strand, and during his break with Alfred Stieglitz. Clurman is considered to be one of the most influential figures of

are critical years for anyone who is alive—aware—had not insulated himself from the world—The world itself in a profound process of change—social change, as it appears to me.”³¹⁵

While in Mexico, Strand read *The Communist Manifesto*, *The Coming Struggle for Power* (although Strand read this book in Mexico, it was becoming increasingly popular with American intellectuals as well)³¹⁶, and *Towards The Understanding of Karl Marx: A Revolutionary Interpretation*.³¹⁷ These books are clear indicators that Strand’s interests were increasingly moving towards the left as he embraced the ideas of Marx while interacting with leftist cultural circles in Mexico.

When Strand was given the post of Director of Film and Photography, he was asked by Chávez and Bassol to make a series of films, over five years that would reflect the SEP’s ideals. Strand was not initially interested in stopping his still photography for film.³¹⁸ However the more he considered it, the more the idea appealed to him and he began to conceive that the audience should be the “sixteen million poorly educated Indians,” and that the films should deal with wealth production of the country—fishing,

American theater and is best remembered as a theater director and critic, and as one of the founders of New York’s Theater Group. The Theater Group was a left wing entity that was used to express political views.

³¹⁵ Paul Strand to Ansel Adams, October 14, 1933. Paul Strand Archive, Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Tucson

³¹⁶ Although Strand became more interested in Communist ideas in Mexico, there were many American artists in the United States that were acquiring a similar sensibility. For more on this subject, see Robert Schulman, *The Power of Political Art: the 1930s literary left reconsidered*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000) and Michael C. Steiner, ed. *Regionalist on the left: radical voices form the American West*. (Norman: Oklahoma Press, 2013)

³¹⁷ Paul Strand to Ansel Adams, October 14, 1933. Paul Strand Archive, Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Tucson

³¹⁸ After Mexico, Strand focused solely on film, and did not return to still photography for a decade.

mining, cattle raising, corn, etc.³¹⁹ Chávez and Bassols agreed with Strand. The first and only film Strand made in Mexico was *Redes*. When Cárdenas was elected president in 1934, he cut the SEP's film programs, thus bringing to a halt Strand's future plans for making more films in Mexico.

Redes, whose plot Strand created, is about a local community that fights injustice. *Redes* takes place in a fishing village that is exploited by an entrepreneur who controls fishing boats, access to markets, and the local economy. In the film, the lead character, Miro shows discontent towards the entrepreneur and leads a revolt after his son dies because Miro could not afford medical care. As a result of Miro's rebellion, a local government official (in the pay of the entrepreneur) had him assassinated. Instead of quelling the revolt, Miro's death turns him into a martyr for the local fishermen. *Redes* ends with the fishermen united as they carry Miro's corpse into the village—suggesting labor solidarity and rebellion against oppression will go on. Strand described *Redes* as, “very dramatic, a real story of struggle, betrayal, ending on the note of collective action, the need of people for each other—solidarity—something I believe in—and a criticism of capitalism, a system I detest.”³²⁰

Although *Redes* is not the main focus of this study it important to mention the film because Strand's comments on it provide a framework for understanding how Strand approached his Mexican works and what his ideas were at that time. An important consideration for Strand was not to “film down” to people. Instead Strand hoped to

³¹⁹ Paul Strand, transcript of interview with Milton Brown, November, 1971 for the Archives of American Art, The Smithsonian Institution, pp. 30-31

³²⁰ Paul Strand to Kurt and Isabel Baach, Mexico, 1933. Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Tucson

create stories that people could relate to and understand regardless of their literacy or socio-economic background. At the same time Strand wanted to produce films that were of superior technical quality. In addition, Strand approached *Redes* as a work of art that would “reach all people most forcefully”³²¹

Many Americans and foreigners from other countries who traveled to Mexico held similar ideas as Strand. For example, the crew of *Redes* was multinational with Americans, Europeans and Mexicans working in different capacities. With the exception of the lead actor who was a professional, the rest of the actors were the inhabitants of the fishing village of Alvarado where *Redes* was filmed.

Many of Strand’s Mexican photographs were taken during the specific time that he was conducting his report on folk art for the SEP, and while *Redes* was filmed. Scholar, Katherine Ware has stated there is a correlation between *Redes* and the *Photographs of Mexico* in that each photograph leads to the next one and appears to have a sequential order, similar to the storyline of *Redes*. While I agree with Ware, I believe *Redes* helps one gauge Strand’s entire Mexican trajectory (not just *Photographs of Mexico*). Additionally, *Redes* sheds light on Strand’s social mission of bringing attention to the material conditions of the Mexican Indian, as well as the proletariat and class struggle in Mexico. I also believe that Strand’s photographs can be interpreted as a narrative that highlights Mexican Indians’ lives, and the ways in which Indians were becoming the new face of Mexico’s national identity. Moreover, Strand’s images are more than social documentary; they have a decisive political outlook that while not a

³²¹ Paul Strand, transcript of interview with Milton Brown, November, 1971 for the Archives of American Art, The Smithsonian Institution

direct call to arms, show a clear interest in the social conditions in which people live and suggest Strand believed that communism was the answer to the 'human situation.'

INDIGENISMO, PARTY POLITICS AND INDIAN REPRESENTATION

When Paul Strand traveled to Mexico in the early 1930s, many of the ideas on nation, *indigenismo* and *Mexicandad* had been shaped in Mexico during the previous decade of the 1920s.³²² What remained constant in both decades was the push towards creating an ethnic national identity that glorified Mexico's pre-Columbian heritage and centered on things Indian as a source of national and cultural identity. What was different in the 1930s was that Indians were seen as political actors.

When Paul Strand photographed Mexican Indians during the 1930s, his photography fit in well with Mexico's nationalist project that defined itself around the Indian. And while the muralists in their paintings demonstrated the importance of Indians, few photographers took Indians as their subject. This is part of the reason why Strand's heroic and romantic images of Indians were striking at that time. As Siqueiros pointed out, Strand's photographs of Indians "paralleled that of the pioneers the Mexican mural painting."³²³

I believe that in terms of Strand's photographs, Siqueiros is alluding to Indians as part of a larger narrative that positions them as part of Mexico's revolutionary history and the new face of the Mexican nation. Siqueiros seems to also be addressing the dignity and heroism that Strand utilized to photograph Indians. In addition, Strand also contributed to the narrative of class struggle that was a significant idea among Mexico's intellectuals and vanguards, particularly muralist.

³²² For more information on *indigenismo* and *Mexicanidad*, see chapter 1 and 2.

³²³ David Alfaro Siqueiros introduction to *The Mexican Portfolio*, 1967

Under the auspices of the SEP, murals were often directed at the peasantry, useful in circulating revolutionary ideas and combating the negative impact of the *Cristero* war.³²⁴ Moreover, muralism was used to stress the model of *indegismo* that

Mythologized the “authenticity” of the indigenous and popular cultures as the basis for a national culture. This was a tactic in part for producing history. Official views on the nation’s history coincided with the muralists’ ideas of national cultural identity, resulting in the construction of a highly ideological version of Mexico’s past under the rubric of *Mexicanidad*. “Culture” and “history” became synonymous, and muralists became the flamboyant brokers of this relationship. They interpreted the past through the lens of a “revolutionary” present, selectively providing the grounds for an equally “revolutionary” future.³²⁵

Thus, it seems that Strand and the muralists were in direct dialogue. However, their mode of representation was different. The muralists often portrayed Indians as generic types that resembled one another; Strand on the other hand utilized specific individuals with general titles to create generic types.

Although the 1920s and 1930s saw a decisive interest in things Indian, such as history and its link to contemporary folk art, most of the avant-garde did not focus on illustrating daily Indian life in the manner that Strand did. Orozco’s *Social Revolution*, 1926 Industrial School (now the Center for Workers’ Education), Oribiza, Mexico (Figure 48) shows a multitude of standardized Indians faces. One does not see individual characteristics. Moreover, *Social Revolution* has a thematic message, of revolution

³²⁴ The *Cristero War* or *Las Cristiadas* was ideological and armed warfare between the Mexican government and the Catholic Church. It was a result of the post-Revolutionary Mexican government’s quest to curbed and ultimately outlaw religion in Mexico. The Catholic Church and the people that devotedly practice Catholicism rebelled against the government’s decrees against religion. For additional information on this topic, please see the Introduction’s explanation of the *Cristero War*.

³²⁵ Anreus, Alejandro. *The Mexican muralism: a critical history*. p. 26

whose key player happens to be Indian. This is evident through the rifles and workers seen in the upper register. The need for revolution is a result of what appears to be suffering bent over figures that are Indian in the lower register. A similar methodology of utilizing general systematic types en masse to parlay a message is also seen in Rivera's murals such as *Partition of the Land*, 1924, Autonomous University, Chapingo, Mexico (Figure 49).

Strand created 'types' through the use general titles such as *Man with Hoe* (Figure 50) even though he spotlighted individual faces. What is particularly noticeable about Strand's 'types' is the expressions in his subjects faces. These expressions have come to represent *qualities* that parlay attributes of Indian-ness or *indigenismo*, as discussed with *Old Woman and Boy*. In addition, while having a similar ideology as the muralists, Strand was subtler in his message. One will also find that unlike the muralists, Strand does not focus on scenes showed physical oppression, violence or victimization. Instead, one sees the material conditions the Indians live in, function as a reference to class struggle. In this regard, he is similar to Weston who engaged with a revolutionary aesthetic, but avoided references to armed struggle.³²⁶

As stated in Chapter 1, the early and mid 1920s muralists focused on past histories and allegories related to Mexico's Pre-Columbian heritage, revolutionary scenes, and folklore. By the mid to late 1920s and early 1930s muralists moved from allegory to ideas on class and race that catered to the masses and advocated cross-class alliances through an iconography that was inclusive of Indians, peasants and workers.

³²⁶ For more on Weston's revolutionary aesthetic see Chapter 1

Diego Rivera's *Alliance of the Peasant and the Industrial Worker*, 1924 and Jose Clemente Orozco's *Omniscience*, 1925 are indicative of the type of imagery that the Presidential regimes of Obregón and later Calles would embrace. However, that is not to say, that all of the muralists' works fit neatly into what the government wished them to portray. Works by the muralists could at times be political and unsympathetic to the government and the bourgeois class such as Rivera's *Wall Street banquet*, 1928 that is a direct critique of capitalism. When one compares Strand's *Man with Hoe* to the above murals, one finds a correlation between economic and class issues. However while the muralists would at times critique the government in their works, Strand's portraits never did. Strand brought attention to the Indian, without referencing the government. This may have been due to the fact his time in Mexico was government sponsored through the SEP.

Man with Hoe, was taken during the filming of *Redes*. It portrays an Indian man in the fishing village of Alvarado. *Man* takes up the majority of the frame, making him the center of attention. In most of Strand's photographs, one rarely sees an emphasis on the background. Instead Strand highlights individual faces and the expression individuals have the moment they are photographed. Although *Man* is the focus, he blends in well with environment. There is unity between *Man*, his posture and the landscape behind. Another quality of *Man* that will be seen in many Strand's Mexican portraits is his gaze: *Man* stares into the horizon, with his face slightly tilted upwards. The posture and expression grant *Man* heroic dignity. In this instance the Indian vis-à-vis *Man* is not an

object of pity to look down upon, but rather a source of pride and strength, despite the poverty in which *Man* lives.

Although Strand focuses on the material conditions *Man* lives in, this photograph does not hold the same revolutionary fever seen in Orozco's and Rivera's images. Rather it is more static as brings attention to *Man* economic condition, and the need for social action. And while *Man* is not a direct call to arms, it does form part of the Revolution's narrative of class struggle. As stated earlier *Man* was photographed during the filming of *Redes*, and was a resident of the fishing village of Alvarado. Thus, *Man* has a relationship to the film *Redes* that has a very clear call to action—whether it be social, or arms—and forms part of Mexico's revolutionary narrative because *Man* is in dialog with many of the characters from *Redes*. As noted by Milton Brown in a conversation with Paul Strand regarding the *Mexican Portfolio* as a precursor to *Time in New England* (a subsequent portfolio), Strand's photographs, exemplify certain characteristics of nationhood.

Well, this in a way opened up a new avenue of expression or communication for you because this is the first of a long series of books that you've done. However, that brings to mind something we didn't mention. And that's the Mexican portfolio which, in a sense, wasn't so much a book as collection of photographs, but had also the same basic idea: instead of a single work of art, a whole series of photographs characterizing a time and place or a people...³²⁷

Thus, I would argue that Brown's assessments can be linked to *indigenismo* and *Mexicanidad* because "characterizing a time and place or a people" is in many ways contingent on historical and material experience, center pieces of Strand's Mexican

³²⁷ Paul Strand, transcript of interview with Milton Brown, November, 1971 for the Archives of American Art, The Smithsonian Institution, pp. 49-50

Indian portraits. In addition, this was a new way of photographing Indians in Mexico at that time.

In Mexican photography, Indian representation demonstrates contradictions inherent in Mexico and the ways that Indians were viewed at that historical juncture. For example, it was often the case that individuals represented in everyday life in photography during the 1920s were white, or *mestizo*, such as Edward Weston's heroic portraits of key Mexican figures. When photographers such as Weston and Mexican photographer Hugo Bhrème photographed 'Indians,' they were staged performances. There are some exceptions such as Tina Modotti, but her photography of everyday life highlighted a proletariat rhetoric, rather than material conditions. It is for this reason that I argue Strand's photographs of Indians were a more sincere attempt at representing Indians truthfully. However, that does not signify that Strand did so. In fact, Strand held some romantic notions of what he believed constituted Indian-ness. Nonetheless, I believe Strand's photographs demonstrate a shift in Mexican photography from staging Indian-ness to photographing a more succinct representation of Indians. Lastly, I would like to point out that there is one more important exception to Mexican photography at that time, Manuel Álvarez Bravo who focused on the banal aspects of Mexican life that included the Indian as a subject. Although, Álvarez Bravo and Strand approached Indians through a different lens, I believe they intersect, and are in dialogue with one another.

Prior to Strand's 1930s photographs, most images of Indians were neither dignified, nor exalted in Mexican photography.³²⁸ Additionally in pre-Revolutionary Mexico, Indians were normally effaced from national identity, culture and photography. Moreover as discussed in Chapter 1, photography in Mexico during the 1920s was in still its infant stage in terms of aesthetics and subject matter. Most photographers were working as portraitists within the parameters of Pictorialism. That is why Edward Weston's modernist approach was successful in Mexico. It is also the reason why I believe Paul Strand's images of Indians were considered so novel. In addition, by depicting Indians' in daily life Strand engaged in a type of rural visual *flânerie* that was aligned with the values of *Mexicanidad* but was not seen in the works of either the muralists or other photographers of that time. Moreover, I believe that it was because Paul Strand often monumentalized Indians in everyday life that Siqueiros stated that Strand's point of view paralleled those of Mexican mural painting. It is a similar quality that Edward Weston³²⁹ displayed in his Mexican heroic portraits such as *Glaván Shooting* (Figure 22) and Strand's *Boy with White Shirt*, 1933. In both *Glaván Shooting* and *Boy with White Shirt*, the focus is on the individuals' face and their respective expressions. Speaking of his trajectory as a whole, Strand said, "I like to photograph people who have strength and dignity in their faces; whatever life has done to them, it hasn't destroyed them. I gravitate towards people like that."³³⁰

³²⁸ However, it should be noted that in Muralism, Indians were exalted and dignified.

³²⁹ For additional information on Weston's heroic portraits see Chapter 1

³³⁰ Strand, cited in Tomkins, "Profile," in *Strand: Sixty Years*, p. 32

It is the strength and dignity that Strand photographed in people's faces which create a sense of heroism, dignity and strength. These qualities can be directly linked to Mexico's revolutionary aesthetic of strife and overcoming adversity. They are also elements that Elizabeth McCausland and Nancy Newhall, early writers on Strand's Mexican portraits, remarked upon as being characteristic of the Mexican Indian that had a history of deprivation, victimization, as well as fortitude and perseverance. Thus, *Boy with White Shirt* is a perfect example of a person that interested Strand that "whatever life has done... hasn't destroyed."

The Indian, Foreigners and National Identity

During the Mexican Renaissance, there was a societal tension between traditional derogatory views of Indians and a nationalist project that sought to incorporate Indians as leading actors of its nationalist project. Although the proponents of this nationalist project were advocating *indigenismo*, they were a small minority drawn from Mexico's intellectual, political and artistic circles. In addition, proponents of *indigenismo* themselves were often at odds with each other. The issue of *indigenismo* was also problematic because a large number of the middle and upper classes were ambivalent about the nationalist plan to ethnicize, or Indianize Mexican culture.³³¹ And yet, *indigenismo* was one of the principle ideas behind Mexico's post-Revolutionary nationalist project. In fact, one of the leading reasons foreigners, such as Strand, were attracted to Mexico was its native pre-Columbian heritage and Indian population.

³³¹ Lopez, *Crafting Mexico; Intellectuals, Artisan, and the State after the Revolution*, p. 95

Ironically, foreigners were often more highly invested in raising the status of the Indians than mainstream Mexican society itself. This created an interesting development where one saw “a knock out fight between Indianists and Hispanophiles,”³³² where foreigners often acted as referees in favor of ‘things Mexican.’³³³

A concern for things Indian was not the only shared interest between foreigners and leading members of Mexico’s cultural project. Both groups tended to lean towards the political left. Paul Strand was no different. For that reason Historian Rick Lopez argues that the interest in things ethnically Indian/Mexican by the foreigners who joined the Mexican avant-garde challenged traditional notions of the foreigner versus the national in that country.³³⁴ This was also the case with Paul Strand.

I believe that Strand’s works hold a more ‘Mexican’ aesthetic than that of an outsider visiting that country. And while there are contradictions and complexities in Strand’s works, traditional notions of foreigner versus national collapse in his Mexican oeuvre. In fact Strand’s works hold nuances that display the many layers of interpretation that have not been discussed thus far by the field; including my idea that Strand’s photographs are indicative of the political discourse in Mexico of the 1930s.

Additionally, Lopez declares that a “transnational political and cultural discourse by both

³³² Lopez, Note, 1, Chapter 3, Quotes and translates art critic Justino Fernandez, *Textos de Orozco* (Mexico, UNAM, 1955), p. 112

³³³ This is seen in Edward Weston’s and Jean Charlot’s interest in folk art, as well as other foreigners that travelled to Mexico in search of spirituality, a connection to the primitive or Pre-Columbian past as an extension of a modernist project. 3

³³⁴ Lopez, *Crafting Mexico; Intellectuals, Artisan, and the State after the Revolution* p. 97

Mexican nationals and foreigners” in the 1920-1940s³³⁵ formed an idea of Mexico that still exists today.

By the time President Lázaro Cárdenas took office in 1934, and during the immediate years leading to his presidency³³⁶, “specific thematic material had become more prominent than suggestive ambience, simple narration was favored over experimentation, nationalism predominated, cosmopolitanism declined.”³³⁷ In many ways this was a result of a need for unification and stability in a nationalist project and government that was creating itself. As a result, the avant-garde and the government had a symbiotic relationship that was a combination of a truce, political mobilization and a shared nationalist project. This relationship can be seen through the ways in which the muralists, other members of the vanguard, and the government interacted. It was what fostered projects such as Strand’s *Redes*.

At the core of Mexican political debates, was the role of the Indian through the image of the *campesino* or peasant in post-Revolutionary Mexico. For example, in the 1920s Agrarian Leagues seeking land reform ignored references to race or ethnicity.³³⁸ However, by the 1930s, the Indian functioned as symbol and (theoretical) active participant for the *campesino*, worker and political movements.³³⁹ Another important

³³⁵ Lopez, *Crafting Mexico: Intellectuals, Artisan, and the State after the Revolution* p. 97

³³⁶ It was during this time period that Strand was in Mexico

³³⁷ Brushwood, John S. “Innovation in Mexican Fiction and Politics (1910-1934),” *Mexican Studies/ Estudios Mexicanos*. p. 86—Although Brushwood is primarily referencing literature, there is a spill over into the plastic arts and Strand.

³³⁸ For additional information, see publications by the Confederación Nacional Agraria Obregon/ Calles, vol. 818, exp. E-28 (1922)

³³⁹ Dawson, Alexander A. “From Models to the Nation, To Model Citizens: Indigenismos and the Revindication of the Mexican Indian” *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol 30, No. 2 (May 1998). P. 305

distinction is that in the 1920s images of Indians were unsystematic. This can be seen in the different ways Indians were portrayed in magazines and by photographers that will be discussed below.

By the 1930s, Indians had political identities, albeit even they were imposed on them. Proponents of *indigenismo* sought to find ways to portray Indians as participating in revolutionary projects in ‘unison’ with other sectors of mainstream society. There were examples of Indians rallying politically. However, it was often an imposed rhetoric where proponents of *indigenismo* described Indians as political, mobilized and as contributing members of society. In reference to the Mazatecan Indians, *indigenista* Javier Uranga³⁴⁰ wrote,

Now days a striking characteristic of the Mazatecans is their fondness for political activity. They are well informed on political events both in the state of (Oaxaca) and likewise on those which affect general conditions in the country at large. Struggles for local control are bitterly contested, and the incidental practice of public discussion makes them possessors of a notable facility of verbal expression. Even without being able to understand, one listens with delight to their discussion in the language of the people, which is beautiful in rhythm as Italian...The Mazatecans are at the very moment of renaissance as a people...Of all the indigenous groups of Oaxaca they are the most anxious to incorporate themselves in present day civilization of European mould...³⁴¹

While there is inherent reverse racism in Uranga’s words because he regards Indians as ready to assimilate to a European mould, what is relevant to this study is the political status of Indians as a symbol of the nation. Moreover, by expressing Indian integration into a European mould, Uranga seems to be echoing *Indigenistas* views that

³⁴⁰ Javier Uranga was a strong proponent of *indigenismo* in Mexico during the 1920s

³⁴¹ Javier Uranga, “Some Mazatecan Customs” MF, Vol. III (Feb- Mar 1927) pp. 19-12

meztisaje, or the mixing and integrating of Mexico's races, particularly Indians was the future of Mexico.³⁴² In addition, by regarding Indians as politically mobilized because they began to run for office, Uranga was prescribing political enfranchisement to Indians, because holding governmental posts, prior to the revolutions was reserved for the ruling white and *mestizo* elite of Mexico. By politicizing Indians as part of the rural poor or *campesinos*, rather than seeing it as its own distinct racial group, proponents of *indigenismo* and Mexican leadership implied that the largely rural Indian poor was a class issue as opposed to that of race.

Recall that Paul Strand's *Redes* plot is based on class more than race, even if the intended audience was the Mexican rural Indian poor. Like his film *Redes*, his portraits, by focusing the on the everyday person through his interest in material culture and the human situation through generic types, are simultaneously in dialogue with *indigenismo* and the idea of class struggle. It is also indicative of the shift within Mexico's avant-garde from allegory to race during the 1920s to that of class during the 1930s. Thus the collective work of Paul Strand while in Mexico becomes an intersection of anchoring ideas of what it meant to be Mexican, in terms of the everyday experience of the rural Indian, and the political views of that time.

³⁴² For more on *meztisaje* and *Indigenismo* see the Introduction

A New Aesthetic: Indian Representations, Evolution and National Identity 1900 to 1930s

Indian representation evolved from that of an “other” to celebrated and dignified hero over a few short decades between 1900 to the 1930s. Paul Strand added a new element to the representation of Indians in Mexico by photographing them in a heroic and romantic manner, helping to make the Mexican Indian the face of the nation. Photographing Indians, as representative of national identity was not being explored in photography at that time in the manner that Strand did it, especially considering how Mexican national identity and ‘culture’ was being visually presented prior to the Revolution.

Women of Santa Ana, Lake Pátzcuaro, Michoacán, 1933 (Figure 52) by Paul Strand when compared to *Condesa Racetrack*, Mexico City (Figure 53), ca. 1910, attributed to Agustín Victor Casasola³⁴³ demonstrates a profound shift in chronicling everyday Mexican life. Casasola was one of Mexico’s leading photographers of the Porfirian Era and is also remembered for documenting the Mexican Revolution. Most of Casasola’s trajectory consists of Mexico’s upper classes and images of the revolution.

Condesa Racetrack does not include Indians. *Condesa Racetrack* was taken just before the outbreak of the Revolutionary War. At first glance, it does not appear to have any trace of what is was considered to be Mexican identity by modern standards. There

³⁴³ Casasola is most remembered for his *Album histórico gráfico*, a chronicle of the Mexican Revolution and his later work *Historia gráfica del la Revolución Mexicana*. Casasola’s works as a whole depict Mexico’s revolutionary struggle, social and political life, as well chronicled everyday Mexican in the early twentieth century. Although he focuses on the everyday life, his works do not portray the distinct interest in the Indian as does later photographers such as Paul Strand, Tina Modotti and Manuel Alvarez Bravo.

are not any references to *indigenismo*, *Mexicanidad*, Mexico's pre-Columbian past, armed struggle or a leftist sensibility—elements that have come to define important tenants of Mexican history and identity. Instead one finds a tranquil scene of Porfirian³⁴⁴ order and progress, gentility and propriety. Casasola worked in pre-Revolutionary Mexico and his photography exemplified Porfirio Diaz's drive to modernize and industrialize Mexico. While Mexico did see significant economic growth and industrialization during the Diaz regime, it was centered on a cosmopolitan elite and paid little attention to Mexico's largely Indian population.³⁴⁵ Casasola's photography mirrored the values of the Porfirian regime and effaced any vestiges of Indians.

Paul Strand by contrast embodied the views of post-Revolutionary Mexico and the SEP by focusing completely on the Indian. And yet both are indicative of Mexican national identity and values during the specific time period that each photograph was taken. It is also interesting to consider that both Casasola and Strand exemplify the views of Mexico's minority ruling classes—whether it was Diaz, or the post-Revolutionary government.

Paul Strand's *Women of Santa Ana* convey a completely different vision of Mexico and its people. *Women of Santa Ana* are barefoot, the skirts of the two women on the right are torn, they stand in front of a dilapidated building, and the ground is made of dirt and stone. Compared to *Condesa Racetrack*, the *Women of Santa Ana* are unchaperoned, dressed in more humble clothing and wear a traditional *rebozo* to cover their head, and carry things—from a child to a plate. In addition, *Women of Santa Ana* are

³⁴⁴ Porfirian refers to Porfirio Diaz's regime.

³⁴⁵ For more information on Diaz see the Introduction

Indian, those from the *Condesa Racetrack* are most likely white. Economically *Women of Santa Ana* are clearly from a different social class, the lower class, than *Condesa racetrack*, the middle or upper class. This is noteworthy because part of what defined Mexico's revolutionary aesthetic of the 1920s-1940s was the idea of class struggle and an emphasis on the lower classes. Moreover during the post-Revolutionary period, particularly in muralism, one often saw a disdain of the upper classes, as in Rivera's *Banquet of the Rich*, 1926.

These contrasting images of Mexico are only twenty years apart. However, they are indicative of what constituted national identity in two different Mexican Eras—pre-Revolution and post-Revolution. And yet, as previously stated, the Mexican middle class was ambivalent about the nationalist drive to Indianize Mexico, and *Cómo se visten en primavera*, 1928 (“How to dress in Spring”) (Figure 54) is an example of the different views on Indians that existed in post-Revolutionary Mexico.

While, one does see a glorification of the Indian by leading avant-gardes and intellectuals during the 1920s and 1930s, derogatory representations of Indians remained part of Mexico's mainstream culture. *Cómo se visten en primavera*,³⁴⁶ is a cartoon published in a leading Mexican newspaper demonstrating how a white woman dresses in the spring versus an indigenous couple. The underlying racism is clear. The white woman is chic, urbane, light skinned, tall and upright, while the couple is stout, dark, most likely country folk, and Indian. This type of representation of Indians remained regardless of the veneration of Indians in the rhetoric of *indigenismo* and *Mexicanidad*. It is also

³⁴⁶ “Cómo se visten en primavera,” cartoon published in *El Universal Ilustrado*, April 5, 1928.

starkly different than Paul Strand's *Women of Santa Ana* taken only four years after *Cómo se visten en primavera* was published.

By the 1930s, gone were images Victorian dresses, suits and gentility; as well as images of the industrial progress and modernity that were the benchmark of Diaz regime in favor of the rural, folk, and popular existence (the Indian). It is unclear if Strand himself had an idea of how the Indian fit into mainstream society. He may have selected the Indian as a focus because of his own romantic ideas about indigenous people. Nonetheless his imagery of the Indian coincided with certain widespread ideas about what constituted authentic Mexican identity among the artistic left in Mexico.

What is particularly complex about Strand's Mexican portraits is that while his portraits are clearly interested in the 'human situation,' have a social dimension, and are in line with representations of Mexican-ness or *Mexicanidad*, they also demonstrate his keen observation of daily life. The interest in the material culture of Mexican Indians and the 'human situation' clearly aligns Strand with the political left. And yet, because Strand's images are not a direct call to arms, his images may seem politically ambivalent. It is for this reason Alan Trachtenberg calls the political issue in Strand's images 'vexing.' However, Trachtenberg recognizes that "Strand believed his pictures contributed to social justice and human progress."³⁴⁷ Trachtenberg also states that despite Strand's genuine interest in Marxism, American modern romanticism shaped his thoughts and informed his artistic sensibility.³⁴⁸ In addition, Trachtenberg writes that, "Strand's work enacts a pervasive dilemma which springs from modernism's equivocal

³⁴⁷ Trachtenberg, Alan Introduction to *Paul Strand Essays on His Life and Work* p. 11-12

³⁴⁸ *ibid*, p. 6

historical situation in an age of contrary revolutions,” and continues to ask; “can art be true to itself, to its aesthetic character, and at the same time serve social justice?”³⁴⁹

I do not believe that Strand’s images of Indians are politically vexing. When one considers the role of the Indian in the 1930s and the fact that in Mexico *Mexicanidad* did not have to be a direct call to arms for it to have clear political undertones, one can see that Strand sympathized with the Indians because he brought attention to their poverty.

In recent years, James Krippner has brought back attention to Strand’s time in Mexico. As such, he is one of the leading voices on Strand and Mexico. According to Krippner, images such as *Old Woman and Boy*, *Women of Santa Ana* and *Woman of Alvarado*, Michoacán, 1933 (Figure 55) demonstrate traits such as pensiveness, resolve, strength and sadness³⁵⁰—qualities that were attributed to Indians as a result of *indigenismo* and the historical circumstances of exploitation and class struggle Indians had endured. The photographs have also come to signify *Mexicanidad* or what is Mexican—in terms of a shared history of struggle and revolution. Krippner discusses them as:

Being immersed in political conflicts, social networks of power and cultural ways of seeing at the time of its creation. These have become even more complex with the passage of time, as essentialist notions of *lo mexicano* or “Mexicanness”... This photograph is an archetypal example of the gendered and racialized ethnographic other... Although fitting within the category of “archetype,” it is also a social documentary photograph, depicting a real person engaged in an unscripted daily activity. It records one unique historical moment, situated in specific context.³⁵¹

³⁴⁹ Trachtenberg, Alan Introduction to *Paul Strand Essays on His Life and Work* p. 11-12

³⁵⁰ Krippner, James. “Traces, Images and Fictions: Paul Strand In Mexico, 1932-34” *The Americas*, 63:3 January 2007, p. 363

³⁵¹ *Ibid*, pp. 363-365

Krippner's assessment of Strand is multifaceted and complex. On the one hand, Krippner recognizes Strand's photographs as a type of social documentary that is unique to its historical moment. However, I do not fully agree with Krippner's analysis that simply states (but does not elaborate) that Strand's Mexican portraits represent a racialized ethnographic "other."

I believe that Krippner does not fully take into account the ways in which *indigenismo* and politics evolved as a nationalist project that was creating itself between the 1920s-1940s. I also am very resistant to assess Strand as ethnographically "othering" Indians. While it is accurate that Strand had a specific agenda in photographing Indians and he was a foreigner, I do not believe that Strand is engaging in the traditional power relations between "normative" and "other" in his portraits. Strand was interested in Mexico's indigenous population for reason beyond the fact that they were Indian. He was also interested in their quality of life and the social structures in which they lived. Strand's comments about *Redes* and the fact that he created its plot demonstrate this to be the case. This is also seen when one compares the way in which Strand photographed Indians with his predecessors.

I would like to propose that Strand did not approach his subjects with ethnographic curiosity, or in terms of power relations, but with a clear intent to put art/ photography in the service of a collective and address the social conditions of the time. The class struggle that Indian faced is alluded to indirectly in photography in the manner that Strand represented Indians; in rural poor villages with dilapidated walls, tread bare

and dirty clothes, a sense of possible sadness and strife as seen in *Man with Hoe, Old Woman and Boy* and *Seated Man, 1933* (Figure 56).

Carl Lumholtz's *Tarahumara girl*, 1892 (Figure 57) C.B. Waite's *Hot Country Laborer*, Mexico, dates unknown circa first decade of the twentieth century (Figure 58), Hugo Brehme *China Poblana* (Figure 38), Edward Weston's *Rosa Covarrubias* (Figure 34), Tina Modotti's *A Little Proud 'agrista,' Peasant Boy* (Figure 59), and Paul Strand's *Woman of Alvarado* trace the ways in which representations of Indians evolved by the time Strand lived in Mexico. By looking at the evolution of Indian representation in Mexico, it can be seen that Strand's photographs of Indians reached an apex in Indian representation because they show Indians in the most heroic and monumentalized manner, compared to any photographer before him.

Lumholtz's *Tarahumara girl* pre-dates the Mexican Revolution and the ideology of *indigenismo* that followed it. It provides a glance into the ways Indians were viewed by foreigners, and to an extent white Mexicans. Lumholtz was a Norwegian explorer and ethnographer who studied native populations of Mexico and Australia. His photograph of *Tarahumara girl* conveys his ethnographic interest in terms of photographing the girl in her 'native' environment and dress. The girl is in a rural desolate atmosphere filled with shrubs, broken branches, dirt—the type of environment Indians were associated with at the time. Additionally she looks unkempt through her disheveled hair, bare feet, and dirty skirt that is held up by a belt of sorts. Further, *Tarahumara girl's* breasts are exposed. This is not how Western women would present themselves in public. Her face appears to have an apprehensive look, a bit uncomfortable with Lumholtz gaze. As she

poses for him, Lumholtz's gaze as ethnographer is at once penetrating and indicative of power relations where *Tarahumara girl* is clearly the 'other' and Lumholtz the standard documenting the interesting, different, or non-normative for Western culture.

Strand's *Woman of Alvarado* is starkly different than *Tarahumara girl* and Waite's *Tehuantepec Woman* (Figure 39) discussed below. *Woman of Alvarado* may, or may not be aware³⁵² she is being photographed in the manner that *Tarahumara girl* and *Tehuantepec Woman* are. Opposed to the images above, *Woman of Alvarado* is not looking at Strand or the camera. In fact, *Woman of Alvarado*'s face is turned away, denying Strand her gaze and power over her by not acknowledging him and the camera. In addition, while Strand may hold some sort of power over *Woman* with his gaze and camera, an object of scrutiny; *Woman* chooses whether or not to acknowledge him. Hence *Woman* too has power, to grant or to refuse Strand her gaze. As a result, traditional power relations are complicated with *Woman of Alvarado*.

Waite's *Hot Country Laborer* of about a decade later follows a similar pattern as Lumholtz in that it shows a sparsely dressed individual, in a rural outdoor environment, posed as the Indian 'other.' However, Waite was not an anthropologist, but a commercial photographer. Waite was an American active in Mexico from about 1900-1910 who took many photographs of Indian women engaged in some sort of chore, at churches, in markets, or involved in a religious activity. These photographs were sold to tourists visiting Mexico and in the United States. Waite would also hire actresses to dresses as

³⁵² *Woman of Alvarado* was one of the villagers from Alvarado who was a part of the production of *Redes*. As a non-professional actress in the film, *Woman* would have known she was being film. It is unclear if she was 'aware' she was also being photographed. However, her participation in *Redes* situates her in a different manner as that of Strand's other subjects, that he states he photographed 'unaware.'

*tehuanas*³⁵³ at his Mexico City studio to perpetuate the myth of Indians.³⁵⁴ *Tehuantepec Woman* is a perfect example of the above. This image was posed in a studio and was meant to display *Tehuantepec Woman* dressed in full Indian regalia. Strand's *Woman of Alvarado* is not posed in a studio, wearing full Indian regalia. Additionally, *Woman* was not photographed as an object of interest to be sold to tourists. Instead she is photographed in her hometown, in simple garb. Lastly, *Woman of Alvarado* was photographed as part of Strand's social vision that was humanitarian and meant to bring attention to the quality of life rural Indians had.

In terms of Mexican photographers, there is not a significant body of work on Indians during the early twentieth century, and when there is it follows the paradigm of depicting the 'other' seen from an ethnographic point of view. In addition, many turn of the century Mexican photographers such as Agustin Casasola or Carl Wilhelm Kahlo (also known as Guillermo Kahlo, who was Frida Kahlo's father) worked as documentary photographers and did not show much interest in photographing Indians. Casasola, as previously stated photographed genteel society in the Porfirian Era and chronicled the Revolution. Most of Casasola's photographs were primarily of politicians, the army, battles, soldiers and mainstream society. Kahlo was commissioned by the Mexican government to conduct architectural photographs during pre-Revolutionary Mexico.³⁵⁵

³⁵³ *Tehuana* is a woman dressed in traditional Indian clothing

³⁵⁴ Oliver Debroise, *Mexican Suite: a history of photography in Mexico*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), p.148

³⁵⁵ It should be noted that the Diaz regime's goal was to industrialize and modernize Mexico. Mainstream society reflected this view, hence photograph that were interesting to people at the time were of architecture, industry or portraiture.

Hugo Brehme's *China Poblana*, 1920 demonstrates a shift among Mexican photographers towards things Indian. *China Poblana* alludes to Indians and the beginning of *indigenismo*. However, Brehme used a white woman dressed as an Indian. The white woman in *China Poblana* is performing Indian-ness—from her skirt, blouse, and shawl (perhaps a reference to a *rebozo*) to the ballet slippers she wears. In addition, *China Poblana* wears a hat that is more often associated with male Indian attire. Moreover, *China Poblana*'s Indian-ness is a series of tensions between things female Indian, male Indian, and ballet slippers that are reference to a certain education or sophistication that for the most part was not available to the Indian poor.

China Poblana was taken shortly after the end of the Revolution, when ideas on *Mexicanidad* and *indigenismo* were beginning to develop, but by no means ratified. Hence there is another tension in the photograph, appealing to white mainstream Mexico, while exploring its Mexican Indian heritage. Although *China Poblana* is full of contradictions, it is worthwhile to note that Brehme is considered in Mexico to be an important Mexican photographer of the early 20th century who helped to foster the folk (Indian) as indicative of the nation.³⁵⁶ Most of Brehme portraits are not of ordinary everyday Mexican Indians, like those of Strands, but of an idyllic Mexico infused with some attributes of Indian-ness. However, because of the subject matter and time period Brehme was working in, he is considered to represent *indigenismo* in its early stages in Mexico and is an important figure in Mexican photography.

³⁵⁶ For more on Hugo Brehme, see:

Brehme, Hugo. *Timeless Mexico: the photographs of Hugo Brehme* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2011) also see Olivier Debrouse 's discussion on Brehme in *Mexican Suite: a history of photography in Mexico*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001)

Brehme's interest in things Indian holds some of the contradictions seen in the early works of leading members avant-garde of the time. Diego Rivera's *Creation*, 1922-1923, David A. Siqueiros' *The Elements*, 1922 and José Clemente Orzoco's *Maternity*, 1923 are early murals where the artist were adhering to traditional western notions of representation, while trying to incorporate indigenous subject matter. By the time Strand photographed Indians, many of these contradictions were resolved.

Edward Weston's *Rosa Roland de Covarrubias, bailando (vestida de traje de tehuana)*, 1926 in many ways follows a similar paradigm as Brehme's *China Poblana* in terms of posing a white woman dressed as Indian. As stated in Chapter 1, Weston took several photographs of *Rosa*, as well as others dressed in native clothing. However, with Weston there is an element of representation, in terms of aesthetics that is not present with Brehme. Weston imbued his photographs with modern qualities that focused on line, volume and depth. Weston's interest was in things Indian, like the dresses the women wore and their formal qualities, not necessarily the Indians themselves. Strand was interested in the Indians, but he also maintained a modern sensibility.

With Tina Modotti, there is break in the representations of Indians. Unlike Weston and Brehme who were interested in things related to the Mexican Indian, but did not focus on Indians themselves, Modotti actually did. However, Modotti was interested in the Indians' in relationship to the Revolution, politics and communism—not necessarily their pre-Columbian past. Since her arrival to Mexico, Modotti had been

actively involved in Communist Party.³⁵⁷ Her work with the party often included documenting political events in Mexico such as protests on Mexican and international issues. For example, Tina documented the protest against the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti in the United States which was held in Mexico City.

Paul Strand and Tina Modotti—Politics in Art

Although Paul Strand embraced communism and leftist politics, he was not absolute about it in his art. Instead one finds that Strand was interested in the everyday lives of people and creating a social message based on his leftist views, rather than creating a call to arms. This is evident in his of generic titles and in his representation of Indians engaged in everyday activities. This is a different approach than that of Tina Modotti's works in Mexico.³⁵⁸ Modotti did not demonstrate an interest in material culture as did Strand. Moreover, Modotti had a succinct political view that included Indians. Strand had an interest in Indians that included a political view. The difference is subtle. Nonetheless it influences the ways in which the two artists' trajectories have to be understood.

Modotti's photographs of Indians usually had a clear political aim—to bring attention to the masses. The Mexican masses consisted primarily of rural folk (peasants and Indians) and workers. The masses in Mexico did not neatly follow Karl Marx's

³⁵⁷ Letizia Argentero, *Tina Modotti: Between Art and Revolution* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 77

³⁵⁸ Tina Modotti was a foreigner in Mexico. She was born in Italy, immigrated to the United States, then to Mexico. For Modotti and Mexico see Margaret Hooks. *Tina Modotti, Photographer and Revolutionary* (London: Pandora, 1993) and Letizia Argentero. *Tina Modotti Between Art and Revolution* (Yale & London: Yale University Press, 2003)

definition of the industrial proletariat (however, there were large numbers of urban workers). For Modotti in Mexico, rural and industrial masses were interchangeable. Her images, and more specifically her titles, are indicative of her politics. *Worker's Parade*, 1926 (Figure 60) alludes to the Mexican masses politically mobilizing. 'A proud little agrarista', *Mexican peasant boy*, c. 1927 is a photograph of an Indian peasant boy whom Modotti politicizes by calling him a proud agrarian (*agrarista*). One finds this to be the case because in Mexico during the 1920s there was a political drive for land redistribution whose aim was to eradicate the disenfranchisement of the agrarian, and to provide them with resources and land. In addition, the status of Indians and peasants as workers was being elevated in Mexico at that time. This is also the case with *Railway worker's daughter*, 1928 (Figure 61).

The titles Modotti utilized created more leftist rhetoric that was less concerned with *indigenismo*. As Roland Barthes writes about images and words, "it is not the image which comes to elucidate or 'realize' the text, but the latter which comes to sublimate, patheticize or rationalize the image...the text loads the image, burdening it with a culture, a moral, an imagination."³⁵⁹ Moreover, Barthes reminds us that the reading of a photograph is always historical, based on culture's relationships between a signifier and a signified that create chains of connotations.³⁶⁰

Strand's photograph *Woman of Alvarado* is portrait of a young Indian woman. She is an everyday woman in her environment, the small town of Alvarado. She is set

³⁵⁹ Roland Barthes, *Image – Music – Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (New York: Will and Wang, 1977) p. 25-26

³⁶⁰ *ibid*, pp. 20-28

against some sort of whitewashed adobe wall. There are multiple ways in which one can read *Woman of Alvarado*. On the one hand, it continues to exhibit Strand's interest in straight photography and formal values—from the contrast within the *Woman's* dark volumes of the curving *rebozo* to the stark vertical white washed wall. In addition, she is in profile and the shadows of her *rebozo* fall on her neck and parts of her face. On a formal level, *Woman* demonstrates Strand's modernist interest in form, volume and depth. However, the richness of *Woman* is accentuated through her expression. *Woman's* gaze is turned inward and away from the viewer. It is a moment in time—a moment in the life of a young woman contemplating something.

What does she think about? Politics? Survival? It is unclear. Her pensiveness brings the viewer in. She also happens to be Indian in a rural poor town. Her immediate circumstances make her interesting to Strand and those interested in the Indian character of Mexico. Strand may have also been struck by the attractiveness of *Woman*, as well as her quiet strength. Moreover, *Woman* demonstrates the 'new realism' that Siqueiros credits Strand with personifying, and rebels against the academic artistic tradition of Mexico prior to the Revolution.³⁶¹

The meaning or signification of *Woman* is *indigenismo*. She is a sign, or a representation for ideas on national identity and *Mexicanidad* of which *indigenismo* is a

³⁶¹ Mexico's leading art academy during the Mexican Revolution, the Academy of San Carlos in Mexico City, was historically Euro-centric and had a history of importing Spanish faculty and masters such as Antonio Fabrés during the nineteenth century. At the academy students were encouraged to fuse "photographic realism with baroque sentimentality." Unless the students traveled to and studied in Europe like Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and Dr. Alt among others, it became difficult to learn the techniques and trends of the European avant-garde. The post-Revolutionary period rejected many of the academic principles of San Carlos in favor of more modern esthetics as well as revolutionary and Indigenous subject matter.

part of. This is where a chain of concatenated interpretations can be superimposed on *Woman* that are historically and culturally relevant during the time period that Strand was working in Mexico. This is seen in the evolution of Indian representation by leading photographers in Mexico during the post-Revolutionary period. Thus with Strand one is also able to gauge the ways in which his portraits follow shifting tides and ideas on nationhood, or *Mexicandad*.

INTERSECTIONS, VISIONS, BANALITY AND DIGNITY; PAUL STRAND & MANUEL ALVAREZ BRAVO

Although Paul Strand's Mexican portraits express Mexican ideas on nation, the Indian and his insider position, there are elements within his portraits that demonstrate his position as an outsider. This is evident as one considers Paul Strand's romantic view of the Indian as some sort of timeless, heroic, beautiful and essentialized figure. And yet, Strand's search for some sort of authentic Mexican identity through the Indian coincided with certain political and aesthetic developments in Mexico and is indicative of his insider status. These elements make Strand's work complex and demonstrate the different ways in which Mexico was viewed and Mexico's national identity was being created. They become even more interesting to consider when they are regarded alongside the works of Mexican contemporary photographer Manuel Álvarez Bravo who was one of the few Mexican photographers photographing the Indian during the time Strand resided in Mexico.

Álvarez Bravo's works were informed by his experiences of war, politics and everyday Mexican life. Manuel Álvarez Bravo, as a Mexican national and a young man growing up during the Revolution, inspires a different vision of Mexico than Paul Strand does as a foreigner. *Fin del tiangis*, 1931 (Figure 62), *The tall ladder*, (Figure 63), *Sed publica*, 1933 (Figure 64), *Obrero en huelga asesinado*, 1933-34 (Figure 65) *Niño Urinando*, (Boy Urinating), 1927 and (Figure 66) while displaying some interest in indigenous themes, has a broader perspective of everyday quotidian Mexican life than Strand's rural images of Indians. And yet, I will argue that these views are not necessarily

at odds with each other, but rather when combined provide a more viable version of Mexico as whole, rather than of segmented populations. In addition, both Strand and Álvarez Bravo convey instances of everyday life in Mexico that intersect with one another, and grant viewers a more accurate depiction of Mexico during the 1930s.

Álvarez Bravo was born on February 4, 1902 in Mexico City. His grandfather, Manuel Álvarez Rivas was a painter and photographer, and his father, Manuel Álvarez García was a painter, writer, and amateur photographer. Thus, his childhood was shaped in many ways by the arts. However, Álvarez Bravo worked initially as an accountant for the treasury department and was known to be able to complete a days worth of number crunching in one hour, in his head as a teenager. Álvarez Bravo did not begin to develop an interest in photography and things indigenous until 1922 when he was working for the Power and Transportation department and he began to read his employer's, Hugo Conway's subscription to the English publication, *Amateur Photographer and Photography*.

Álvarez Bravo was a young boy and teenager during the Mexican Revolution. In fact during the mid teens, it was common for young men such as Álvarez Bravo to be lined up in Mexico City and executed by firing squads. Álvarez Bravo recalls, "Often we would find spent cartridges...sometimes on my way to school, I would suddenly run across a dead soldier..."³⁶² Battles in the city were also very common. Álvarez Bravo also recalls, "I remember something that disturbed me a great deal, and that was hearing

³⁶² Manuel Álvarez Bravo quoted in *Manuel Alvarez Bravo: Photographs and Memories*. (New York: Aperture, 1997), p. 7

the cannons. They were so regular, every day more or less at the same hour, that I had a feeling it was going to be like that all of my life.”³⁶³

Álvarez Bravo’s experience of war and death, was the norm for a young adult living in Mexico during the Revolution. The uncommon reality of war became an ordinary experience for Álvarez Bravo. As a result, his art is imbued with ordinary events that demonstrate aspects of life that are normally not seen in a more romantic or modernist vision of life. Thus, one will find that Álvarez Bravo’s imagery contains raw banality such as urinating, a boy sleeping or a dead man’s body. As a result, Álvarez Bravo’s portraits penetrate daily life, turmoil, struggle and chaos in Mexico. One also finds that Álvarez Bravo’s works are of unexpected moments in everyday life that reject romanticism, and many of the grand narratives of post-Revolutionary Mexico. Nonetheless, Álvarez Bravo forms part of Mexico’s nationalist project because in his works, Álvarez Bravo isolates Mexican life, shows a concern for the Indian and displays his interest in modern aesthetics. These are elements that were valued and seen as indicative of post-Revolutionary art.³⁶⁴

Strand and Álvarez Bravo were friends, respected each other’s works and were interested in modern ideas and formalism. According to Álvarez Bravo,

I bought my first book on Picasso in the bookshop run by Pedro Robredo. It proved to be decisive in my turning towards the arts, as families in those days had stopped at artists such as Murillo. Even more than Diderot and Rousseau, Picasso opened up new path for me. Although I owe my first influence of vision to Hugo Brehme, Picasso and his cubism put me fact to face with another kind of reality.

³⁶³ Manuel Álvarez Bravo quoted in *Manuel Alvarez Bravo: Photographs and Memories*. (New York: Aperture, 1997), p. 7

³⁶⁴ For additional information, see Chapter 1’s discussion on modern art in Mexico and the *Estridentistas*.

Brehme unleashes the picturesque photographs; Picasso the uncommon, strange photograph. I found my own security later on when Tina Modotti showed me Edward Weston's photographs.³⁶⁵

Fin del tiangis translates to end of the market. It is a scene of two Indian women bent over some sort of table—their back is to the viewer. All one can see is their distinct Indian attire, a dirt ground, some sort table and a mesh like sack. The women are in an open space set against some sort of white washed wall. Although the viewer cannot see the women's face, the viewer is able to see the system in which Indians live and work (selling at a market). And while it is an isolated moment in time, like those seen in Strand's pieces, it is not a romanticized view of Indians. In addition, with Strand one sees emphasis on Indian faces, as opposed to Álvarez Bravo where faces are often effaced.

The Tall Ladder is a photograph of an Indian woman carrying a jug of water, walking towards a ladder. What seems to be of interest to Álvarez Bravo is the mixture of an everyday activity and the formal qualities of the scene—a tall vertical ladder, the wall with a horizontal line due to its contrasting colors, and the woman's circular shapes—from the concaves of her skirts, to her head and round jug of water.

One of Álvarez Bravo's best-known photographs is *Obrero en huelga asesinado* (*Worker Assassinated Striking*), is an image of a dead worker lying on a dirt ground, with blood spilling from his head. It is an image that is politically charged. To be assassinated for striking alludes to a disaccord between the government and workers. As stated earlier,

³⁶⁵ Interview 1982 published in *Manuel Alvarez Bravo; 100 Years 100 Days* by Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes (Mexico); Fundació Televisa.; Fomento Cultural Banamex with text from Ignacio Toscano and Carlos Monsiváis

with the advent of Calles, there was a growing repression of workers rights. Is Álvarez Bravo critiquing those that assassinated the worker?

Certainly to an extent he is—however he is looking at society and life as whole, not just a political event. Álvarez Bravo was politically on the left, but he was not radical. He emphasized the pathos of strife in a country that was seeking reconstruction and reform. Paul Strand's images on the other hand are not a critique of the government, but a compliment to the government and SEP's project of defining the nation around the Indian.

The common denominator in most of Álvarez Bravo's images that one does not see in Strand is that people are engaged in some sort of activity. That is not to say that Strand's portraits are passive. What I am suggesting, however, is that Álvarez Bravo's portraits contain more actions or activities such women cleaning up at the end of the market, drinking water, conversing, urinating, or the dead after a workers strike. Paul Strand's images are more static attempt to capture an Indian essence of sorts and a moment in time. Moreover, in Mexico, Strand is a portraitist who isolates his figures from the day-to-day reality, whereas as Álvarez Bravo situates Indians in time and place. As a result, in Alvarez Bravo's works, identity is contingent on the Indian's work and day-to-day lives, in Strand it is not.

Obrero does not have a hammer and sickle as seen in some of Modotti's photographs, nor do we see the men that killed him, as seen in many of the muralist paintings of the time depicting injustice. There is not a perpetrator apparent. Instead, the perpetrator is referred to in the image through the dead body of *Obrero*. The same can be

said of *Boy urinating*. The act is done, but the person responsible is not seen. The boy's face is hidden. Hidden faces are quality seen in many of Álvarez Bravo's photographs. The direct stare of his subjects' gaze is often missing.

When compared to Álvarez Bravo's photographs above, Strand's portraits have different qualities. They are quieter, more subdued and less shocking. Strand's images are of the everyday quotidian experience, but in a dignified, heroic manner that seeks to capture a romantic eternal quality of Indian-ness and monumentalize in a similar manner as the muralists. Another key difference between Strand and Álvarez Bravo is that while Strand had an interest in things Indian and their life, Álvarez Bravo explored the nuances that created their everyday life. Strand was more concerned with materiality and expressing Indians in their environment.

Boy in white shirt and *Man, Tenancingo de Degollado*, 1933 (Figure 67) are succinct examples of the heroism and dignity that is seen in most of Strand's portraits. *Boy in white shirt* is a photograph of a young Indian man or boy in a three quarter profile view. He is seated against a white washed wall. *Boy in white shirt* is dressed in traditional white linen male Indian garb. He also wears a *sombrero*. Initially one may wonder what makes *Boy in white shirt* heroic, given the fact that his clothing is evidently dirty and torn—signs of poverty. Moreover, he is a boy. And yet, *Boy in white shirt* appears to have a larger than life persona seen through his fully erect seated position, and intent gaze towards the horizon. What *Boy in white shirt* is thinking is unclear. Yet, one does wonder. His body language and posture is one of strength and character, despite his poverty. *Man, Tenancingo de Degollado* is similar to *Boy in white shirt* in that he stares

to horizon is sits erect. His expression is stern and contemplative. Despite his torn clothing, his presence is imposing.

Images such *Man* and *Boy* above capture a very particular moment in time, of a specific person that will not be repeated—“That-has-been.” “That-has-been” or the Intractable is something that can only be experienced with indifference and authenticates the existence of a Being.³⁶⁶ In the case of Strand, I would argue that although he is concerned with ‘human situation,’ he does not necessarily interact with the Indians he wishes to help with his art. It is distance, in his Mexican photography that allows Strand to present a romantic vision of Indians. This is the human condition and material culture that Strand is looking at and photographing. Thus what one finds in Strand is a tension in trying to capture the “essence” of Indian-ness through fleeting moments, and by immortalizing them through the documentation of a photograph. As a result, there is tension between the eternal and ephemeral.

In *On Photography*, Susan Sontag writes that photography is “an extension of the eye of the middle class *flâneur*, whose sensibility was so accurately charted by Baudelaire. The photographer is an armed version of the solitary walker reconnoitering . . . the voyeuristic stroller.”³⁶⁷ Although Sontag and Baudelaire refer to an urban stroller, I would like to propose that by people watching and trying to photograph the essence of Indians without their knowledge, Paul Strand should be regarded as pseudo-type of rural *flâneur* that aims to immortalize moments in time, or the timeless

³⁶⁶ It is his status as an outsider that prevents Strand from puncturing into the everyday banal aspects and nuances of Mexican life. See Barthes, *Image – Music – Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (New York: Will and Wang, 1977), pp. 77, 107

³⁶⁷Sontag, Susan. *On Photography* (New York: Picador, 1977), p. 55

Indian character of Mexico. Moreover, as discussed earlier, Strand was a member of Young Americans that believed that “the representational isolation of moments—particularly instances of social contact—was the most singular and valuable contribution of photography.”³⁶⁸

Sontag also reminds us that there is “something in people’s faces when they don’t know they are being photographed.”³⁶⁹ Not all of Strand’s portraits have a sense of heroism and monumentality, but of solitude and sadness. This is seen in *Seated man, Uruapan, Michoacán*, 1933 (described above) and *Boy, Uruapan, Michoacán*, 1933 (Figure 68). The, “something in people’s faces” has been remarked upon by the field in relation to Paul Strand’s portraits. Elizabeth McCausland stated that in Paul Strand’s Mexican Portraits, one can see “behind the inscrutable faces of these men, women, and children, hide centuries of labor, sorrow, and death...”³⁷⁰

Nancy Newhall also has a similar analysis when she wrote, that the images “seem to symbolize...the emotional preoccupations of the people.”³⁷¹ More recent scholars such James Krippner hold similar views. While I do agree with McCausland, Krippner and Newhall, I would suggest that a more accurate description is that of Naomi Rosenblum

³⁶⁸ Whalan, Mark. “The Majesty of the Moment; Sociality and Privacy in the Street Photography of Paul Strand.” *American Art*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Summer 2011), p. 36 Although Whalan is specifically referencing urban scenes in this article, many of its ideas can be applied to rural Strand’s Mexican portraits.

³⁶⁹ Sontag, *On Photography*

³⁷⁰ McCausland, Elizabeth. “Paul Strand’s Series of ‘Photographs of Mexico’” *The Springfield Union Republican*. Springfield, Massachusetts. July 7, 1940

³⁷¹ Newhall, Nancy. *Paul Strand, Photographs 1915-1945*, p. 7

who wrote that in Strand, one sees, “conjoining opposites, monumental dignity and beauty to the poverty stricken illiterate peasants.”³⁷²

It can be argued that Álvarez Bravo’s penetrating gaze is a reflection of his life experience as a teenager in war stricken Mexico. He was familiar with death and the banal nature of life. Strand, who was, as stated earlier aligned with the values of *indigenismo* and was a Mexican worker himself, was nonetheless a foreigner and outsider that did not have the life experience of Álvarez Bravo that lived through the violence of the revolution.

However, it does not signify that Strand could not understand and accurately depict Indians in an honest and direct manner. In fact he did, and was praised for his endeavors not only by leading avant-gardists such as Siqueiros, but also President Lázaro Cárdenas who sent Strand an official letter (Figure 69) doing so. However, Strand was limited by his outsider foreigner status. Strand was not limited in capability, honesty or genuine interest; but in the nuances of the Mexican experience. And yet, there is an element in Strand’s works that Álvarez Bravo does not have, dignity, monumentality and heroism—traits that were prevalent in Mexico’s revolutionary aesthetic. These are qualities that are reminiscent of the works of Edward Weston from the previous decade and are also seen from the muralists. However, while Weston focused on members the avant-garde, Strand focused on the everyday Indian.

I would like to conclude by stating that Álvarez Bravo’s banality and Strand’s dignity are compliments and intersections that help form a whole and complete image,

³⁷² Roseblum, Naomi, Rosenblum, Naomi, “The Early Years.” in *Paul Strand Essays on His Life and Work*, p. 27

rather than compartmentalized views of Mexico. For Mexico was not always about banality as seen with Álvarez Bravo, nor dignity as seen with Strand—it was both. It is for this reason the Strand and Bravo intersect as they present visually, by means of their photographs, their views on Mexico.

CHAPTER 3

*Folk art is the immutable and changing root of all true art
Each human nucleus, each civilization, and each period,
establish through forms their special view of the world.
In time styles change but not the substance of a tradition.
The manner in which each artist interprets reality is different,
although his expression does not deny but affirm unity of a culture*

*Mexico was born of the fusion of two millenary civilizations;
in folk art, more than in other fields, the marked traits of our mixture are manifested.
Popular art is the bond, the permanent tie
between the different stages of our historical evolution.
It is the strong fabric from which
the directive line of both our past and present art grew.*
~ Luis Echeverría, President of Mexico, 1971³⁷³

During the time that Edward Weston and Paul Strand lived in Mexico they were both interested in photographing Mexican folk art. Mexican folk art, as a subject matter for the avant-garde, was indicative of the values, or themes that were preoccupying the nation at that time. For Edward Weston in the 1920s, it was crafts such as pottery and toys; while for Paul Strand in the early 1930s it was *bultos* or religious statuary. Although

³⁷³ This quote was written as part of the opening statements for the two volume set *The Ephemeral and The Eternal of Mexican Folk Art* published as a nationalist project by Fondo Editorial de la Plástica Mexicana (Banco Nacional de Comercio Exterior, S.A., Venustiano Carranza Núm. 32 México, D.F., 1971). President Echeverría's opening statements on folk art are significant because, like his predecessors of the 1920s-1930s, Echeverría's goal was to foster nationalism through the rhetoric of politics and the arts. Echeverría, like Obregon, Calles and Vasconcelos hoped to put art to the service of the state. For example, Echeverría, in 1971, asked Carlos Chávez to develop a 'national' plan that would provide music instruction for all elementary school students. In many ways, Echeverría's interest in supporting the arts, and associating with them; was a result of Mexico's 1968 Tlateloco Massacre that killed an estimated 300 students and civilians. This occurred 10 days before the 1968 Olympics held in Mexico. At that time political instability plagued Mexico as a result of the federal government's restrictions on labor unions and other sectors of society. Additionally, there was dissatisfaction at the \$150 million dollars the government spent in preparation for the Olympics, given the country's economic troubles. At the time of the massacre, Echeverría was Secretary of the Interior, hence considered responsible for the massacre. However, Echeverría stated that blame lay with former President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz. Thus, when elected President, Echeverría utilized the arts to quell tensions and increase nationalism. His support of the *The Ephemeral and The Eternal of Mexican Folk Art* was important. For additional information on Echeverría and the arts see: *Mexico's Cinema: A Century of Filmmakers*, edited by Joanne Hershfield and David R. Marciel. (Lanham, MD: SR Books, 2005), and Robert L. Parkers' *Carlos Chavez, A Guide to Research*. (New York: Routledge, 1998)

crafts and *bultos* as folk art are very different thematically, they share a common denominator—they represent elements of culture and national identity that Mexicans could identify with, as well as foreigners.

Mexican folk art is as diverse as it is multifaceted. It is a loose term that can be applied to many forms of native craft expression, that encompasses “great interest in the work of village potters, artisans who worked in *papier-mâche*, and weavers of straw figures.”³⁷⁴ In general, Mexican folk art is made of various materials and usually served a utilitarian or decorative purpose. What was particularly interesting about Mexican folk art and important to know, is that it evolved during Mexico’s colonial period into what Mexicans call *artesanía*—a blend of indigenous and European techniques and designs.³⁷⁵ In many ways, it is the epitome of *mestizaje*.

According to Mexican art critic Rafael Carrillo Azpelta, the criteria for folk art in Mexico includes: it having “its origins in the life of people;”³⁷⁶ is often characterized by its anonymity that gives it a general character; and is the tie found between the creator and community.³⁷⁷ These characteristics establish an intimate relationship between folk art and the people whose roots are found in Mexico’s past.

Folk art, in particular crafts, became a vehicle through which claims to native origins could be made, because it was seen as being linked to a native pre-Columbian heritage. For example, in some cases pottery molds similar to those from pre-Columbian

³⁷⁴ *The Ephemeral and The Eternal of Mexican Folk Art*, Vol. 1

³⁷⁵ For more information see Maria Teresa Pomar, “Centenaria presencia de las artesanías,” *Mexico Desconocido* (Nov/Dec 1999), pp.11-28.

³⁷⁶ *The Ephemeral and The Eternal of Mexican Folk Art*, Vol. 1, p.9

³⁷⁷ *ibid*

times were still being utilized in Mexico. For that reason, folk art was used in Mexico's nationalist project which sought to define itself around its pre-Columbian past, history and cultural traditions. However, folk art as it had evolved by the post-Revolutionary period was not the same as pre-Columbian art. Rather, it was a blend of indigenous and European techniques that developed during its colonial visceral era, and thus, colloquial to modern Mexico.

Many of the techniques employed in Mexican folk art have European elements. However, its formal attributes are heavily influenced by Mexico's native tradition. Edward Weston and other members of the avant-garde were specifically attracted to folk art's simplicity of form, and relationship to Mexico's pre-Columbian past. By photographing folk art, Weston celebrated folk art, and produced art that was in line with the revolutionary aesthetic of the time.

During its colonial visceral period, Mexico experienced deep transformational cultural shifts that were heavily influenced by Spain,³⁷⁸ and its European heritage. Many Spanish and European influences became deeply embedded into Mexico's cultural and folk traditions. It is for that reason that Mexican President Luis Echeverria wrote the words, "Mexico was born of the fusion of two millenary civilizations; in folk art, more than in other fields, the marked traits of our mixture are manifested. Popular art is the bond, the permanent tie between the different stages of our historical evolution."³⁷⁹

Echeverria's words indicate that Mexican folk art was a result of two cultures, the Indian and Spanish. He also stated that through popular art, Mexican history can in many

³⁷⁸ Mexico became independent from Spain in 1821

³⁷⁹ *The Ephemeral and The Eternal of Mexican Folk Art*, Vol. p.1

ways be traced, from a purely Indian sensibility, to one that is mixed with Spanish, or becomes predominantly Spanish. Thus, there are times in the trajectory of Mexican folk art when one culture's elements dominate the other culture. With pottery, and in relation to Weston's photographs, the Indian sensibility dominates. With Strand and his photographs of *bultos*, the Spanish sensibility dominates.

Paul Strand's photographs of *bultos* are a type of Mexican folk art due to the blending of Spanish and native traditions, that created its own unique school of religious representation native to Mexico. However, while pottery relied more on pre-Columbian form and molds, *bultos* relied heavily on Spanish empire traditions, and molds that were primarily of Flemish origin. *Bultos*, at that time were an important part of Mexico's cultural heritage because of Mexico's strong religious and spiritual traditions.

What is particularly interesting to consider in relation to Strand's photographs of *bultos* is that religion was not celebrated by many of the Revolution's leaders (there was not a consensus on the issue of religion among Mexico's revolutionaries). However, religious folk art was attributed the same value as non-religious folk art related to Mexico's pre-Columbian past. Religious folk art was admired, not because the Revolution's leaders were religious, but because Indian hands often made it. In addition, and as previously stated, Mexico had created its own school of religious representation, thus religious folk art was culturally relevant as something uniquely Mexican. Thus *bultos* were seen as representing *lo Mexicano*, or *Mexicandad*. Despite the status of religious folk art as something uniquely Mexican, it contained a tension that was not part of non-religious folk art—a disdain for religion, an appreciation for religious folk art.

This tension is seen in the values of the avant-garde. For example, Diego Rivera, who admired religious folk art, and wrote about in publications such as *Mexican Folkways*, was anti-clerical.

The federal government (including the SEP), along with a substantial amount of Mexican leadership regarded religion as oppressive, and based on superstition. Mexican leadership wished to eradicate the hold religion had on people, and focus more on education in order to modernize Mexico. However, Mexico, a historically religious country, would not easily accept restrictions on religion, religious traditions and cultural norms. This led to a dark episode in Mexican history called *Las Cristiadas* or the *Cristero War*, where the federal government and the Catholic Church engaged in armed warfare as they each fought for the soul of the Mexican people. Thus, religion and religious representation during this time period was complex; and, in many instances, contradictory among the Mexican avant-garde. However, in Mexico, contradictory ideas and representations often played themselves out during the post-Revolutionary period until ideas were resolved. For example, this was the case with *indigenismo*. The early *indigenistas* often disagreed with each other. And as seen in Chapter 2, Indian representation was problematic in Mexico even though the ideology of *indigenismo* was being disseminated. This was also the case with land reform, leftist ideas, the status of unions, etc. Thus, in spite of the fact Mexican leadership and some members of the avant-garde looked down on religion, religious imagery continued to have cultural relevance in folk art, and was utilized as a tool to convey secular messages in the works of the muralists.

By photographing *bultos*, Strand joined his Mexican peers in utilizing complex subject matter, that was at odds with the professed goals of the revolution, yet continued to fascinate artists, and the nation alike. Visiting artists, like Strand, were not immune to its influence, and unable to ignore it, they became drawn to Mexico's religious and spiritual heritage. In fact, part of what attracted Strand to Mexico, in addition to the Indian was its spirituality.³⁸⁰

It is interesting to consider Strand's fascination with *bultos* because he too had a disdain for religion. And yet, by photographing *bultos*, Strand seems to side with the people who would not turn their backs on religion. Thus, whether conscious or not, by photographing religious objects during the period that religion was restricted in Mexico, Strand's *bultos* contain an underlying political commentary.

By photographing folk art, Weston and Strand were photographing traditions that represented aspects of Mexican national identity, regardless of whether or not, the identity was being celebrated or repressed by Mexican leaderships at that time. Moreover, Weston's and Strand's folk imagery should also be regarded as historical documents because they demonstrate elements of culture and tradition that preoccupied Mexico during their residency.

³⁸⁰ Oles, James. *South of the Border; Mexico in the American Imagination 1914-1947* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), p. 147

FOLK ART, INDIGENISMO, MEXICANDAD, JEAN CHARLOT, WESTON & IDOLS BEHIND ALTARS

Weston's photographs of Mexican folk art are related to *indigenismo*, *Mexicanidad* and the national revolutionary aesthetic that Weston embraced. Prior to his time in Mexico, Weston was mostly a portraitist and had not shown interest in folk art of the United States. In Mexico, Weston acquired an appreciation for folk art and began to collect it extensively. As with many of his peers in Mexico, Weston saw folk art as related to Mexico's pre-Columbian heritage, and as representative of a pure artistic expression associated to form, abstraction and simplicity. Weston's photographs of Mexican folk art are complex, and showed his allegiance to Mexico, and the values of the post-Revolutionary period. As a result, one finds that Weston's folk art imagery has a triple function: 1) celebrates folk art and thus represents nation, 2) shows his clear transition into a modern aesthetic, and 3) is a double representation of formalism—the object itself as simple and abstract, and Weston's own photographic abstraction of the object.

In its post-Revolutionary period, Mexico sought to redefine its national identity politically, socially, and culturally. According to historian David Z. Brading, “the Mexican Revolution was preceded and accompanied by an upsurge in nationalism”³⁸¹ that rooted itself on the idea of “*mestizaje* as the historical mainspring of Mexican

³⁸¹ David Z. Brading, “Manuel Gambio and Official Indigenismo” *Bulletin of Latin American Research* Vol. 7, No. 1 (1998), p. 75

identity.”³⁸² What Brading refers to is that proponents of *indigenismo* in Mexico sought to exalt some aspects of Mexico’s indigenous heritage to promote the mixing of the races (white and Indian through *mestizaje*), and to reject the European centered ideals. As a result, many of the attributes or qualities found in things Indian began to acquire value. This was particularly the case with folk art traditions that had a connection to Mexico’s pre-Columbian past. As Mexico sought to explore *lo Mexicano*, and create a sense of Mexican-ness, *Mexicanidad*,³⁸³ it not only focused on the Indian and *mestizaje*, but also turned to folk traditions such as dance, spirituality and art.

These subjects were discussed and written about often in the journal *Mexican Folkways*.³⁸⁴ Writing about folk art was revolutionary, in and of itself, because prior to the twentieth century, folk art was esteemed only in the villages where it was produced. “Consumption was mainly local, although crafts were also popular in the lively traditional fairs held yearly in many parts of Mexico.”³⁸⁵ It was believed that because contemporary artisans utilized similar techniques, or molds as in pre-Columbian times it was “proof of an ancient heritage.”³⁸⁶ Thus, for the leaders of the post-Revolutionary era, folk art represented a cultural legacy that was deeply rooted in the past that became a source of pride.

³⁸² *ibid*

³⁸³ *Mexicanidad* became the actualization of the enfranchisement of the ideal of equality the Revolution proposed, land redistribution, unifying as a nation, looking to “things” Mexican such as its pre-Columbian past, *indigenismo* and rejecting Euro-centrism.

³⁸⁴ As mentioned in Chapter 1, *Mexican Folkways* (1925-1937) was a tri-monthly publication that discussed Mexican folklore, traditions, art, music, poetry, archeology, the Indian in terms of *indigenismo* and many other relevant cultural topics.

³⁸⁵ *The Ephemeral and The Eternal of Mexican Folk Art*, Vol. 1, p. 9

³⁸⁶ Fernandez Ledsema, Gabriel “Mexican Toys” in *The Ephemeral and The Eternal of Mexican Folk Art*, Vol. 1, p. 270

Many avant-garde artists, including Weston, appreciated the clean lines and simple forms of Mexican crafts such as pottery and toys; which, although elementary, were perceived as aesthetically beautiful, and aligned with modernism and abstraction in terms of formal qualities. Additionally, Mexican crafts became the means through which people could connect to Mexico's pre-Columbian past.

A key event, which marked Mexico's early interest in itself, was an exhibition on Mexican indigenous art organized by Dr. Atl at the Academy of San Carlos in September 1910 in Mexico City. The exhibition, *Gran Exposición de Arte Popular Mexicano*, was a nationalist response to the government of Porfirio Díaz's exhibition of contemporary Spanish paintings³⁸⁷ to commemorate the centenary of Mexico's struggle for independence from Spain. Dr. Atl's exhibition was radical at that time because folk art was not being given the value accorded to European art,³⁸⁸ or Mexican art that had a European sensibility. In fact, Mexico's leading art academy, the Academy of San Carlos in Mexico City, was historically Euro-centric, and had a history of importing Spanish faculty and masters such as Antonio Fabrés during the nineteenth century.³⁸⁹ At the academy students were just beginning to be allowed to utilize folk art as inspiration. However, they were encouraged to fuse "photographic realism with baroque sentimentality."³⁹⁰ Thus,

³⁸⁷ Desmond Rochfort, *Mexican Muralists: Orozco, Rivera, Siqueiros*, p. 16

³⁸⁸ *ibid*

³⁸⁹ Fernández, Justino. *Arte Moderno y Contemporáneo de México*. (Mexico, 1952), p. 198. This book gives a history of the development of Modern art in Mexico and traces the genealogy of the Academy of San Carlos and how it contributed to modern art in Mexico.

³⁹⁰ Patterson, Robert H. "Antecedents of Mexican Mural Painting, 1900-1920." *Journal of Inter-American Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (Jul., 1964), p. 379

Atl's exhibition reflected the groundswell of nationalist feeling amongst the country's band of nationalist artist and intellectuals, for whom the official exhibition of Spanish painting typified the insufferably exclusive European cultural preoccupations of the nation's ruling classes.³⁹¹

Jean Charlot, who wrote extensively on Mexican art, noted Dr. Atl's exhibition of Mexican indigenous art, through its racial consciousness, "anticipated the creation of a truly Mexican style."³⁹² In addition, the exhibition was considered revolutionary, and according to Robert Patterson, "Some of basic elements of the revolution were expressed in the show: its impetus had been nationalism, and its subject, in part was the Indian."³⁹³

Thus, with *Gran Exposición de Arte Popular Mexicano* an interest in non-European centric Mexican art had begun to emerge in the years leading up to the Mexican Revolution. In addition, popular arts such as the engravings and newspaper prints of José Guadalupe Posada³⁹⁴ became fashionable and admired. Artists like Saturnino Herrán began to present a mixture of pre-Columbian and European themes with *Our Gods*, 1918 (Figure 70). *Our Gods* is a fusion of pre-Columbian and European religious representation of gods. The primary figure is a painting of a well-known Aztec sculpture, the mother goddess Coatlicue.³⁹⁵ Within the body of Coatlicue is a

³⁹¹ Patterson, Robert H. "Antecedents of Mexican Mural Painting, 1900-1920." *Journal of Inter-American Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (Jul., 1964), p. 379

³⁹² Charlot, Jean. "Orozco and Siqueiros at the Academy of San Carlos," *College Art Journal*, Vol. X, no. 4 (Summer 1951), p. 356 With this quote Charlot is referring to a post-Revolutionary aesthetic that is inclusive of the Indian

³⁹³ Patterson, Robert H. "Antecedents of Mexican Mural Painting, 1900-1920." *Journal of Inter-American Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (Jul., 1964), p. 381

³⁹⁴ José Guadalupe Posada was an illustrator and cartoonist that published in leading newspapers. His works were popular because of their political nature, humor and satire. Posada's works can be described as populist. He was a man of the everyday people and his work catalog of Mexico and its historical events.

³⁹⁵ Coatlicue was the mother of the powerful Aztec sun god Huitzilopochtli—thus Christ being born from her can be a reference to the new Christian religion being born and as fusing some pre-Columbian beliefs on deities with European. In Mexico the way Indians were converted was by building churches on top of

representation of Christ on the cross, his legs between her groin area; recalling the Aztec myth that the sun god, Huitzilopochtli, was born to her.³⁹⁶ However, in this instance, Huitzilopochtli as the “sun” god becomes Christ, the “son” of god. This painting in many ways represented the conversion in Mexico from Indian pre-Columbian religious beliefs to Catholicism. It also demonstrated that although Mexico adopted Christianity, pre-Columbian motifs were still a part of the popular imagination.

Despite the rise of artists like Saturino Herrán, academic art was still deeply embedded within the Mexican psyche. That is why Dr. Alt’s ‘Mexican’ art exhibition was beyond a nationalist project—it was contrary to the current academic trends, revolutionary and modernist. Moreover, Dr. Alt was crucial to the modern and revolutionary aesthetic being developed in Mexico at the time.³⁹⁷

Dr. Atl also published *Las Artes Populares en Mexico* in 1922, dedicated entirely to Mexico’s folk art. *Las Artes Populares en Mexico* brought significant attention to folk art, and fit in well with the spirit of *indigenismo*. It is highly probable that Weston would

indigenous temples. Towns connected to some sort of indigenous rite or deity would be given a saint’s name. The idea was to replace one belief system with another in a way that cosmologically made sense to Indians. In addition, lesser gods often shared attributes of Catholic saints. For more information on this synchronism please see Mullen, Robert J. *Architecture and its Sculpture in Viceregal Mexico* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1997)

³⁹⁶ For more on Coatlicue see *Handbook to Life in the Aztec World* by Manuel Aguilar Moreno (New York: Facts on File, Inc, 2006), pp, 142, 148, 203, 389. Specifically pages 203 and 389 discuss how Coatlicue was replaced by Mary. For the Indians that were being converted, Mary personified many of the mother goddess characteristics of Coatlicue.

³⁹⁷ Dr. Alt travelled extensively in Europe in the 1890s and early 1900s. He was well familiar with the trends in Europe and a great promoter of mural and the Italian renaissance as inspirational for the emerging muralist. However, his influence began as a teacher at the Academy of San Carlos during the revolution. Dr. Alt was also a political figure and revolutionary.

have known about Dr. Atl's catalog of Mexican folk art³⁹⁸ since it was well received and acknowledged by the Mexican avant-garde in the 1920s. In addition, there was a significant amount of interaction between Californian artists and Mexican artists in the early 1920s, just before Weston moved to Mexico.³⁹⁹

In fact, in 1922, Xavier Guerrero, Mexican avant-garde painter, was entrusted with taking a selection of *Gran Exposición de Arte Popular Mexicano* to Los Angeles, California. *Gran Exposición de Arte Popular Mexicano* was the most representative exhibition of Mexican Folk art shown in the United States at that time, sparking an interest in Mexican folk art in the United States. Weston met Guerrero in Los Angeles at the end of 1922,⁴⁰⁰ and became good friends with him. When Weston moved to Mexico, Xavier and his sister Elisa Guerrero became part of Weston's inner social circle.⁴⁰¹ In addition, he photographed Guerrero (as part of his series of heroic heads) and his sister Elisa (*Elisa vestida de tehuana*, Figure 36).

Many of Weston's early photographs of Mexican folk art were the type of objects Manuel Romero de Terreros y Vincente discussed in *Las artes industriales en la Nueva España*, published in 1923.⁴⁰² *Las artes industriales en la Nueva España* was a response to an exhibition that was an expanded version of Dr. Atl's 1921 catalog called *Las artes*

³⁹⁸ Stebbins, Theodore, E Jr., Karen Quinn, and Leslie Furth, essay Starting Life Anew: Mexico, 1923-1926, by Furth in *Edward Weston: Photography and Modernism*. (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston: Boston, New York & London), p. 49

³⁹⁹ Mariana Figeralla. *Edward Weston y Tina Modotti en Mexico: Su Intersección Dentro De Las Estrategias Estéticas Del Arte Posrevolucionario*, (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma De México Instituto De Investigaciones Estéticas, 2002), pp. 70-71

⁴⁰⁰ Mariana Figeralla. *Edward Weston y Tina Modotti en Mexico: Su Intersección Dentro De Las Estrategias Estéticas Del Arte Posrevolucionario*. P.71

⁴⁰¹ Throughout his *Daybooks* Weston often describes his friends and the outings or trips they did together. The Guerrero's are part of these trips and Weston's social circle.

⁴⁰² Manuel Romero de Terreros y Vincente, *Las artes industriales en la Nueva España*. (Mexico City: Librería de Pedro Robredo, 1923), see Figures 8, 37, 77, 83, 84, 88 and Cogner, 22

populares sponsored by the Ministry of Industry in 1922. *Las artes industriales en la Nueva España* was intended for a more serious audience than Dr. Atl's original exhibition. Dr. Atl's *Las artes populares*, was meant to bring attention to Mexican folk art, while de Terreros y Vincente's *Las artes industriales en la Nueva España*, documented the history of each folk art style discussed. In addition to providing a contrast to academic art in Mexico, folk art became a source of inspiration and rebellion. It was promoted by magazines such as *Savia Moderna* which was anti-analytical and rebelled against the objective realism they felt was indicative of the "prevailing ruling ideology of scientific positivism of the Diaz dictatorship...promoting in its place a view of art that was essentially spiritual and symbolist."⁴⁰³ It was at this juncture Mexican folk art began to take center stage in Mexican ideas of nationhood and cultural identity. This is seen in the words of David Alfaro Siqueiros,⁴⁰⁴ who wrote an essay directed at the "New American" artists as a call to 'artistic arms.'

La compresion del admirable fondo humano del arte negro y del arte primitivo en general, dio clara y profunda orientación a las artes plásticas perdidas cuatro siglos atrás en una senda opaca de desierto; acerquémonos por nuestra parte a las obras de los antiguos pobladores de nuestros valles, los pintores y escultores indios (maya, azteca, incas, etc.); nuestra proximidad climatológica con ellos nos dará la asimilación del vigor constructivo de sus obras, en las que existe un claro conocimiento elemental de la naturaleza, que nos puede servir de punto de partida. Adoptemos su energía sintética, sin llegar naturalmente, a las lamentables

⁴⁰³ Rochfort, Desmond. *Mexican Muralists: Orozco, Rivera, Siqueiros*. p. 17

⁴⁰⁴ Many of Mexico's leading muralist and avant-gardes such as David Alfaro Siqueiros also traveled to Europe to learn more about art, as well as fresco techniques. Siqueiros was given a government scholarship and spent three years in Europe. Of all the muralists, Siqueiros was interestingly enough one the most experimental in terms of technique. He valued the modern ideas and the technical aesthetics he was exposed to in Europe. He was also one of the younger artists of the muralist movement, a soldier in the Mexican Revolutionary War and a student prior to its outbreak at the Academy of San Carlos

reconstrucciones arqueológica... tan de moda entre nosotros y que nos están llevando a estilizaciones de vida efímera.⁴⁰⁵

Humanity's admirable deep comprehension of Negro Art and the primitive art in general, has given a clear and profound orientation to the plastic arts that got lost four centuries ago in an opaque path of miscalculation; for our part let's remember the works of the ancient civilizations of our ancient populations of our valleys, the Indian painters and sculptors (Maya, Aztec, Inca, etc.); our climatological proximity with them gives us the vigor to assimilate constructively their works, in which there exists a clear understanding of nature, that can serve us as a point of departure. Let's adopt their synthetic energy, without naturally arriving at the lamentable archeological reconstructions... so in vogue among us and is taking us to do ephemeral stylizations of life⁴⁰⁶

Siqueiros' words in many way echoes Octavio Paz's, (in Chapter 1) revisionist ideas that concluded Mexican muralism can be linked to the West's interest in non-Western cultures;⁴⁰⁷ as well as, Gambio's and Vasconcelos' ideas of looking to the pre-Columbian past for inspiration⁴⁰⁸. In his essay, Siqueiros called for artists in the Americas to turn to ancient cultures for inspiration, but to avoid creating an archeologically based ephemeral style of art that mimicked the ancients; but, rather to use the ancients as a point of departure in the most natural way possible.⁴⁰⁹ This is what Weston did by focusing on the formal attributes of Mexican folk art, as opposed to trying to mimic, or simply document it. For example, photographing art that was linked to Mexico's pre-Columbian past, through an object's design and formal elements, Weston utilized folk art a "point of departure," and imbued it with his own personal aesthetic.

⁴⁰⁵ From Siqueiros, David A. "Tres llamamientos de orientación actual a los pintores y escultores de la Nueva Generación Americana."

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid Translated by Cindy Urrutia.

⁴⁰⁷ Octavio Paz, "Re-visiones: la pintura mural", en México en la obra de Octavio Paz, vol. III Los privilegios de la vista, México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1987, p. 231 Translated by Cindy Urrutia

⁴⁰⁸ For more on this topic see the discussion on Gambio and Vasconcelos in the Introduction

⁴⁰⁹ David A Siqueiros, "Tres llamamientos de orientación actual a los pintores y escultores de la Nueva Generación Americana", *Vida Americana*, núm. 1, Barcelona, Mayo de 1921

Thus, re-capturing the synergy lost through mimicry; which is what would have happened if Weston simply photographed archeological artifacts.

When the field has discussed Weston's Mexican still life, it is often in relation to the modern ideas he was exposed to in Mexico vis-à-vis exhibitions, and ideas groups such as the *estridentistas* were promoting. Scholars such as Amy Cogner, Sarah X. Lowe, David Peeler, and Mariana Figarella,⁴¹⁰ among others have pointed out; the ideas concerned with formal aesthetics that were circulating among members of the Mexican avant-garde were critical to the transformation one sees in Weston's formal trajectory. The field also had begun to discuss Weston's still life as having Mexican themes, but it does not label him as an active participant in Mexico's nationalist project. Like his portraits, Weston's photographs of folk art are icons of nationhood, and form part of Mexico's revolutionary aesthetic.

In many ways, Weston's interest in folk art can be attributed to his friendship with Jean Charlot, who was an expert and a collector of Mexican folk art. Charlot's sentiments and beliefs on Mexican folk art are important to address, because as Leslie Furth reminded us, it was not until Weston met Charlot that he expressed interest in folk art, and began to make favorable comparisons between modern and folk art.⁴¹¹ Weston soon began to 'echo' Charlot's beliefs that indigenous art expressed a "more radically abstract

⁴¹⁰ As stated in Chapter 1, "Weston appreciated Rivera's formation and the information he brought of the Parisian artistic ambiance of the first decades of the century, his contacts with the principal artists of the European modern vanguard, his personal relationship with Picasso, Modigliani, Revery and other artists." Translated by Cindy Urrutia from Mariana Figarella. *Edward Weston y Tina Modotti en Mexico: Su Intersección Dentro De Las Estrategias Estéticas Del Arte Posrevolucionario*, (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma De México Instituto De Investigaciones Estéticas, 2002), pp. 84-85

⁴¹¹ Stebbins, Theodore, E Jr., Karen Quinn, and Leslie Furth, essay Starting Life Anew: Mexico, 1923-1926, by Furth in *Edward Weston: Photography and Modernism*. (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston: Boston, New York & London), p. 50

language than any of those used by modern artists.”⁴¹² According to Charlot, Mexican folk art (with an emphasis on folk painting) was where:

Pre-Hispanic and colonial tradition meet and fuse...The output is so varied as to be unclassifiable...Even in more general terms, folk painting taught us much in matters of mental discipline. Respectful of Paris, we were reluctant in the 1920s to defy its reigning artistic idols, originality, and personality, and even less eager to commit the then cardinal sin of telling stories in pictures. Folk painting epitomized a virtue never mentioned by the French critic, that of humility. The strength of folk painting came of the racial, rather than the personal, characteristics that the folk were quite content to echo. Their popular achievement, based on anonymity and communal feeling, taught us that in art as in elsewhere man may loose himself to find himself.⁴¹³

Charlot’s statements are meant to elevate, and promote folk art. However, his characterization that the strength of folk art “came from the racial, rather than personal” expresses lingering traces of racism. Charlot, in attempting to accord folk art with value betrays many of the racial sentiments that prevailed at the time. While Charlot’s words are problematic,⁴¹⁴ his admiration of folk art is the most relevant issue to this study because Charlot influenced Weston’s interest in folk art. And like Charlot, Weston collected folk art extensively, and developed a deep interest in folk art that resonated with the Mexican avant-gardes’ taste for “truth to materials” and simplified forms.⁴¹⁵

⁴¹² Jean Charlot, *An Artist on Art Collected Essays*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1972) Vol 2, p. 44

⁴¹³ Charlot, “Mexican Ex-Votos,” in *An Artist on Art: Collected Essays of Jean Charlot*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1972), Vol 1, p. 123-124, and 131. This article was originally published in *Magazine of Art*, April 1949

⁴¹⁴ I am labeling Charlot’s views as problematic and am not elaborating on issue of race because this is not a post-colonial study. Nonetheless, ideas on race form part this study.

⁴¹⁵ “Mexican Ex-Votos,” *An Artist on Art: Collected Essays of Jean Charlot*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1972), Vol 1, p. 123-124, and 131. This article was originally published in *Magazine of Art*, April 1949

Hand of the Potter Amado Galvan, 1926 (Figure 71) is one of Weston's most well-known photographs from Mexico. It is the front piece and title page to Anita Brenner's *Idols Behind Altars*, and depicts a newly made clay pot created by the master potter Amado Galván. *Hand of the Potter Amado Galvan* was taken while Weston was working and traveling with Anita Brenner. Brenner's project was an anthropological and cultural study funded by National University of Mexico. It examined the relationship between art and religion in Mexican Art from pre-Columbian times to the early 20th century. Also, it explored the role that native values, folk art and religion played in Mexican art, past and present. It included the works of contemporary artists such as Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and Francisco Goitia. Brenner's anthropological study evolved into the book *Idols Behind Altars*, published in 1929. In her introduction to the 1970 reprint, Brenner discussed her study as:

The Secretary of Education José Vasconcelos, an inspired man...he called Mexico's artists, poets, writers, and all talented people, from wherever they might be, and said "Here. Do it." Do what? "Do whatever you think should be done"...First, there were no directives. No doctrines, blueprint, program, no authority's recipe of any kind. There was a general idea...Be Mexico, the people of; Find Mexico, the spirit of...Things went more or less like this: Siqueiros said Communism? Alright, paint it; let's see what comes of *that*. Best-Maugaurd says the primal elements of line and form must be taught to children so that they can express themselves, finding their foundations in their own way? By all means, start a program of this in their primary schools...Dr. Edmudo Flores, sums it up as, "We have the simple-minded idea that if there's a revolution to be made, why the thing to do is make it." Methods are invented as one goes along, without much reference to tradition, authorities, or dogma.⁴¹⁶

⁴¹⁶ Anita Brenner's introduction to, Brenner, Anita. *Idols Behind Altars: The Story of the Mexican Spirit*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970, reprint).

Modotti was also commissioned to work with Brenner, and provide photographs for the upcoming book. However, Weston took the majority of the photographs utilized. For this commission, Weston received official travel documents from two different government institutions, from the Director of Mexico's Military College, and the Inspector General of Artistic Historical Monuments, in order to facilitate travel throughout Mexico and any other things he needed.⁴¹⁷

When Weston was commissioned to work alongside Anita Brenner, his interests expanded to include churches and other types of folk art. The commission included \$500 plus travel expenses, 15 weeks of travel throughout various regions of Mexico, and photographing approximately 400 artifacts and monuments. According to Weston, Brenner's project "made us keenly observant."⁴¹⁸ The ownership of the photographs taken for Brenner is unclear, since Weston was asked by Brenner to provide her with the negatives. It is estimated that Weston gave Brenner 200-400 negatives and Brenner did not catalog them well. For our purposes the important fact is that,

Like Brenner, Weston was intrigued by the survival of pagan artistic traditions and their incorporation into the fervent Catholicism of modern Mexico. Weston admired the strength and purity of form he found in native Indian art; during his stay in Mexico he amassed a large collection of pottery which served as the subject for many of his and Modotti's abstract photographs. In the work for *Idols Behind Altars* his simple, straightforward images pay homage to the work of earlier craftsmen and anticipate some of Strand's studies of church decoration.⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁷ These travel documents are part of Edward Weston Archive, Center for Creative Photography, Tuscon, AZ found respectively in Box 15, Item 6 and Box 16, Item 16

⁴¹⁸ Weston, *Daybooks*, p. 168

⁴¹⁹ Zurier, Rebecca. Catalog to the exhibition "Photographs of Mexico: Modotti, Strand, Weston," sponsored by the Corcoran Gallery of Art Washington D.C. (Sept 1978 –Nov 1978) and El Museo del Barrio New York City (Dec 1978- Feb 1979)

Although Weston was working with Brenner at the time he photographed *Hand of Pottery Amado Galvan*, on the day he visited Galván, he did so with Charlot, Rivera and several other artists in the city of Tonola.⁴²⁰ According to Charlot, the master potter was “humble, quiet, polite, but had the impatience of an inspired artist who wishes to be left alone with his work and vision.”⁴²¹ Charlot recalled that Galván allowed Weston to photograph his clay-incrusted hand with his newly made pot, and let Rivera sketch him “squatting and painting his own brand of Indian designs on a jar.”⁴²²

Charlot’s first-hand account of how *Hand of the Potter Amado Galvan* was photographed and sketched is significant to this essay for several reasons. Firstly, it demonstrates that three leading avant-gardes; Rivera, Charlot and Weston, were interested in works of master potter Amado Galván, providing evidence that folk art and its creators/artisans were a source of inspiration to them. Secondly, by writing and publishing this account, Charlot (who was considered to be a contemporary expert on folk art and Mexican art), situated Weston and Rivera along side each other, giving them equal importance. Clearly; Weston, Rivera and Charlot not only regarded themselves as peers, but as producing art works linked to Mexico’s folk art and cultural traditions.

In *Hand of the Potter Amado Galvan*, Galván’s hand is extended out, holding the pot to display his work. The photograph was a simple image of a simple pot. Yet, this was no ordinary pot. It was a pot hand crafted by a recognized master folk artist. The pot

⁴²⁰ Weston often traveled to small rural towns as part of an excursion with friends such as General Galvan (as noted in Chapter 1), the Salas, Charlot, Rivera, Tina Modotti among others

⁴²¹ Mexican Ex-Votos,” *An Artist on Art: Collected Essays of Jean Charlot*, Vol. 1 pp. 123-124, and 131. This article was originally published in *Magazine of Art*, April 1949. P. 125

⁴²² *ibid*, pp. 123-124

itself is simple and rudimentary in design. There appears to be a few curvilinear incised lines visible on the upper part of the pot, where the light shined upon it. The only other visible shape is the triangular cone-like neck of the pot. The emphasis was on the pot's geometric circular forms. This photograph is arresting because it was taken from below, so that the hand and pot were outlined against the sky. It made the pot and the hand of the artist appear heroic, singular and noteworthy.

In many ways, *Hand of the Potter Amado Galvan* is reminiscent of the Weston's heroic portrait heads such as, *Diego Rivera Smiling*, 1924 and *General Glaván Shooting* (Glaván disparando), Mexico, 1924, discussed in Chapter 1. In all three works Weston focused on the subjects as sharp close ups. Another formal parallel is seen between *Diego Rivera Smiling* and *Hand of the Potter Amado Galvan*; the angle of the photographs is from the ground up. This causes the viewer to look up to them, in admiration, and as heroic.

Through its visual presentation, *Hand of the Potter of Amado Galvan* became worthy of praise and recognition. One has a sense of this by the out stretched hand and strong grip that holds the pot. In a way, the pot seems to be an extension of the arm and hand. It is at once worker/ artisan and creation/ folk art. All these elements seem to conflate with one another. Thus, I would like to propose; through his presentation of *Hand of the Potter Amado Galvan*, Weston was putting an image of Mexico on display for his viewers—performing and selling Mexican-ness. I believe the *Hand of the Potter Amado Galvan* is selling a product twice over: 1) the pot, in and of itself, as a work of art,

2) and the pot as a symbol of Mexican culture. This is also the case with *Radgoll and Sombrerito*, 1925 (Figure 72).

Radgoll and Sombrerito is an example of the type of Mexican folk art, specifically toys, which interested Weston and became a staple of his Mexican photography. Interestingly enough, the field initially paid little attention to Weston's still life. Weston's biographer Ben Maddow⁴²³ considered these works "dead ends," and Nancy Newhall ignored them in her writing on Weston, and removed many references to them (as editor) from Weston's *Daybooks*.⁴²⁴ More recently, art historians have noted that Weston's still life contains a modern sensibility, and acknowledge that they demonstrate the Mexican avant-garde's influence on Weston. The field also notes that Weston's still life was filtered through Mexico's modern credo of truth to materials and simplified forms. While I agree with this viewpoint; I would like to add that like his portraits, Weston's still life demonstrates a revolutionary aesthetic that positions him as more than a visitor, but as an active member of the Mexican avant-garde.

According to Diego Rivera concerning Weston's folk art and portraits, "Weston is the culmination of THE AMERICAN ARTIST; that is, one whose sensitivity contains the extreme modernism of the PLASTIC ARTS OF THE NORTH and the LIVING TRADITION BORN FROM THE LAND OF THE SOUTH."⁴²⁵ Rivera's words can be

⁴²³ Maddow, Edward. *Weston Seventy Photographs* (1973 reprint: Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1978), p. 64.

⁴²⁴ Stebbins, Theodore, E Jr., Karen Quinn, and Leslie Furth *Edward Weston: Photography and Modernism*. (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston: Boston, New York & London), p. 48 note 123

⁴²⁵ Rivera. Diego "Edward Weston and Tina Modotti" *Mexican Folkways* 2 (April-May 1926): 27-28

read in many ways, and seem to imply that Weston's aesthetic has a Mexican inflection. Thus, Rivera situates Weston as representing *lo Mexicano*.

Through still life, Weston was able to apply the principles and ideas he acquired through the *estridentistas* and their interest in modern ideas. *Ragdoll and Sombrero* like *Hand of the Potter Amado Galvan* demonstrated Weston's interest in exploring modern ideas and fusing them with Mexican subject matter. *Ragdoll and Sombrero* is an arranged image of a ragdoll, hat and basket set against vertically patterned material that is organized along geometric lines. The round hat is made of hand woven straw, and is patterned into a series of concave and convex curves, creating a circular interwoven design. The hat's curvature is contrasted against the vertical black and grey lines of the curtain. *Ragdoll* is partially superimposed in front of the hat, and basket is in front of the ragdoll's lower left leg and skirt. The curtain maybe some sort of wool material, the hat straw, the ragdoll rags, and the basket appears to be made of straw.

These objects and figure are placed along a diagonal axis that cuts across the upper left corner to the lower right. Thus, one finds that the simple arrangement of the figure in a shallow space makes it appear as if *Ragdoll* is on display, or as part of a presentation. In addition, because of the hat, we realize the ragdoll and basket are small toys.

Weston's *Tina en la asotea*, 1924⁴²⁶ (Figure 19) is a nude photograph of Tina Modotti and pre-dates *Ragdoll and Sombrero* by one year. Although different subject matter, there were a few commonalities in both pieces including: a female figure

⁴²⁶ For more information see Chapter 1 discussion on the nudes of Tina Modotti

(Modotti/*Ragdoll*) on display, an interest in geometric shapes, and references to *indigenismo* and *Mexicanidad*.

Both *Tina* and *Ragdoll* displayed an interest in a female figure, have a series of lines that contrast with the lighting, and utilize textiles as a backdrop. With *Tina en la asotea*, *Tina* is laid on a *petate*, while *Ragdoll* was posed in front of a curtain. The vertical lines of the curtain are reminiscent of those seen on the *petate*. However, while the *petate* identified *Tina* with *indigenismo* and *Mexicanidad*, the *sombrerito*, or *somebrero*, identifies *Ragdoll* with *indigenismo* and *Mexicanidad*. And yet, the resemblance between curtain and *petate* is strong. The *petate*, or references to a *petate*, charges Weston's photographs with a strong nationalist and cultural maker. This is evident as one considers the article, "The Petate, A Nationalist Symbol" by Anita Brenner published in *Mexican Folkways*. Weston owned this issue of *Mexican Folkways*.⁴²⁷

A closer inspection of *Ragdoll* and *Sombrerito* suggests they are on display for the viewer. *Ragdoll* brings to mind a stage or a theatrical show on what constitutes Mexican-ness. As a result the *Ragdoll* becomes a performer. However, *Ragdoll's* body is inanimate. And yet, attributes of a human body can be applied because the doll represents a human body. A doll, with an inanimate body, is similar to a mannequin used to sell commercial merchandise, "the primary purpose of a mannequin display is to promote buying, whether of the specific clothing or product displayed..."⁴²⁸ And like a

⁴²⁷ This issue is part of Weston's personal papers housed at the Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Tucson. *Mexican Folkways* June-July V. 1 No. 1, 1925, p. 14

⁴²⁸ Sara K. Schneider, *Vital Mummies*. (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 7

mannequin, a doll can sell a product. It is for this reason I believe *Ragdoll*, like the *Hand of the Potter Amado Galvan*, is selling a product. The product is Mexican identity, as an idea, vis-à-vis images of Mexican folk art presented as a performative display.

For example, by comparing *Ragdoll and Sombrerito* to a window store display, which includes a mannequin, a few insights can be obtained. A ragdoll and a mannequin are both inanimate, and yet they are viewed as performers. According to Sara A.

Schneider:

Mannequins are inanimate, the scenes in which they are placed usually as un-“event”-ful as paintings on a gallery. If Gauguin is not “performative,” why should mannequin displays be? Mannequin displays link the image of a body to a tacit action: a realistic mannequin, though still, often appears to be about to act or have just acted. And both realistic and abstract mannequins simultaneously display and are displayed. Appearance is in fact a form of action.⁴²⁹

However, this performance takes a dual representation of American and Mexican preferences of display and spectatorship. This is particularly the case as one considers the *sombrerito*. Zusana M. Pick writes,

a Mexican character type launched in the American stage in the 1920s...A key element of this recognition is the *charro* hat, the fetish object of Mexican identity...The promotion of folklore by the Mexican state reinstated the *charro* figure as a nationalist and gendered signifier of authenticity, making possible the valorization of the hat by tourist and foreign visitors...It alludes to multiple representations of the *sombrero* as a symbol of Mexico and the revolution, reducing the country’s identity to a garment popularized as a genuine Mexican artifact.⁴³⁰

⁴²⁹ *ibid*

⁴³⁰ Pick, Zusana M. *Construction the Image of the Mexican Revolution: Cinema and Archive*. (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2010), p. 82. In this study, Pick analysis the way in which ideas on Mexican identity for forged in the United States and Mexico through Cinema. In relationship to the hat, or sombrero,

In many ways, *Ragdoll and Sombrerito* promotes stereotypes of the Mexican peasant. Its craftsmanship can be linked more to colonial crafts than Mexico's pre-Columbian heritage. However, *Ragdoll*, through its Mexican Indian dress represents the aesthetic of *indigenismo*. The *Sombrerito* or a *sombrero* on the other hand, is a symbol of the Mexican revolutionary, peasant, cowboy or landowner; and it is mostly attributed to *Mexicanidad*. Moreover, *sombreros* are a common theme throughout Mexican murals' representations of peasants and revolutionaries. Foreign artists visiting Mexico often portrayed Mexicans in *sombreros* as well.

In fact, Weston's photograph *Diego Smiling*, 1926 (Figure 6) is an iconic image of Rivera wearing a *sombrero*. *Sombreros* are also seen in Victor Agustin Casasola's documentary photographs of the Revolution. *Sombreros* also began to infiltrate portrait photography in Mexico, as seen with Brehme's *China Poblana*, c. 1920 (Figure 38). In addition, Weston himself would wear a *sombrero* when he went out on outings with friends as seen in *Untitled* (Image 74), a photograph of Weston and friends on an outing. Weston is the third person from the right.

In many ways *Ragdoll and Sombrerito* staged qualities bring to mind Weston's *Rosa Roland de Covarrubias, bailando (vestida de traje de tehuana)*, 1926 (Figure 34) photographed a year later,⁴³¹ where *Rosa*, a white woman, dressed in Indian regalia modeled Indian-ness. As previously discussed in Chapter 1, *Rosa* demonstrates Weston's limitations as a foreigner by posing a white woman as Indian as opposed to

Pick is referring to the 1920s and 1930s, particularly in representations of Pancho Villa and Mexican *charros* (or cowboys).

⁴³¹ For additional information see Chapter 1

photographing an actual Indian. However, when viewed in relation to *Ragdoll*, one can argue that Weston was definitely interested in photographing people and things that represented Mexican national identity.

James Oles made a brief, but interesting observation my supports the argument above. According to Oles, “Weston worked on compositions that might be read as abstracted substitutes for the Mexican peasant *campesino*: as still life of a pair of huaraches (sandals) and a straw hat, or woven reed figures of horsemen “posing” against wool serapes.” Although there was not a direct mention of *Ragdoll*, her body could also be substituted for a Mexican peasant or Indian.⁴³² This was the case with Weston’s *Hat and Shoes*, (image of a *sombrero* and Mexican sandals called *huaraches*) 1926, (Figure 73). This photograph followed the paradigm as with *Ragdoll and Sombrerito* in terms of an interest in modern ideas and Mexican themes. In fact Weston, while living in Mexico, wore sandals similar to those of *Hat and Shoes*.⁴³³

As stated in Chapter 1, Rivera and other muralists greatly influenced Weston. In Rivera’s murals for the Ministry of Public Education (which Weston visited), Rivera inserted still life motifs that included *sombreros* visible from the same type of frontal angle used by Weston in *Hat and Shoes*. Weston may have also been influence by Orozco; however, this is a relationship that the field has yet to be investigate.⁴³⁴ Weston visited Orozco in Coyoacán with Brenner and photographed many of his murals throughout Mexico City for *Idols Behind Altars*.

⁴³² Oles, *South of the Border: Mexico in the American Mind*, p. 93

⁴³³ “La Fotografía de Edward Weston” *Nuestra Cuidadad*, Tomo II, Número 7, México, Octubre de 1930

⁴³⁴ Furth, “Starting Life Anew: Mexico, 1923-1926,” in Stebbins, Theodore, E Jr., Karen Quinn, and Leslie Furth *Edward Weston: Photography and Modernism*, Note 150

Thus, *Hand of Potter the Amado Galvan, Ragdoll and Sombrerito* and *Hat and Shoes* do more than demonstrate Weston's shift from Pictorialism to a more modern sensibility, but represent an icons of nationhood, *Mexicanidad* and *indigenismo*. For that reason, Weston's works were new, refreshing (to himself and to Mexicans), and well received.

The concepts that always governed his vision came from awareness of cubism, and from seeing examples of modern art such as the sculpture of Brancusi in his well thumbed copied of the *Little Review*. Even so, the enchantment of Mexico took a firm grip on him. By osmosis he absorbed...He turned the seductive lights of Mexico into an agency that separated and abstracted masses, just as had the ancient Indian sculptors and architects.⁴³⁵

Moreover, it was Weston's emphasis of truth to form and modern aesthetic that gained him recognition in Mexico.

While traveling throughout different regions of Mexico, Weston made a habit of rising early and visiting marketplaces' *puestos* (spots), in order to see what native goods he could find, acquire, and ship home.⁴³⁶ These "finds" were a source of pride for Weston.⁴³⁷ According to Weston, some of his best times were spent at:

ever-fascinating *puestos*, purchasing for ridiculously small amounts more animals of clay—a bull, a horse, a pig—executed with the fine feeling for essential peculiarities of form, or as in the pig, painted with a keen sense of decoration. The tiny figures in metal: the charro, a horse with raised *banderillas*—what grace! What elegance! What understanding of anatomy! These Indians never went to "Art School."⁴³⁸

⁴³⁵ Cogner, *Edward Weston in Mexico 1923-1926*. p. X

⁴³⁶ Weston's visits to markets are described throughout his *Daybooks*.

⁴³⁷ *ibid*

⁴³⁸ Cogner, *Amy. Edward Weston in Mexico 1923-1926*. p. 93

Weston would often boast of his “finds,” and compare them to the folk art other artists, such as Jean Charlot purchased. Of particular interest to Weston were toys, *jugetes*, in the form of figurines made of *papier-mâché* and straw. In Mexico, crafted toys were considered folk art related to Mexico’s pre-Columbian tradition as well as its colonial heritage. Toys were related to Mexico’s past because they were made of ceramics and there was archeological evidence of ceramic made toys in pre-Columbian times. However, by the time Weston collected them, toys were not purely indigenous in design, but also fused with elements of colonial traditions. Moreover, toys were considered an important part of Mexico’s folk art tradition, and were written about by art critics and art historians.

Gabriel Fernández Ledesma, a muralist, photographer, writer, editor, designer, engraver, and researcher of Mexican handcraft and folk art had by 1926 published in *Forma* many folk objects, and particularly toys, as a series of descriptive water colors. Fernández Ledesma was the founder of *Forma*. In addition, shortly after Weston returned to the United States, Gabriel Fernández Ledesma published *Jugetes Mexicanos*, a leading study on Mexican toys that is considered fundamental reading on Mexico by the field. Fernández Ledesma’s position within the Mexican avant-garde made his views important. Further, several pieces of the type of folk art Fernández Ledesma published in

Forma and discussed in depth in *Jugetes Mexicanos*, Weston owned.⁴³⁹ According to

Fernández Ledesma,

El juguete Mexicano, rudimentario y deficiente es sus aplicaciones científicas, pone en juego, no el ingenio físico, sino el dominio y habilidad manual respecto a la material, supeditados siempre a un puro concepto de belleza.⁴⁴⁰

The Mexican toy, rudimentary and deficient of its scientific applications, puts in play, not physical ingenuity, but the ability and manual dominance with respect to materials, always depending on a pure concept of beauty.⁴⁴¹

Fernández Ledesma's suggests the simplicity and elementary form in toys and in other folk art gave them their charisma and beauty.

There was a great deal of synchronicity between Weston's views on Mexican folk art, his visual production, and the political ideology of *Mexicanidad*. Many of Weston's photographs of Mexican still life were done after he completed Brenner's nude series, from late 1925 through 1926. As discussed in Chapter 1, with the Brenner nude series, Weston's works not only focused on the "thing itself" and its "quintessence," but looked to pre-Columbian and Aztec period sculpture for inspiration. Weston approached folk art with a similar reverence for simplicity and rudimentary forms. According to Weston, "some toys are in the direct tradition of the ancient idols,—direct descendants indeed...Interested in my present tendency, friends bring all sorts of toys for me to use.

⁴³⁹ Stebbins, Theodore, E Jr., Karen Quinn, and Leslie Furth, essay "Starting Life Anew: Mexico, 1923-1926," by Furth in *Edward Weston: Photography and Modernism*. (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston: Boston, New York & London), p. 49

⁴⁴⁰ Gabriel Fernández Ledesma, *Jugetes Mexicanos*. (Talleres Gráficos de la Nación: Mexico, 1930). Ledesma conducted a study of Mexican toys and in the late 1920s and published El Juguete Mexicano in 1930.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid, Trans. by Cindy Urrutia

My trastero is strewn with them, awaiting their turn,—an inexhaustible source of pleasure.”⁴⁴²

This was the case with Weston’s *El Pinguino* (“The Penguin,” Figure 74), 1926, a papier-mâché toy that was loaned to Weston by Rivera. With *El Pinguino*, Weston arranged his subject matter in a manner that emphasized formal qualities, and displayed the Mexican-ness of each piece. *El Pinguino* was organized in front of a mask that Rafael Salas had painted, and placed next to a bronze bowl. *El Pinguino* appears to be a zoomorphic⁴⁴³ representation where the mask was the face of a human, and the penguin represented the mask’s animal form. Zoomorphism was a quality often associated with Aztec art and pre-Columbian art as a whole. Weston was familiar with pre-Columbian art due to his visits to the Mexico’s National Museum and his excursions to multiple pre-Columbian sites such as Teotihuacán.

In fact, I believe *El Pinguino* is reminiscent of the Aztec god of rain Tlaloc (Figure 75), with his protruding distinctive nose, large round eyes and fangs. And yet, there is playful quality to *El Pinguino* that was not seen in sculpture of Tlaloc. In fact, Weston wrote of his toys, “I never tire of the jugetes, they are invariably spontaneous and genuine, without fancied in fun. One imagines the Indians laughing and joking as they model and paint.”⁴⁴⁴ While Weston’s comments seem light hearted, for Weston Mexican toys were more than a superficial reference to Mexico’s folk heritage. As Cogner states,

⁴⁴² Weston, *Daybooks*, p. 157

⁴⁴³ Leslie Furth states *Pinguino* looks zoomorphic, but not why nor does she expand on this idea and instead focuses on the formal attributes of texture and volume in “Starting Life Anew: Mexico, 1923-1926,” in *Edward Weston: Photography and Modernism*, p. 51

⁴⁴⁴ Weston, *Daybooks*, p. 130

Superficially his photographs of toys seem playful, and often the humor he felt is still contagious. These pictures reflect his self-confidence, as well as his demanding tastes and preferences. He did not accept mediocrity in craftsmanship, nor in arranging illuminating objects. To him, the toys were not cheap objects destined to be broken and thrown away. Instead, he called them “major art.” “What grace!” he exclaimed. “What elegance!” In Weston’s pictures of *jugetes* neither photograph nor object is subservient. He managed to balance the two; he did not dominate his subject, which might have been condescending, both politically and aesthetically, nor did he allow his subject matter to dominate the composition... The photographer and object interrelated in order to exploit the best of each other...”⁴⁴⁵

The qualities Cogner refers to are seen in most of Weston’s toys, from *Bull, Pig, Horse and Plate*, 1925 and *Jugetes*, 1926 to *Three Fish—Gourdes*, 1926 (Figure 76).

⁴⁴⁵ Cogner, *Edward Weston in Mexico 1923-1926*, p. 36

FOLK ART AS A MODERN AESTHETIC; WESTON, MODOTTI AND JIMENEZ

Although Weston's images of folk art were not a call to arms, they represented a revolutionary aesthetic because they characterized folk art's relationship to *Mexicanidad* and *indigenismo*, as well as a modern sensibility. In the 1920s, Weston was not the only photographer exploring folk art. However, the photographers that were interested in folk art were few, as opposed to the larger number of painters interested in folk art. During the time Weston was active, Tina Modotti and Agustin Jimenez also expressed an interest in folk art. However, folk art representation varied among the photographers. For Modotti, folk art expressed a more utilitarian function and politics. With Jimenez on the other hand, one finds his works paralleled Weston's interest in form, and the qualities of the art itself. And like Weston, Jimenez's photographs of folk art was not interested in demonstrating an overt political point of view.

Consider photographer Tina Modotti's *Woman with olla*, 1926 (Figure 77). *Woman with olla* shows the back of a woman carrying a round pot (*olla*). This pot's form is simple, round and unadorned—similar to that of *Hand of the Potter Amado Galvan*. The pot of *Woman with olla* dominates the picture and takes up almost half of the space on the right hand side. She appears to be a peasant, or perhaps an Indian. This type of pot is often called *un cantaro de agua*, or a jug for water. The woman also wears some sort of scarf or headpiece. Mexican Indian peasant women would often go to rivers or lakes with a jug to collect water. Many would use a headpiece to balance water on their heads or use it as support for carrying the jug, much like *Woman with olla*. *Woman* was an

ordinary worker who happened to fit into the Mexican value of *indigenismo* due to her Indian status and *olla*; hence worthy of being photographed. However, since the viewer only has an oblique view of her profile, she is at once inaccessible and accessible.

The viewer does not know who she is. She is anonymous. Thus she can be any woman, any worker, or any Indian. Her specific essence is denied to us. One can wonder; who is she? And yet, by being an unknown, she becomes a generic type. We can access *Woman with olla* by superimposing rhetoric of *Mexicanada* and *indigenismo*. She then becomes the commoner for whom the Mexican Revolution was fought. Her struggle must be known. Evidentially, this image has a political agenda—to bring focus to the Indian peasant. This too, is the face of Mexico and the national identity that was being created in the 1920s. This is the human side and politically charged type of art that was popular among leading members of the Mexican avant-garde.

In addition, showing the everyday Indian commoner, *Woman with olla* is indicative of Modotti's overall sensibility that demonstrated a "quiet comprehension of all suffering."⁴⁴⁶ It also demonstrates Modotti's interest in "the ordinary people she observed, the tools, the burdens of life exalting her chosen subjects with a touch of poetry. She is able to make visible the humility, simplicity, solitude and fortitude of the Mexican people."⁴⁴⁷

Clearly Modotti's *Woman with olla* contains a sensibility and political orientation that Weston's *Hand of the Potter Amado Galvan* does not—specifically an interest in humanity. To be more precise, and as scholars note, Modotti is interested in the struggle

⁴⁴⁶ Mildred Constantine, *Tina Modotti: A Fragile Life*. (Rizzoli: New York, 1983), p. 93

⁴⁴⁷ *ibid*

or hardship of humanity. Weston, on the other hand, plucks the pot out of time, to admire it as a singular artistic creation.

Modotti takes a similar approach in her other works. Take *Hands resting on tool*, 1927 and *Corn, Guitar, Cartridge*, 1928 (Figures 78 & 79) for instance. Both pieces have a clear interest in form, but also on people. The hands, from *Hands resting on a tool* appear to be that of worker, or *campesino*. They are rugged dirty hands, mostly likely of man, that rest on what appears to be an agricultural tool. The dark rough hands contrast against his light overalls and tool. The hands bring in a human element to the signs of work, and lend an overt political ideology to the image.

Corn, Guitar, Cartridge does not display a person, but rather points to humanity by means of the guitar. The bullet cartridge is unmistakably a revolutionary symbol. The corn perhaps is only harvested through the hard work of a laborer, whose rights the Revolution protected. When one regards Modotti with the distance of time, her works neatly fit into *Mexicanidad*. One sees commoners, the “struggle”, and ideas of revolution. Weston is harder to situate within this aesthetic because of the lack of the human element and overt political rhetoric. However, recall that ideas on nationhood were being created at the very time that Weston is in Mexico. The very distance that allows viewers to situate Modotti within the Mexican avant-garde’s political aesthetic is the very thing that has prevented many American scholars from aligning Weston politically with the avant-garde. Yet, I believe Weston’s visual production in Mexico is

part of the conversation ensuing on what constituted *Mexicanidad*.⁴⁴⁸ While Modotti produced leftist oriented political imagery, Weston produced images of subject matter and ideas that were Mexican and anti-academic, thus revolutionary as well. Both are images of *Mexicanidad*.

Agustín Jiménez, like Weston and Modotti, photographed still life inspired by Mexican folk art. What is striking about Jiménez's still life of Mexican folk art is that they seem to resonate more with Weston, than Modotti. For example, *Jugetes de Dia de Corpus*, 1929 (Figure 80), *Alcancia*, 1929, *Los Sombreros*, 1929, and *Jarritos*, 1932 (Figure 81) efface human representation and instead present the objects alone to the viewer. Jiménez's is more interested in form and aesthetics, than espousing a political agenda. Moreover, while Weston was working on *Idols Behind Altars*, Jiménez became the official photographer for Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes (the National School for Fine Art, the new name for the former Academy of San Carlos), the photographer for *Forma Magazine*, and an occasional collaborator for *Mexican Folkways*. Thus his importance and membership in the avant-garde is unquestionable. Additionally, through Jiménez and relation to folk art, one can surmise that it was not necessary to demonstrate a call to arms in order to engage with *Mexicanidad* and *indigenismo*. This become more evident when one considers that the charm of folk in Mexico was not about explicit revolutionary actions, but about staking a claim to authentic ethnic origins through folk traditions, *lo Mexicano*.

⁴⁴⁸ It is imperative to note that the ideas on *Mexicanidad* and *indigenismo* do not fully solidify until the 1930s, the decade after Weston was in Mexico.

By photographing folk art, Weston presented his viewers with *lo Mexicano*, and a trace of the ideas on nationhood that were circulating. This was evident to Weston's contemporaries. Weston's early still life was exhibited at his second *Aztec Land* exhibition. The exhibition was a success and Weston sold many photographs. Francisco Monterde García Icazbalceta, editor of Mexican avant-garde cultural magazine *Antena* wrote a glowing review.

The pupil of Weston's eye, circumscribed and clarified by his lens, is like a gunsight, and we have been presented with its conquests... From the light of this magic lantern emerge—enlarged—the Indian toys, the soul made out of cardboard, of reeds, and of clay: the profile of a little horse on wheels; the agrarian attitude of dolls with weapons, riders on the mules of Corpus Christi, and the sonorous silliness of the piggy-banks pretending to be fruit, posed on the top of the bowls made from gourds that we discovered barely three years ago.⁴⁴⁹

In *Daybooks*, Weston described the response he had from friends and associates such as Diego Rivera, Lupe Rivera, General Galván, Jean Charlot, Dr. Alt, etc. Rivera was impressed by *Circus Tent*, *Fruta de Barro*, and *Caballito de Cuarenta Centavos*. Jean Charlot expressed admiration for Weston's still life, and took *Caballito* home with him. What is more, Secretary of Education, Vasconcelos also attended this exhibition. Vasconcelos was impressed by Weston and expressed his interest in using Weston's *Clouds* for his publication, *La Antorcha*.⁴⁵⁰

A year later, Weston had another exhibition at the Museum of Guadalajara with Modotti. This exhibition was also well received and the reviews were very positive.

⁴⁴⁹ Translated by Amy Cogner from *Antena* (November 1924): 10-11 in *Edward Weston Omnibus: A Critical Antology* edited by Nancy Newhall and Amy Cogner (Gibbs M. Smith, Inc Peregrine Smith Books: Salt Lake City, 1984), p. 19

⁴⁵⁰ Weston, *Daybooks*. p. 97-100

David Alfaro Siqueiros wrote about the exhibition in *El Informador*. In his review, Siqueiros praised Weston and Modotti for rejecting *trucos artisticos* or ‘artistic tricks’ utilized by the Pictorialists that dominated the county in favor of “sense of realism” and exploration of form.⁴⁵¹

Diego Rivera also published an article titled “Edward Weston and Tina Modotti” in *Mexican Folkways* in 1926. In this article Rivera is referencing Weston’s still life from 1926, most of which were done while working with Brenner. Rivera compares Weston’s truth to form and focus on the “thing itself” to the originality of Diego Velásquez. Rivera applauds Weston for turning away from Pictorialism in favor for a more modern aesthetic.⁴⁵²

Weston’s photographs of folk art were also published in other leading Mexican publications like *Nuestra Ciudad*, *Irriadidor* and *El Ilustrado* among many. In addition to the above, Weston gained support from leading members of Mexican society. From Weston’s personal papers at the Center For Creative Photography at the University of Arizona, Tucson one finds several personal letters from lawyers affiliated with government institutions to the Inspector General of Historical and Artistic Monuments. In these letters, Weston was endorsed and described as photographing “Mexican things” that are destined to be cultural artifacts.⁴⁵³ Clearly, if Weston was not perceived as

⁴⁵¹ Siqueiros, David S. “Una Trascendental Labor Fotográfica. La Exposición Weston Modotti. *El Informador*. *Diario independiente*. Guadalajara, viernes 4 de septiembre de 1925, p. 6

⁴⁵² Rivera, Diego. “Edward Weston and Tina Modotti” in *Mexican Folkways*, No. 1, Vol 2, 1926, pp. 27-28

⁴⁵³ Please see personal letter from dated June 1926 written to the Director of the Military College in Tacuba, D.F. The signature of the writer is unclear. Yet his/ her endorsement of Weston is straightforward.

partaking in the artistic renaissance Mexico was involved in, he would not have received such accolades from his Mexican contemporaries.

Although his images of Mexican folk art were well received in Mexico, they did not receive the same level of acknowledgement in his home country. There were some exceptions such as Los Angeles Times art critic Arthur Miller that in “Some Photographs by Edward Weston” references Rivera’s 1926 article on Weston in *Mexican Folkways*, and writes that Weston’s subject matter is, “Men, machines buildings, textures, toys, landscapes and skies...But the element of human drama enters very strongly into much of his work, as, for example monumental heads of Diego Rivera’s wife...It was this 1000-year-old native art which could make it possible that drew Weston to Mexico.”⁴⁵⁴

Weston is well remembered and regarded in Mexico even after returning to the United States in 1927. In 1930, Armando Vargas de la Maza published an article that discussed Weston’s still life toys. The corner piece was *Three Fish Gourds*, 1926. He wrote:

In publishing these two works by Weston, one is presented with the opportunity to consecrate a memory of him, such an excellent and sincere friend to Mexico, a people whose beauty he has felt and expressed, as few foreigners have been able to do... Weston finds even in the most vulgar objects an angle from which beauty appears... The collections of Mexican things in Weston’s works is numerous; showing his palpable love for Mexican life.⁴⁵⁵

This article summarizes well the way in which Mexicans regarded Weston. It is also clear that Weston’s works were aligned with *Mexicanidad* and *indigenismo* and represented icons of Mexican nationhood.

⁴⁵⁴ Arthur Miller, Los Angeles Times (9 February 1930).

⁴⁵⁵ Excerpts From Vargas de la Maza, Armando. *Jugetes Mexicanos: La Fotografía de Edward Weston*. “Nuestra Ciudad” (México, Octubre de 1930), Tomo II, Número 7, translated by Cindy Urrutia-Avivi

RELIGION, RELIGIOUS REPRESENTATION, AND FOLK ART

When Paul Strand moved to Mexico, the status of religion was ambivalent at best due to the Calles' government that executed highly restrictive anti-clerical legislation that sought to curbe the power the Catholic Church traditional held in Mexico for two reasons: 1) the government sought to do away with superstition and replace it with education and secular thought, and 2) the Catholic Church had historically been as powerful as the federal government and thus a threat. In addition in Mexico, the Catholic Church had a legacy of being a socially advanced institution. Its network of services and influence included hospitals, the government, universities, banking and civil registry.

During Mexico's colonial period the Catholic Church often served as peacemaker, or mediator in class conflicts between the Mexican State and people. In addition, its clout as an institution was at times utilized to affirm political legitimacy.⁴⁵⁶ The clergy could at times, and did threaten the State. Thus, when the Bourbons controlled Mexico (late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries), and in the spirit of the French Revolution, the State tried to curb the power of the Church and replace it with State centralization. This move towards secularization continued in post-Bourbon Mexico and after Mexico's Independence from Spain in 1821. In the years leading to the Mexican Revolution (1857-1910), the State had tried to submit the Catholic Church to the State. Liberals were proposing economic reform that included confiscating the Catholic Church's property

⁴⁵⁶ Jean Meyer, *La Cristiada: The Mexican People's War For Revolution*, (New York: Square One Publications, 2013); also see Meyer first book on The *Criadero War* titled *Las Cristiada* published in 1973.

and moving the State towards free trade. This was in line with the Diaz's regime drive to modernize Mexico.

However the Catholic Church would not easily yield, and from 1890 to 1910 social Catholicism developed, which led to the formation of the National Catholic Party in 1911. The National Catholic Party believed that Christian values were the solution to the country's problems and "Catholic identity was expressed in one's social, political, and economic involvement...social Catholicism became one of the principle agents in public life."⁴⁵⁷ The Mexican Revolution provided a telling blow to the influence of the Catholic Church. Although the leader of the Mexican Revolution, Francisco Madero, had the support of the Catholic Church, he was assassinated. Unfortunately for the Catholic Church when Venustino Caranza won the presidency and drafted a new constitution in 1917, several of its articles restricted the power and influence of the clergy, Church ownership of property, Church education, and worship practices. For example, the 1917 constitution contained the following:

Article 3 restricted religious education

Article 5 outlawed monastic orders

Article 24 banned worship outside of a church building

Article 27 turned Church property over to the ownership of the State

Article 37 revoked citizenship should anyone be found disobeying the constitution due to the influence of a clergy member

Article 55 forbade priests from holding public office

Article 130, among other things banned foreign born clergy; gave the government the authority to determine the number of clergy in each locality; took away the

⁴⁵⁷ Meyer, *La Cristiada: The Mexican People's War For Revolution*, p. 9

clergy's right to vote, assemble and speak freely against the government...banned the clergy from involving itself in politics...forbade the wearing of clerical garb; and rescinded the right to a trial by jury for any infraction of the law on these religious issues.⁴⁵⁸

Although the 1917 restrictions on the Catholic Church were severe, President Carranza and his successor, President Obregón (1920-1924) did not enforce the constitution. In fact, Obregón had secretly contacted the Vatican to explore diplomatic relations. One also finds that as a result Obregón's leniency, Catholic work unions and Catholic political groups assembled in early post-Revolutionary Mexico. This quiet truce came to an end when President Calles succeeded Obregón.

Although Calles was elected as a populist, his political orientation changed mid-presidency. He soon curbed Catholic and Communist unions alike as he sought to reform the country and bring stability to Mexico in its Reconstructionist period. This led to the enforcement of the 1917 constitution and the passing of the Calles Law on July 2, 1926 that called for even more restrictions on clergy. The Calles Law took effect on July 31, 1926 and the next day government officials and police were sent to churches to take inventory of the items inside and to seal the doors of the churches. This immediately caused riots, escalating tensions and eventually armed conflict between the Catholic Church's assembled army, and the federal government.

In the state of Michoacán, where Strand primarily worked, then governor Lázaro Cárdenas (future Mexican president) signed a truce with the *Cristieros* and all conflict

⁴⁵⁸ Meyer, *La Cristiada: The Mexican People's War For Revolution*, p. 11

subsided in that particular state in 1930. This was not the case in many other regions of Mexico and occasional armed battles erupted throughout the 1930s. In fact, it was not until 1938-1940, that the Mexican federal government finally lifted its entire ban against religion and the Catholic Church. However, because there was a truce in the state of Michoacán Strand was able to enter churches and photograph *bultos* without the need for official government papers; unlike Weston who also worked in Michoacán and did require official government permits for Brenner's study.

Because of religion's ambivalent status in that country, I believe whether intentional or not, photographing *bultos* speak to the darker side of the Revolution. It brought attention to an element of Mexican cultural history that was under debate at that moment and had caused bloodshed in post-Revolutionary Mexico. Thus regardless of intention, *bultos* are politically charged. I believe Strand's sympathy was ultimately with the people rather than with the government that wanted to suppress religion, but not because he believed in religion. In fact, Strand was anti-clerical and shared the SEP's position on religion. However, Strand did admire the faith and spirituality Mexican Indians expressed, not their beliefs. Additionally, Strand's *bultos* demonstrate that despite the government's quest to eradicate religion, it was so deeply embedded in Mexican history and culture that visiting artists like Strand were unable to ignore it, and in fact were drawn to Mexico's religious and spiritual heritage as evidenced by their chosen subject matter. However, there is another dimension to Strand's *bultos*, their status as folk art that Strand admired. In a letter Strand wrote,

Among other things I made a series of photographs in the churches, of the Christ and Madonna, carved of wood by the Indians. The are among the most extraordinary sculptures I have seen anywhere, and have apparently gone unnoticed. These figures are alive with the intensity of those who made them.⁴⁵⁹

Strand was not alone in his interest in Mexico's spiritual and religious traditions. Other members of the Mexican avant-garde—from nationals to foreigners—also engaged with religious themes and/ or subject matter to varying degrees. Both Charlot and Rivera wrote and published on religious art as folk art, and Edward Weston photographed it. The avant-garde also understood that Mexico was historically religious, that people would not easily relinquish Mexico's religious heritage, and that in many ways the general populous trusted the Catholic Church more than the government. Moreover, although many members of avant-garde did not necessarily believe in religion they did actively use religious symbolism in their work to convey secular messages.

For example, Diego Rivera's *Entry into the Mine*, 1923 (Figure 82) is reminiscent of the Biblical story of the Road to Calvary and *Exit from the Mine*, 1923 (Figure 83) positioning brings to mind the Crucifixion sacrifice.⁴⁶⁰ However, Rivera's in *The Embrace*, 1923 (Figure 84), one sees

the unity expressed in the embrace of the peasant and industrial worker, with the peasant's sombrero resembling a halo and his serape a religious cloak, conveys all the religious passion of a secular annunciation, visiting the two figures in a spirit of human brotherhood.⁴⁶¹

Scholarship in the field had shown that Rivera, Orozco and Siqueiros utilized religious references in their works; from Rivera's images that are reminiscent of religious cycles of

⁴⁵⁹ Paul Strand Letter to Irving Browning, September 1943, CCP

⁴⁶⁰ Rochfort, *Mexican Muralists: Orozco, Rivera, Siqueiros*, p. 54

⁴⁶¹ *ibid*

Italian Renaissance painting to Siqueiros and Orozco that understood that the working class still had more confidence in the church than political organizations.⁴⁶²

Rivera also wrote on religious folk art and gave it the same value as non-religious folk art. Although Rivera did not specifically write on *bultos*, he did write an essay on *retablos* titled, “Retablos: The True and only Pictorial Expression of Mexican People,” published in *Mexican Folkways*. Although a *retablo* is not the same as a *bulto*, they share Christian iconography and symbolism. In Spain, a *retablo* is a Christian painting, sculpture or combination of the two that rose from behind a church altar. In Mexico, a *retablo* is a Christian devotional painting that is considered to be a type of folk art, but not necessarily a sculpture. Religious sculptures in Mexico are *bultos*. *Retablos* and *bultos* are relational due to their use of Christian iconography in churches, and because they are votive objects. Rivera appreciated the aesthetic qualities of *retablos* as well as their link to mysticism and spirituality that was part of Mexico’s history. For Rivera, the fact that it was usually Indians that made *retablos*, gave them value. Thus, for Rivera, *retablos* were not about religion per se, but a part of Mexico’s folk heritage that was esteemed at that time. According to Rivera,

What is left to Mexico of really popular art, is the manifestation of the vitality of the Mexican people...It is this vitality that is the salvation of Mexican art, this the force that transforms an abstract model into something individual and real. It is this that assures resuscitation and life, a phenomenon apparent in every thing the true Mexican touches, but chiefly in the votive or commemorative paintings which are called “retablos”. These small pictures...are products of a European aesthetic criterion, digested in the native consciousness, resulting in a half-breed thing, but a thing of mysticism that is positive, vital, and with happy results—a

⁴⁶² Antonio Rodriguez, *A History of Mexican Mural Painting*. (New York and London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), p. 186

mysticism with all the possibilities of persistence within time and space... This paintings are the expression of the deepest spirit in the people, achieved plastically with technique that is pure, intense, sharp, and sometimes infantile, always simple and therefore infinite, craftsmanship... the Mexican people still holds fast to its miracles... which it portrays in its paintings: the retablos... Such is Mexican painting modeled plastically and spiritually by, with and within its wisdom.⁴⁶³

Rivera's words attest to the importance of the Indian as an artisan, and as a producer of folk art that included religious objects. Specially, it was the *hand* of the artisan that was significant for Rivera and his contemporaries. It is also part of what attracted Weston to certain religious objects that demonstrates that religious subject matter.

Weston's *Palma Bendita*, (*holy palm*) 1926 (Figure 85) is example of folk religious subject matter that was interesting to the avant-garde. *Palma Bendita* is a braided palm made for Palm Sunday. *Palma Bendita* was photographed in the town of Santa Anita and in reference to it Weston wrote, "The woven palm-leaves from Santa Anita—which I called woven reeds until corrected by Rafael [Salas]—proved tempting material to work with. I have made several negatives, one especially significant in form, exquisite in texture and symbolic of Mexico."⁴⁶⁴ *Palma Bendita* is symbolic because: 1) it is a form of folk art, 2) attests to Mexico's religious past, 3) and is part of the present. Interestingly enough, one also finds traces of religion in some of Weston's non-still life. *Rosa* discussed above, wears a small black cross as part of her Indigenous costume. It is unclear if *Rosa* wore the small black cross because she was religious, or because saw it as

⁴⁶³ Rivera, *Mexican Folkways*, October-November 1925 Vol. 1, No. 3, translation by Anita Brenner. This issue of *Mexican Folkways* also focused on other spiritual traditions such as The Festival of the Day of the Dead.

⁴⁶⁴ Weston, *Daybooks*, p. 155

a symbol or attribute of the Mexican Indian. Whatever the case, it is a part of the photograph and its references to *indigenismo* and *Mexicanidad*.

Like Weston, Strand also isolated subjects, as seen with *Cristo with thorns* and *the bound Cristo* (discussed below). According to a synopsis by the J Paul Getty Museum, “By isolating the figure, Strand focused on a topic that was relevant to the contemporary viewer: the working man's daily struggle to attain redemption.”⁴⁶⁵ While I agree that Strand focused on a topic relevant to the contemporary viewer and daily struggle, I do not believe *Cristo with thorns* is about redemption because Strand was anti-clerical and believed that faith in communism, not Christianity held some claim to salvation. Instead, I believe that Strand, by isolating his subject matter is similar to Weston that treats religious artifacts with a reverence for their symbolism as folk art and tradition, as opposed demonstrating religion as the salvation of the Indian. One also finds that many of Strand’s photographs are of suffering *bultos*—emotional and physical.

I believe Strand’s photographs of *bultos* command respect for the suffering of the Mexican Indian. This is evident when *bultos* are juxtaposed with his portraits. In addition, Strand represents a double suffering through his *bultos*: 1) the historical class oppression experienced the Indian; 2) and religious oppression happening at that time because of the Calles Law that forced many Indians to hold services on their own. Strand may have not intended to provide a commentary on the political nature of religion in Mexico, but given the fact that he was in Mexico shortly after the *Cristero* War and that he was working in one of the few regions of Mexico where Indians could hold services,

⁴⁶⁵ <http://www.getty.edu/art/gettyguide/artObjectDetails?artobj=40380>

albeit without a priest, fills his photographs with political undertones. However, it should be noted that not all politicians were in favor of the Calles Law. For example, former President Obregón criticized the Calles Law and won the 1928 Presidential election. Unfortunately for Obregón and the *Cristeros*, Obregón was assassinated and Calles instituted a puppet government that then

Strand's *Photographs of Mexico* was not published until 1940. When Strand did publish the *Mexican Portfolio* it was well received, in both the United States and Mexico. By 1940 the tenacious nature of religion's outlaw status had subsided. Thus it is difficult to say how his contemporaries would have received Strand's *bultos* in 1933 when he was in Mexico and religion was still illegal in certain parts of the country. However only seven short years later, *Photographs of Mexico* was deemed as 'Mexican' by Mexicans, and it was Strand's good friend and cultural avant-gardist Carlos Chavez that helped Strand sell copies *Photographs of Mexico* in Mexico.

FOLK ART, SPIRITUALITY, REVOLUTION, AND PAUL STRAND—A REVOLUTIONARY AESTHETIC

Paul Strand's images of *bultos* consist mostly of Madonnas and the Christ figure as close up or isolated figures, albeit with a few exceptions. Strand's *bultos* are interesting because they represent the conflicting nature of Mexican society at that time in relation to religion. However, despite the fact that religion itself was problematic, turning to religious folk art such as *bultos* for inspiration was as not. Moreover, Mexico's nationalist project's overall concern was to turn to the past and find elements that attest to a cultural heritage and sense of unity, because prior to the Revolution (as stated in the Introduction) Mexico was not a cohesive country.⁴⁶⁶

The type of *bultos* Strand often photographed were of the Christ suffering and in grief; such as *Cristo with thorns*, Huexolta, 1933 (Figure 86) and *The bound Cristo*, Oaxaca, 1933 (Figure 87). These images are striking and contained certain qualities of what was believed to constitute Mexican-ness, particularly in relation to the Mexican Indian such as a history of strife/suffering, sadness, resolve, and strength.⁴⁶⁷ More specifically, I believe that Strand's *bultos* became more than a symbol of religion, but of the Mexican Indian and what he/ or she has endured whether it be religious persecution, victimization, oppression or class struggle.

Scholars have, on numerous occasions have noted that *Photographs of Mexico* has a sequence of representation begins with landscape, proceeds to architecture, followed by

⁴⁶⁶ For additional information on this topic see the Introduction's section on Post-Revolutionary Mexico

⁴⁶⁷ For more on the Indian qualities or attributes see Chapter 2.

religious imagery and then moves to people. After which time, religious imagery and people are often juxtaposed against one another. James Krippner has suggested *Cristo with thorns* resembles the portrait that follows, *Man, Tenancinago de Degollado* (Figure 67) and that “Strand’s images of religious sculpture, and especially suffering Christ, are perhaps the most striking in this series, especially because they emerge out and blend into the postures, faces and clothing of the biological portraits.”⁴⁶⁸ Although photographs such as *Cristo with thorns* and *The bound Cristo* blended with the biological portraits, they were presented in a very deliberate manner—in the manner Strand believed those photographs represented Mexico. Moreover and as discussed in the previous chapter, Katherine Ware noted that *Photographs of Mexico* was set up in a sequential manner, as in a film. Films narrate a story by means of the actors that perform in the film.

By juxtaposing various suffering *Cristos* next to suffering humans in *Photographs of Mexico*, Strand appears to be concerned with the theme of suffering. As a whole, *Photographs of Mexico* “construct a visual narrative that emphasizes the suffering and emotional intensity expressed in religious iconography, as mirrored in the daily life of the rural poor.”⁴⁶⁹ However, even though Strand seemed to side with the people and their historical suffering and religious oppression in his fascination with the *bultos*, but he did not necessarily condone the Catholic Church in Mexico.

Addressing the historical oppression and suffering of Mexico’s Indians and peasants was thematically aligned with the revolutionary aesthetic that was being espoused at that time. By showing suffering Indians next to suffering *bultos*, Strand

⁴⁶⁸ *Paul Strand in Mexico*. (Mexico and New York: Fundación Televisa and Aperture, 2010), p. 49

⁴⁶⁹ *ibid*, p. 51

engaged with that element of Mexico's revolutionary aesthetic. This is the case when one views *bultos* as part of a larger whole, or trajectory. Strand was following in the footsteps of the muralists to convey a message vis-à-vis religion's symbolism and iconography, as opposed to promoting religion in Mexico. In addition, Strand was providing a commentary on religion particularly because he photographed *bultos* after the *Cristero* War. As close ups, *bultos* allow a person to scrutinize, assess and consider. They can also be read as a stand-in or abstract figure that represents religion in a similar manner as seen with Weston's *Ragdoll and Sombrero* and *Hat and Shoes*. *Cristo with thorns* is inanimate, like Weston's *Ragdoll* described earlier. In addition, it has similar qualities that correlate to a human figure. The human like quality of *Cristo with thorns*, is best seen through a similar representation of the Christ figure by another American artist, Perkins Harnley, *A Mexican Country Image of Christ*, c. 1933 (Figure 88).⁴⁷⁰ Of Harnley's *A Mexican Country Image of Christ*, a Mexican critic wrote "More blood is not possible; made more into bits; more dead than a corpse; [Christ is forced] down out of his divinity to give him a living look, even more than super human, of terror of grief, perhaps of tenderness."⁴⁷¹ When one considers the similarity in terms of blood and suffering that is granted to Harnley's image, a similar connection can be made with Strand's multiple representations of *Cristo*; given them more humanity and making them more representative of the people.

⁴⁷⁰ Harnley's image is exceptional. Harnley's suffer Christ is one of a few instances where one finds a relationship between Strand and another American artist visiting Mexico.

⁴⁷¹ Enrique Asunsolo, "Perkins Harnley [sic]," *Mexican Life* 9:10 (Octubre de 1933), pp. 23-25

Strand himself was anti-clerical, shared the anti-clerical views of his Mexican peers, and believed that communism was the answer to humanity's history of political, social, and economic oppression. In a letter Strand wrote to Irvin Browning, Strand stated that the Christ and Madonna sculptures he photographed in Mexico were the most extraordinary he had seen anywhere; he was mesmerized by them. Strand discussed those figures as alive with the intensity of the faith of those who made them. In this letter Strand is clear that what he was interested in was 'that faith' even though he did not believe in it. Strand also expressed that he believed that that faith was fleeting, that it was only a matter of time before it dissipated. However, he also wrote that the world needed faith, a faith which was equally intense and more realistic. Strand was referring to communism.⁴⁷² Moreover, these photographs can be read as "symbols of sacrifice yet to come in the establishment of a socialist society, which Strand, like many others, believed to be the more 'realistic' faith of the twentieth century."⁴⁷³

Since Strand saw Mexico's faith as fleeting, one can make an additional connection between his portraits and *bultos*; an attempt to *construct* what Strand may have believed to be the spiritual nature of Mexico's Indian.⁴⁷⁴ I would like to suggest that by photographing *bultos*, as representation of Mexico's Indians' faith, Strand was attempting to photograph the eternal quality of faith; not necessarily religion. Of the Indian and religion Strand wrote:

⁴⁷² Paul Strand letter to Irvine Browning, Sept. 29, 1934. CCP

⁴⁷³ Oles, James. *South of the Border; Mexico in the American Imagination 1914-1947*, p. 147 Oles interpretation of Strand is similar to what I am proposing. However, the above statement was stated briefly, in passing and is not elaborated upon nor does it view Strand as a member of the Mexican avant-garde nor does it view *bultos* as part of a revolutionary esthetic.

⁴⁷⁴ Although Mexican Indians had acquired a reputation for being spiritual, it does not signify that every Indian was. The point is that an idea of spirituality was being constructed, rather than displayed.

It is touching and sometimes very beautiful to see the Indian carrying on the services of his church without the aid of a priest and one is grateful that there is no priest. Yet one feels that even here the religious element is more of a compensation for his condition, a consolation, than real spiritual nourishment.⁴⁷⁵

Strand's sentiments, while somewhat condescending, were sympathetic and continue to attest to his belief that Mexico's problem was one of class struggle. Strand's film *Redes* and his *bultos* portraits were a commentary on the prevailing economic system in Mexico. In fact, the poet Edwin Rolfe, who was friends with Paul Strand, wrote *Prophecy in Stone*, that was inspired by Strand's *Christ with thorns*.

Enter the ruined hacienda: see Christ
in sixty different tortured poses,
varnished, carved to semblance of life, endowed
with breath almost: here where the camera eye
restores the initial spirit, reveals
the permanence surviving of death:
ferret out a race's history in a finger's curve,
see sun washed walls flaking to dust,
the dust to powder won by the wind;
deep gashes, rust of rain and sun,
stone fallen, and the black deep grooves
where peons crucified conquistadors,
Nailed them to doors, whips clutched
In paralyzed hands, tense in agony...

See too the solidarity mare
grazing in the barbed enclosure surrounding
the dead mansion of glory: and the mountains
rising beyond, and the pendant clouds
hung in the skies, identical with horizons Coronado never conquered.

Marks of boot and fingerprint remain
on the rainless scene: nails jut from walls
long cleaned by wind and bird of flesh and bone.

⁴⁷⁵ Krippner, *Paul Strand in Mexico*, p. 51 note 57

See here, a continent away, the evidence
of grandeur ground to death by time and men,
and the lonely spirit, sun on the anguish eyes
of the carved Christ: and the deep patience
men of another century engraved
on these stone walls and images—lines like words
shouting: “We are enslaved!”

lines in prophetic
thunder: “We shall rise,
conquer our conquerors.”⁴⁷⁶

Edwin Rolfe was the pen name of the poet Solomon Fishman. In addition to being a poet, Rolfe was a social activist on the political left. Many of his works are socially charged with a critique of the prevailing economic system and has revolutionary undertones, as seen in the last four lines of *Prophecy in Stone* where Rolfe writes the enslaved will become the conquerors. For Rolfe, Strand’s American contemporary, *Cristo with thorns* is charged with political rhetoric—that of oppressed Indians that because of revolution will rise and conquer. At the same time the *Cristo* is symbol for the suffering and oppression Mexican Indians endured. I believe that these were also Strand’s sentiments. It is unclear from the record if Strand discussed his Mexican photographs with Rolfe. I think it is highly likely that he did, given the fact that *Prophecy in Stone* was published in 1936, four years before *Photographs of Mexico* was published.

In addition to being interested in *bultos* of the Christ, Strand photographed multiple representations of the Madonna figure. However, unlike his suffering *Cristos*, his Madonnas seem more peaceful, pious, dignified, innocent and resolute. This is the case with *Virgin*, San Felipe, Oaxaca, 1933 (Figure 89) and another Madonna with the

⁴⁷⁶ Published in *The New Republic*, Sept. 16, 1936

same title *Virgin*, San Felipe, Oaxaca, 1933 #2 (Figure 90). Both *Virgin* #1 and #2 are more traditional representations of the Madonna. Instead of anguish on her face, there is a quite peace and resignation. *Virgin* #1 looks up to the heaven in contemplation and prayer. *Virgin* #2 looks down but is equally as quiet and calm as *Virgin* #1.

As stated earlier, James Krippner has suggested that Strand's *Man* resembles *Cristo with thorns*. I would like to propose there is a similar relationship with some of Strand's representations of Indian women and Madonnas. However, the images I am referring to (except for *Virgin* #2) were not published in *Photographs of Mexico*. Many of Strand's female Mexican portraits are of women wearing rebozos in a similar manner as his many of his Madonnas. *Woman*, Tenancingo de Degollado, 1933 (Figure 91) is an image of a young Indian woman wearing a *rebozo*. What is striking about *Woman* is her facial expression that brings to mind *Virgin* #1. *Woman* like *Virgin* #1 looks up. *Woman* is quite, contemplative, perhaps praying, or perhaps just thinking about life. It is unclear, but what is evident is the striking resemblance to the look of *Virgin* #1. *Child with rebozo*, 1933 (Figure 92) also recalls *Virgin* #1 because *Child* also looks up. However, *Child* is a little girl, perhaps a symbol for innocence and purity, akin to *Virgin* #1.

By photographing *bultos* as close ups, Strand continued his tradition of emphasizing form and the modern aesthetic he developed in the United States. They are also a continuation of his pre-Mexican modern sensibility. However, in Mexico, as with in portraits of Indians, *bultos* acquired a social commentary dimension that was not seen in the United States. Strand's *bultos* were a combination of admiration, a deep interest in

the material culture of the Mexican Indian who was believed to be very religious, as well as social commentary.

Strand was not only attracted to sculpture within church walls, he was also attracted to its architecture, doors and gateways. Strand's *Church gateway*, Hidalgo, 1933 (Figure 93) is an example of the type of visceral era church gateways that are typical in Mexico. Strand photographed multiple church gateways as well as doors and full churches. *Wall and doorway*, 1933 and *Church*, State of Puebla, 1933 are examples.

Strand was interested not so much on religion per say, but in photographing things of historical and cultural significance that were aesthetically interesting to explore. It is reminiscent of his ties to Alfred Stieglitz, the Lyrical Left and Young Americans who were interested in cultural nationalism (as described in chapter 2). They all looked to a 'usable past' for inspiration and subject matter. Although Mexico was not the same as the United States, Strand utilized a similar approach to locate culture in Mexico.

As a an American modern visiting Mexico, Strand's sensibility was influenced by modern ideas and U.S. national culturalism. According to Wanda Corn, although U.S. moderns looked to American arts of the past and what little they knew of Native American culture, "their mind set was primarily presentists and futurists."⁴⁷⁷ In Mexico, Strand maintained his modern sensibility as he explored Mexico's past. However, Strand's *bultos* and portraits have a humanist dimension that was not part of his pre-Mexico modernist aesthetic.

⁴⁷⁷ Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935*, p. 293

Bultos were part of the driving force behind *Photographs of Mexico*'s success in the United States, and more importantly Mexico. Strand's second wife Virginia Stevens helped Strand promote and sell *Photographs of Mexico*. Stevens and Strand received numerous letters from friends as well as buyers stating how pleased they were with *Photographs of Mexico*. Mexican national Luis Barragan's letter to Stevens echoes the sentiments of how the portfolio was received and how *bultos* were regarded.

I have just received my copy of the Paul Strand monograph, "Photographs of Mexico". It is well presented in every aspect that I am very proud to own it. Perhaps the most eloquent expression of my regard for it is the enclosed check for thirty more dollars, in payment for two more copies which I wish as gifts for friends.

I am most of all impressed by the photographs of the religious images. These figures have a quality beyond any other reproductions of Mexican religious art I have ever seen. As a suggestion, I wish it were possible for Paul Strand to do a series of monographs on the religious images of Mexico. These would command the attention of a wide spread audience of Mexican art lovers like myself and would also serve to make known to the world the beauty of the images which are venerated by the people of even our obscure villages.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁸ Letter from Luis Barragan to Virginia Stevens, July 15, 1940 Paul Strand Archive, Center for Creative Photography, AG 17:1/1

VISIONS OF RELIGION, THE *BULTOS* OF PAUL STRAND'S AND MANUAL ÁLVAREZ BRAVO

Paul Strand was not the only photographer interested in *bultos* in Mexico. Manuel Álvarez Bravo was also interested in religious statuary. However the two artists' representation of *bultos* differs. Paul Strand photographed *bultos* as close ups, in isolated spaces, and often showed them suffering. Álvarez Bravo on the other hand often photographed *bultos* at a distance and posed them, away from their intended devotional location. In addition, Strand photographed *bultos* inside churches, at their original setting. At first glance, Strand and Álvarez Bravo appear to be different and unrelated. However, I would like to propose that like with their portraits, their *bultos* intersect, creating a more complete vision of Mexico, folk art and religion. While different, they are both interested in things Mexican and how they relate to culture.

Álvarez Bravo, like Strand engaged with ideas on *Mexicanidad* and *indigenismo* through their *bultos*. As curator Nissan N. Perez has noted, Álvarez's Bravo's work have a close relationship to Mexico's culture and myths. Religion is an important part of Mexican culture. However, Álvarez Bravo seems to compartmentalize certain aspects of religion because instead of photographing *bultos* in relation to a religious setting, Álvarez Bravo either extracts them from their place of worship, or only shows partial elements of worship. This dislocates *bultos* and dethrones them as votive pieces. As a result, I would like to suggest that by dethroning *bultos*, Álvarez Bravo is showing irony and is contributing to the anti-religious rhetoric in Mexico. John Mzar has noted of Álvarez Bravo's oeuvre that it "swam counter to the stream of established clichés, using visual

irony to embody contradictions.” What could be more contradictory than a sleeping Cristo outdoors that is suppose to be watching over people? Such is the case with Álvarez Bravo’s *Sleeping Cristo*, 1925 (Figure 94). This irony continues with the *The Visitors*, 1935 (Figure 95). Visiting implies seeing or meeting someone, often indoors. Álvarez Bravo’s *Visitors* are outdoors, and do not seem to be visiting anyone.

The Visitors is an image of three *bulto* figures. The three figures are male and have some sort of saintly status due to the halos over their heads. It is unclear who these visitors are, but the title may be suggestive of the Three Wise Men, or the Three Kings that visit Christ as part of the Christmas story. *The Visitors* do not have identifying markers as seen with most Catholic saints. However, the two figures on the left do have one of their hands stretched out, as if holding something—perhaps offering/ gifts to the baby Christ

Álvarez Bravo’s *The Visitors* and *The Creators, the Makers*, 1935 (Figure 96) are example of *bultos* in movement and outside their intended home. They are best discussed together. *The Creators, the Makers* is an image of two of the *bultos* from *The Visitors* being carried down a hallway, possibly outside of a church. Due to Mexico’s anti-clerical position in the 1930s, it is unlikely that the men or *The Creators*, carrying the *bultos* were the sculptors/ creators of *The Visitors*. The record is unclear and not much is written on these pieces. However, the men that carry the *bultos* may be Indian. Thus, I would like to suggest that *The Creators, the Makers* can be read a reference to the artisan, the folk, the Indian that sculpted *bultos* such as *The Visitors*.

When compared to Strand, Álvarez Bravo's *bultos* are distant, inaccessible and posed. *The Visitors* and *The Creators*, in their final pose, side by side, were both photographed at oblique angles, unlike Strand's frontal *bultos*. One is unable to look directly at *The Visitors* facial features. This creates an inaccessibility of sorts that does not allow for scrutiny, but only suggestion.

Álvarez Bravo's *bultos* bring to mind his portraits where there is little emphasis on the face. As stated in the previous chapter, Álvarez Bravo's portraits are of unexpected moments of everyday life that reject the romanticism and grand narratives of post-Revolutionary Mexico. While Álvarez Bravo's *bultos* are not of unexpected moments of everyday life, they are unexpected representations of devotional figures.

Pair of Saints (Figure 97) is a photograph of two *bultos*, a Madonna and a male saint. Unlike *The Visitors*, *Pair of Saints* are inside a church, on top of some sort of altar. However, something is highly amiss. The crucifix of the Christ figure is partially cut off from the photograph. One can only see his legs and nail bolted feet. By effacing the Christ's face, Álvarez Bravo rejects the most important person of Christianity, the Christ. And yet there is a contradiction, the two saints. The female saint's seated pose and face looking down recalls multiple pieta representations. However, Christ is not laying on her lap—he is once again absent. It is unclear who the male figure is. Perhaps Joseph since it is possible that the female saint is Mary due to her pose resembling a pieta scene. Like *The Visitors*, there is a certain sense of anonymity because the two saints do not have specific identifying markers, one can only infer. However this anonymity may be a

reference to the anonymity of the hand of Indian artisan, or folk artist who most likely created *Pair of Saints*.

Álvarez Bravo was familiar with the importance folk art had in post-Revolutionary Mexico and in a statement on the role of the artist, Álvarez Bravo seems to identify with the folk artist even though when he wrote the below, he had gained recognition.

Popular Art is the art of the People

A popular painter is an artisan who, as the Middle Ages, remains anonymous. His work needs no advertisement, as it is done for the people around him... Before the conquest all art was of the people, and popular art has never ceased to exist in Mexico... It is the work of talent nourished by personal experience that of the community—rather than being taken from experiences of the other painters in other times and cultures, which forms the intellectual chain of nonpopular art.⁴⁷⁹

Thus *bultos* for Álvarez Bravo, are symbols of Mexican cultural and identity that he examines, and question by dethroning them. Strand's *bultos* too are symbols of cultural identity. However, unlike Álvarez Bravo Strand's various *Cristos* and *Madonnas* are frontal close ups that elicit contemplation and interaction. There is a certain respect and reverence that Strand grants his *bultos* that Álvarez Bravo does not.

Strand's *Cristo and cross*, 1933 (Figure 98) continues Strand's proclivity for close ups and demonstrating the *Cristo* figures suffering. *Cristo and cross* is a *bulto* of the *Cristo* figure that has fallen carrying the Christian cross. The most striking element of this piece is the face and head of *Cristo*. *Cristo* is wearing a crown of thrones that has caused him to bleed. His eyes are only partially open and his pupils are looking upward.

⁴⁷⁹ Álvarez Bravo quoted in Emily Edwards, *Painted Wall of Mexico from Prehistoric Times until Today*. (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1966) p. 145

His mouth just barely open may be trying to breathe and recover from the pain and exhaustion of the thrones he wears and the heavy cross he carries. The pain that the *Cristo* seems to be experiencing, along with the photograph being a close up, creates a sense of emotional and physical intensity that invites the viewer in. Compared to *The Visitors* that unseats religion, *Cristo and cross* is very interactive, and speaks to Strand's interest in the Mexican people's faith as well as suffering; whether it is the Indian's suffering reflected through the *bultos*, or suffering as an idea within religion and Mexican culture.

San Luis Potosi, 1932 (Figure 99) is a photograph of an altar with four *bultos* that includes the *Cristo* figure, and three other devotional figures—possibly Joseph on the right, Mary center, and Magdalene on the right. *San Luis Potosi* is similar to Álvarez Bravo's *Pair of Saints* in the sense that they are both altarpieces of a *Cristo* figure with saints below. However, their representation is different. Although *San Luis Potosi*'s figures are at distance, making scrutiny difficult, light shines in the Mary figure from a left centered diagonal. As a result, one can see her specific expression and clasped hands in prayer. Thus, like with *Cristo with thorns*, invites contemplation. Álvarez Bravo's *Pair of Saint* have darker lighting, look down, and their expressions are difficult to discern. In addition, *Pair of Saints* does not focus on any specific figure or the formal qualities of the figures, *San Luis Potosi* does. Perhaps the accessibility with which Strand displays his figures speaks to the idea of faith being accessible.

To conclude, religious representation during this time period was complex and contradictory among the Mexican avant-garde; one the one hand it is looked down upon,

on the other hand it continues to have cultural relevance and forms a part of the works of the Mexican avant-gardes as a tool to convey a message. Moreover, avant-gardes in Mexico understood that despite the Revolution's disdain (and in many cases their own) for religion and spirituality, it was a strong force in Mexico and part of its history. It is also part of the reason why foreigners were attracted to Mexico at that time period.⁴⁸⁰

Within this larger context, *bultos* are more than Christian representation, but represent attributes *lo Mexicano*, in essence *Mexicanidad*.

⁴⁸⁰ Christianity was not the only spiritual tradition in Mexico. Although it is a dominant factor in Mexican spirituality, the old traditions of pre-Columbian times were alive—from the surviving architecture, to pilgrimages and spiritual practices that was still conducted like the famous Mesoamerican ballgame (called *ullamalitzli* in the Aztec language of Nahuatl) that is still played in certain parts of Mexico to this day.⁴⁸⁰

Artists visiting Mexico often represented sites from the pre-Columbian past. However, the visual mode of representation varied from the spiritual intensity of Hartley's *Tollan, Aztec Legend*, 1933 (Image 29) to the formal abstractions of Weston's *Pirámide del Sol, Teotihuacán*, 1923 (Image 30). Both images are of structures charged with symbolism. *Tollan, Aztec Legend* demonstrates Hartley's desire to paint landscape imagery with archeological significance and integrate pre-Columbian history in the form of myths and monuments⁴ as a result of his interest in spiritualism and primitivism. Edward Weston's *Pirámide del Sol, Teotihuacán* also depicts the Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacan.⁴⁸⁰ However, it is a photograph rather than a painting. In this image, the majesty of the Pyramid of the Sun is alluded to through its monumental portrayal. Although pre-Columbian religion and spirituality is not the same as that of Christianity in Mexico, their respective architecture attests to strong spiritual traditions that are part of Mexico's history. The interest of foreigner in Mexico's religious architecture, from pre-Columbian to Christian attests to a fascination with Mexico's spiritual character, more so than the religion itself.

CONCLUSION

Edward Weston's and Paul Strand's residency in Mexico during its post-Revolutionary period of the 1920s and 1930s decades was a pivotal time for both photographers. During their time in Mexico Weston and Strand were deeply transformed by their experiences in that country. This led Weston and Strand to create works of arts that contributed to visual expressions of nationhood in Mexico and formed part of Mexico's post-Revolutionary aesthetic. While in Mexico, Weston's and Strand's subject matter dealt with themes and ideas such as *Mexicanidad* and *indigenismo* that were pre-occupying Mexican leadership during the post-Revolutionary period. These ideas were central tenants in Mexico's national culturalism.

While in Mexico, Strand and Weston accessed *lo Mexicano* and created art works that are part of *Mexicanidad*, *indigenismo*, and national identity. The search for *lo Mexicano*, and national identity in Mexico was cultural *construction*, created from the top down. Weston's and Strand's Mexican works are examples of national identity being created from the top down. With Weston, working from the top down is clear. Weston's photographs of leading Mexican figures and his still life of Mexican folk art related to pre-Columbian motifs demonstrate this to be the case. Hence, in terms of subject matter Weston neatly fit into the Mexican state apparatus' views on what constituted *lo Mexicano* in terms of *indigenismo* and its politicalization. However, as has been stated in Chapter 1, Weston's works are complex and at time betray his outsider sensibility. Nonetheless, Weston overall oeuvre as that of an insider and member of the Mexican avant-garde.

Strand's works generally functioned in a similar manner as those of Weston in terms of creating subject matter from the top down. Strand's production of *Redes*, as Director of Film and Photograph with the SEP, correlated with the SEP's views on leftist politics, *indigenismo*, *Mexicandad* and their mutual desire to educate Indians on their views and ideas. Strand's photographs of Indians was concurrent with the party politics of the time that sought to that bring attention to the Indian, elevate the Indian, and demonstrate the Indian as part of the nation.

By demonstrating the material condition (that included a sense of strife and suffering) of Indians, Strand echoed the SEP's views on bringing attention to the importance of class struggle and leftist politics. Thus these photographs have clear political undertones, and form part of the Revolutionary aesthetic of the time. Strands *bultos*, had a slightly different characteristic; they functioned both from the top down, and bottom up. *Bultos* as folk art were celebrated, thus functioned from the top down. Yet, they were already considered to be a part of Mexican cultural and popular heritage, and had acquired value from the bottom up in the decades leading to the revolution. However, like Weston, Strand at times betrayed his outsider status as discussed in Chapter 2. And, like Weston, Strand's Mexican trajectory is that of an insider and member of the Mexican avant-garde.

Weston and Strand were able to explore and transform their ideas on art in Mexico because Mexico was welcoming to foreigners, and because they both forged strong friendships with leading members of the Mexican avant-garde with whom they acted as boosters to each other's works. Weston's friendships is reflected in they visual

economy of exchange between himself, Jean Charlot and Diego Rivera. In addition these three artists wrote about and promoted each other's works. Strand's friendship with Carlos Chávez afforded him an official invitation to Mexico, a government sponsor exhibition and multiple governmental posts within the SEP. Although Weston and Strand had a genuine interest in things Mexico, their friendships with leading Mexican figures allowed them to have insider status that went beyond that of a visiting artist. Weston and Strand resided in Mexico, had friends in Mexico, worked in Mexico, and were respected as artists in Mexico. In addition, their exhibitions were well received and written about. As I have noted in the previous chapters Diego Rivera attributed "Mexican" characteristics to Weston and David Alfaro Siqueiros called Strand and "American-Mexican." These are strong compliments and indicators that Weston and Strand were highly esteemed in Mexico.

FIGURES

FIGURE 1, Edward Weston, *Amcro Steel*, 1922



FIGURE 2, Edward Weston, *Diego Rivera*, 1924



FIGURE 3, Diego Rivera, *Self Portrait*, detail from murals of the Secretariat of Public Education Building (*Autorretrato*), 1923-1927



FIGURE 4, Jean Charlot, *Portrait of Edward Weston*, Mexico, 1924



FIGURE 5, Edward Weston, *Jean Charlot*, 1926



FIGURE 6, Edward Weston, *Diego Rivera Smiling*, 1924



FIGURE 7, Edward Weston's, *Diego Rivera Smiling Mexico* 1924 was published in *Mexican Folkways* No. 5, 1926



FIGURE 8, Jean Charlot, *Bullet*, undated, c. 1920-1921



FIGURE 9, Cover of *Irradiador* Showing Weston's *Armco Steel* on the Cover



FIGURE 10, Edward Weston, *Escusado*, 1925



FIGURE 11, Tina Modotti, *Tank #1*, 1927

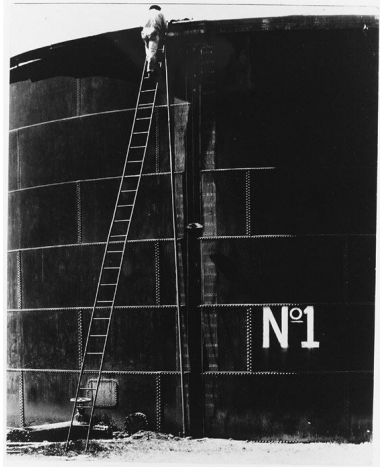


FIGURE 12, Agustín Jiménez, *Tolteca Cement Plant*, 1932

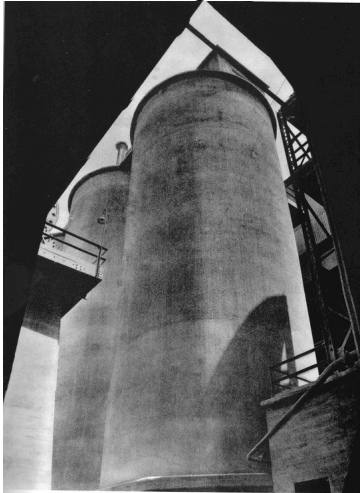


FIGURE 13, Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917



FIGURE 14, Aztec Land Pamphlet

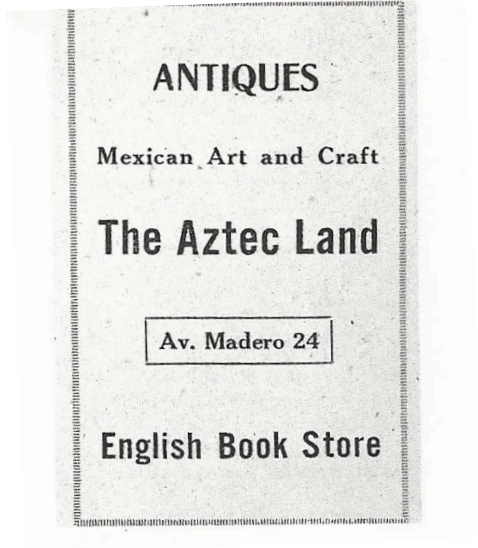


FIGURE 15, Edward Weston, *Nude*, 1925



FIGURE 16, Knotted Rattlesnake, Aztec Period



FIGURE 17, Moon Goddess Xuihtecuhtli, Aztec Period



FIGURE 18, Anonymous, *Untitled Nude*, 1924



FIGURE 19, Edward Weston, *Tina en la asotea*, 1924



FIGURE 20, Edward Weston, *Nude on the Roof*, 1924



FIGURE 21 Weston, *Lupe Rivera*, 1924



FIGURE 22, Edward Weston, *Galván Shooting*, 1924

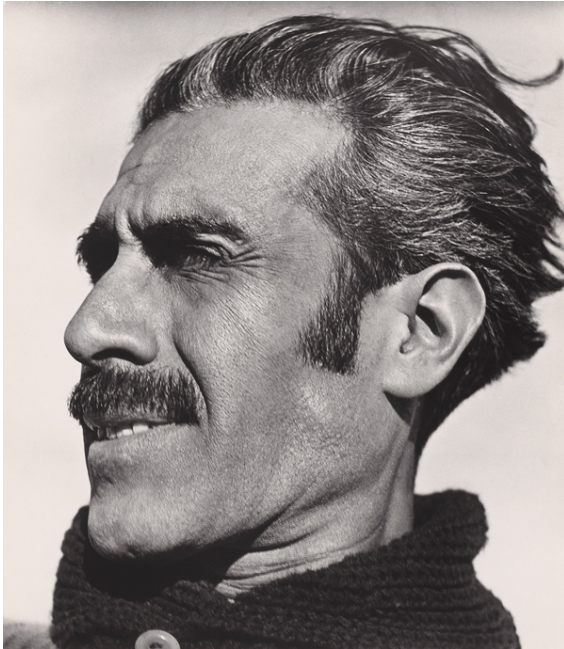


FIGURE 23, Edward Weston, *Glaván Shooting* (Glaván disparando), Mexico, 1924
 Published in *Mexican Folkways*, No. 3, 1926 (Catalog 64) side by side an article written
 by Glaván himself called a “Ranchero’s Psychology.”

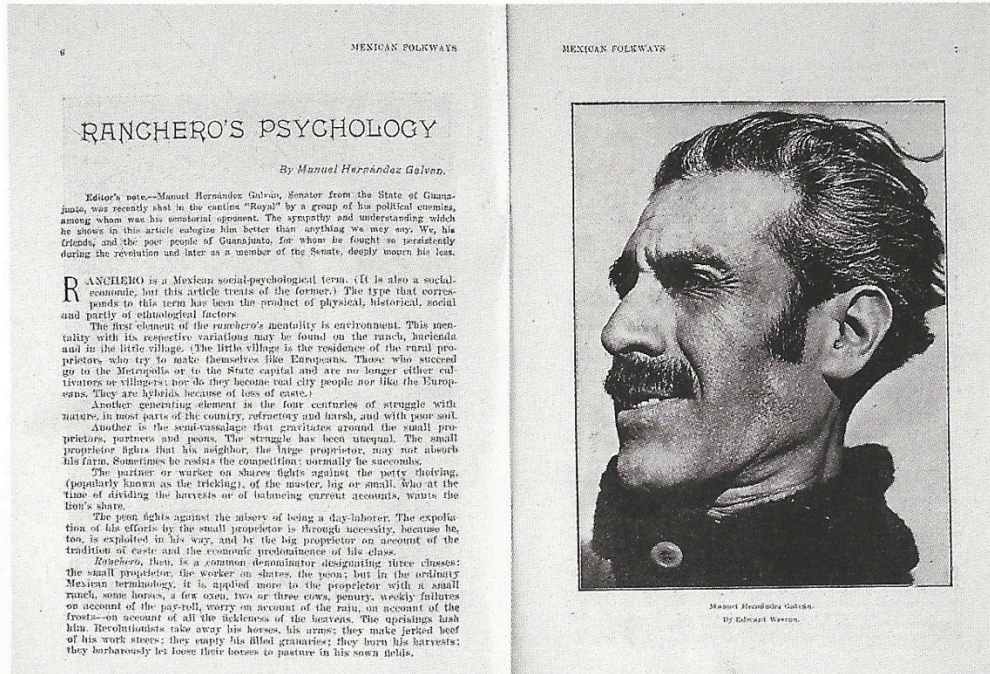


FIGURE 24, Diego Rivera, *Manuel Hernández Glaván yacente*, c. 1926



FIGURE 25, Agustín Jiménez, *Máximo Pacheco*, 1928

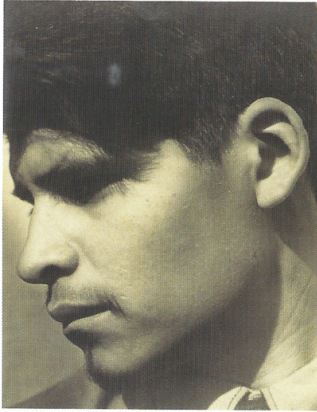


FIGURE 26, Agustín Jiménez, *Self Portrait in Profile*, 1929



FIGURE 27, Edward Weston, *Nahui Ollin*, 1923



FIGURE 28, Antonio Garduño, *Nahui Ollin*, Mexico, c. 1927



FIGURE 29, Tina Modotti, *Nahui Ollin*. *Nahui Ollin*, c. 1925



FIGURE 30, Tina Modotti, *Frances Toor*, 1927



FIGURE 31, Tina Modotti, *Carleton Beals*, 1924



FIGURE 32, Tina Modotti, *Dolores Del Rio*, 1925



FIGURE 33, Edward Weston, *Woman Seated on a Petate*, 1926



FIGURE 34, Edward Weston, *Rosa Roland de Covarrubias, bailando (vestida de traje de tehuana)*, 1926



FIGURE 35, Edward Weston, *Luz Jiménez, parada*, 1926

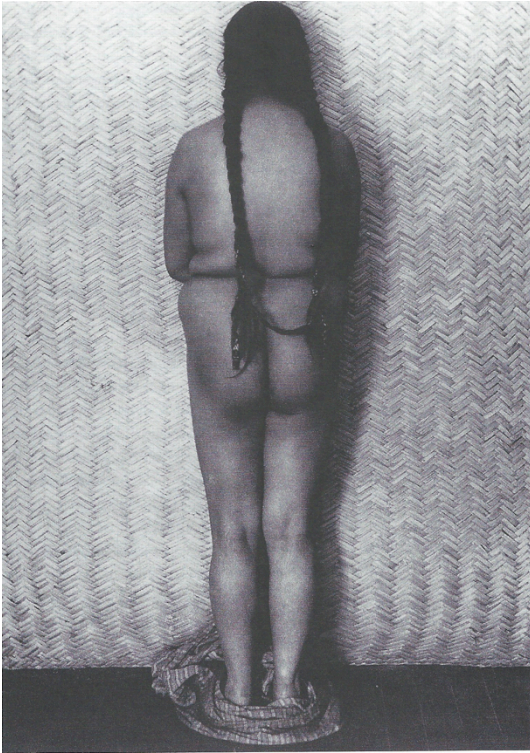


FIGURE 36, Edward Weston, *Elisa Guerrero*, 1923



FIGURE 37, Maria Uribe Winner of the Indian Bonita Contest



FIGURE 38 Hugo Brehme, *China Poblana*, 1925



FIGURE 39, C.B. Waite, *Tehuantepec Woman*, 1910



FIGURE 40, Edward Weston, Pissing Indian



FIGURE 41, Paul Strand, *Blind Woman*, 1917

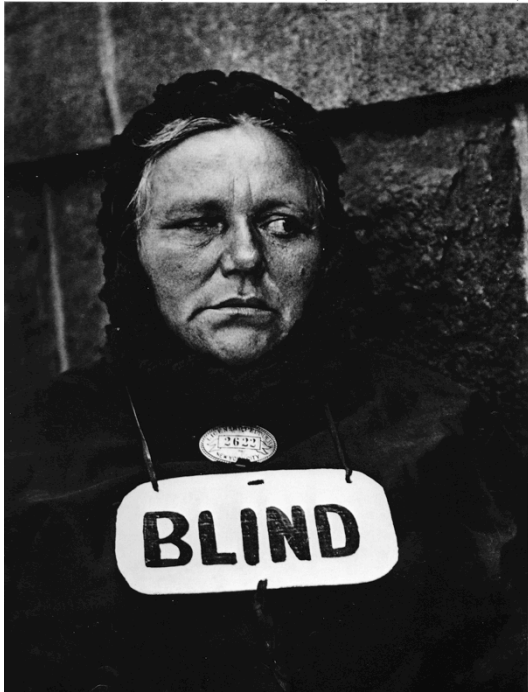


FIGURE 42, Paul Strand, *Old Woman and Boy*, 1933



FIGURE 43, Paul Strand, *Boy and basket*, 1933



FIGURE 44, Paul Strand, *Carlos Chavez*, 1932



FIGURES 45 & 46, Paul Strand Work Documents from the SEP

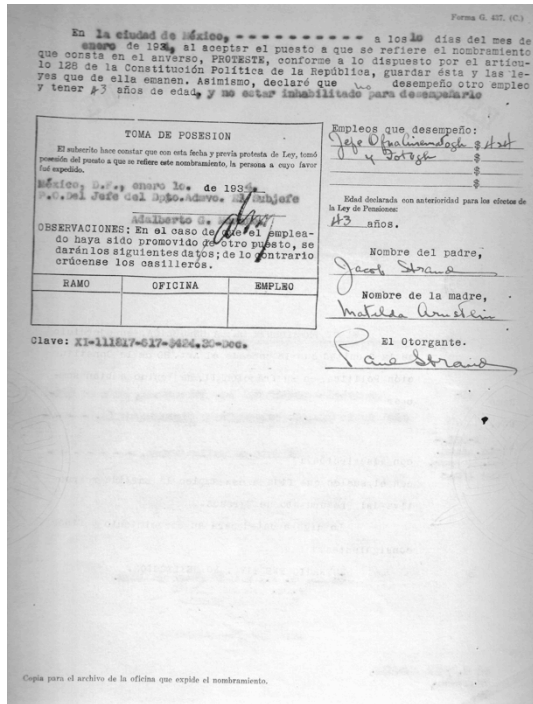
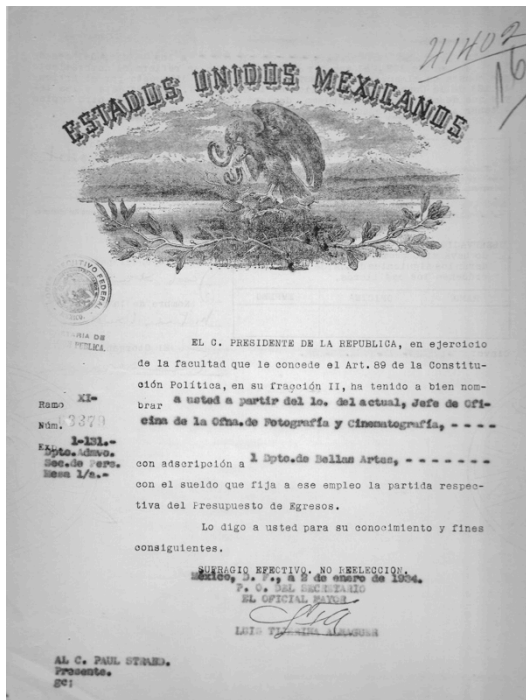
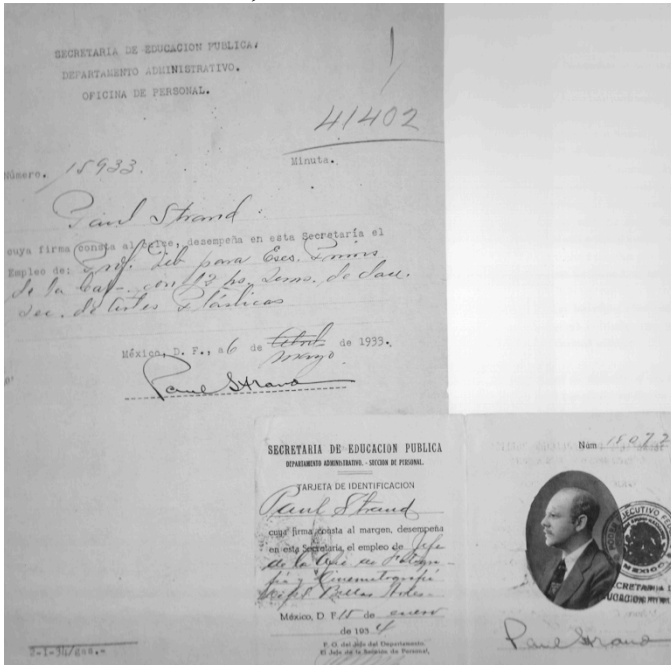


FIGURE 47, Advertisement for Paul Strand's Exhibition at the *Sala de Arte*



FIGURE 48, Jose Clemente Orozco, *Social Revolution*, 1926



FIGURE 49, Diego Rivera, *Partition of Land*, 1926



FIGURE 50, Paul Strand, *Man with Hoe*, 1933

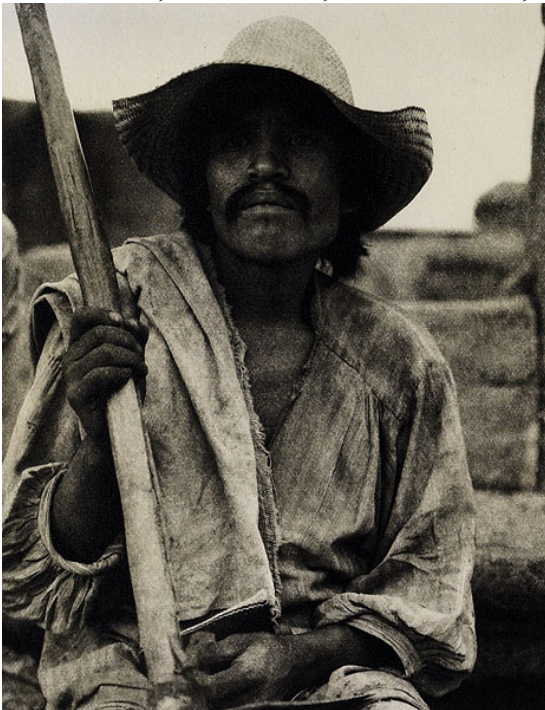


FIGURE 51, Paul Strand, *Boy in White Shirt*, 1933



FIGURE 52, Paul Strand, *Women of Santa Ana*, 1933



FIGURE 53, Victor Agustin Casasola, *Condesa Racetrack*, 1910



FIGURE 54, El Ilustrado, “Como se Viste en la primavera”, 1928

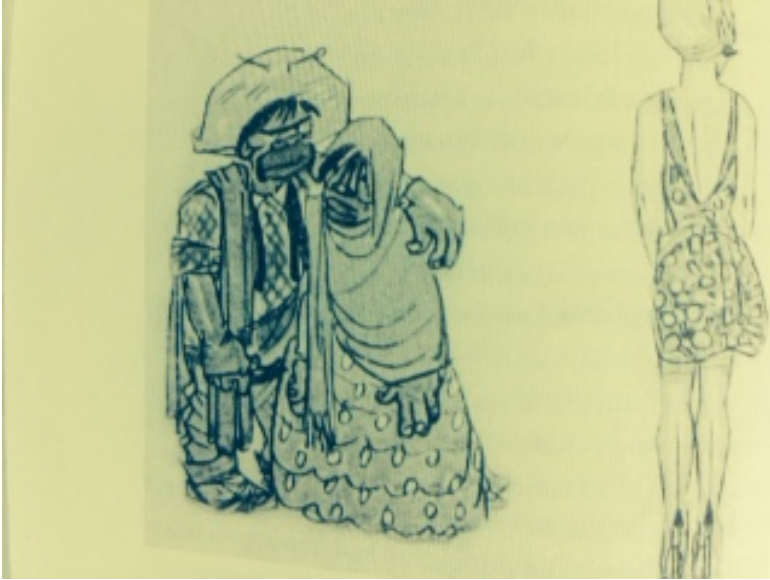


FIGURE 55, Paul Strand, *Woman of Alvarado (Susana Ortiz)*, 1933



FIGURE 56, Paul Strand, *Seated Man*, 1933



FIGURE 57, Carl Lumholtz, *Tarahumara Girl*, 1892

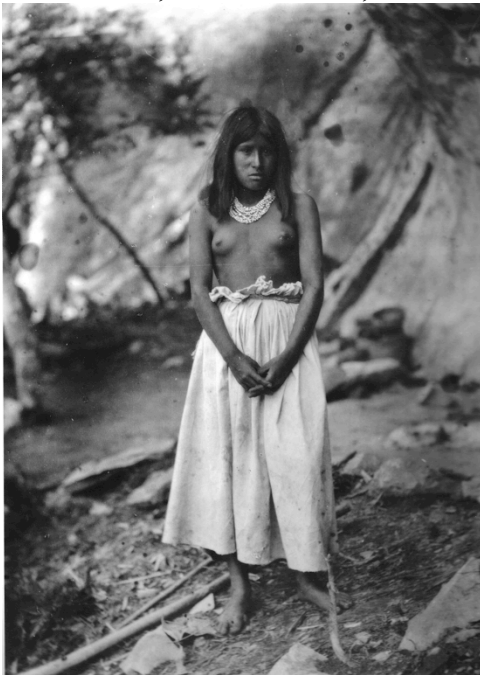


FIGURE 58, C.B. Waite, *Hot Country Laborer*, date unknown, Early 20th Century



FIGURE 59, Tina Modotti, 'A proud little agrarista', *Mexican peasant boy*, c. 1927



FIGURE 60, Tina Modotti,
Worker Parade, 1926



FIGURE 61, Tina Modotti,
Railway Workers Daughter, 1928

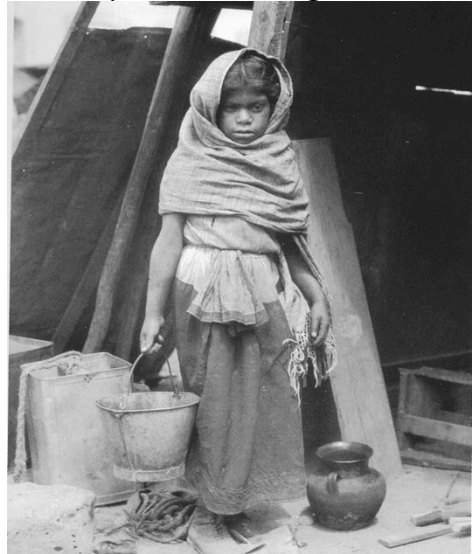


FIGURE 62, Manuel Alvarez Bravo
Fin del tiangis, 1931



FIGURE 63, Manuel Alvarez Bravo
The Tall Ladder, 1930

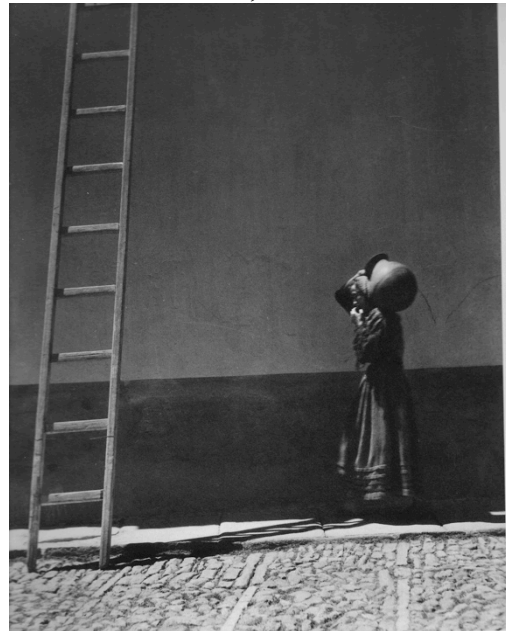


FIGURE 64, Manuel Alvarez Bravo
Sed Publica, 1933

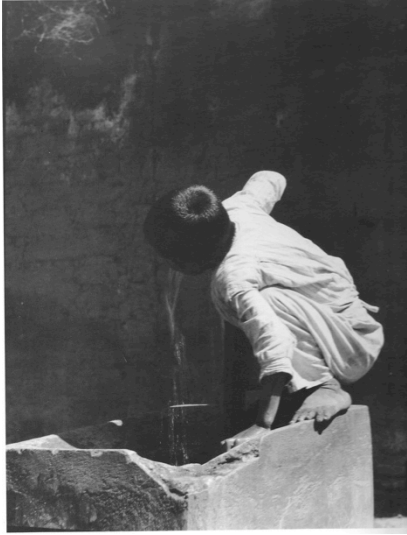


FIGURE 65, Manuel Alvarez Bravo
Obrero en huelga asesinado, 1934



FIGURE 66, Manuel Alvarez Bravo, *Niño Urinado*, 1927



FIGURE 67, Paul Strand, *Man Tenancigo de Degolla*, 1933

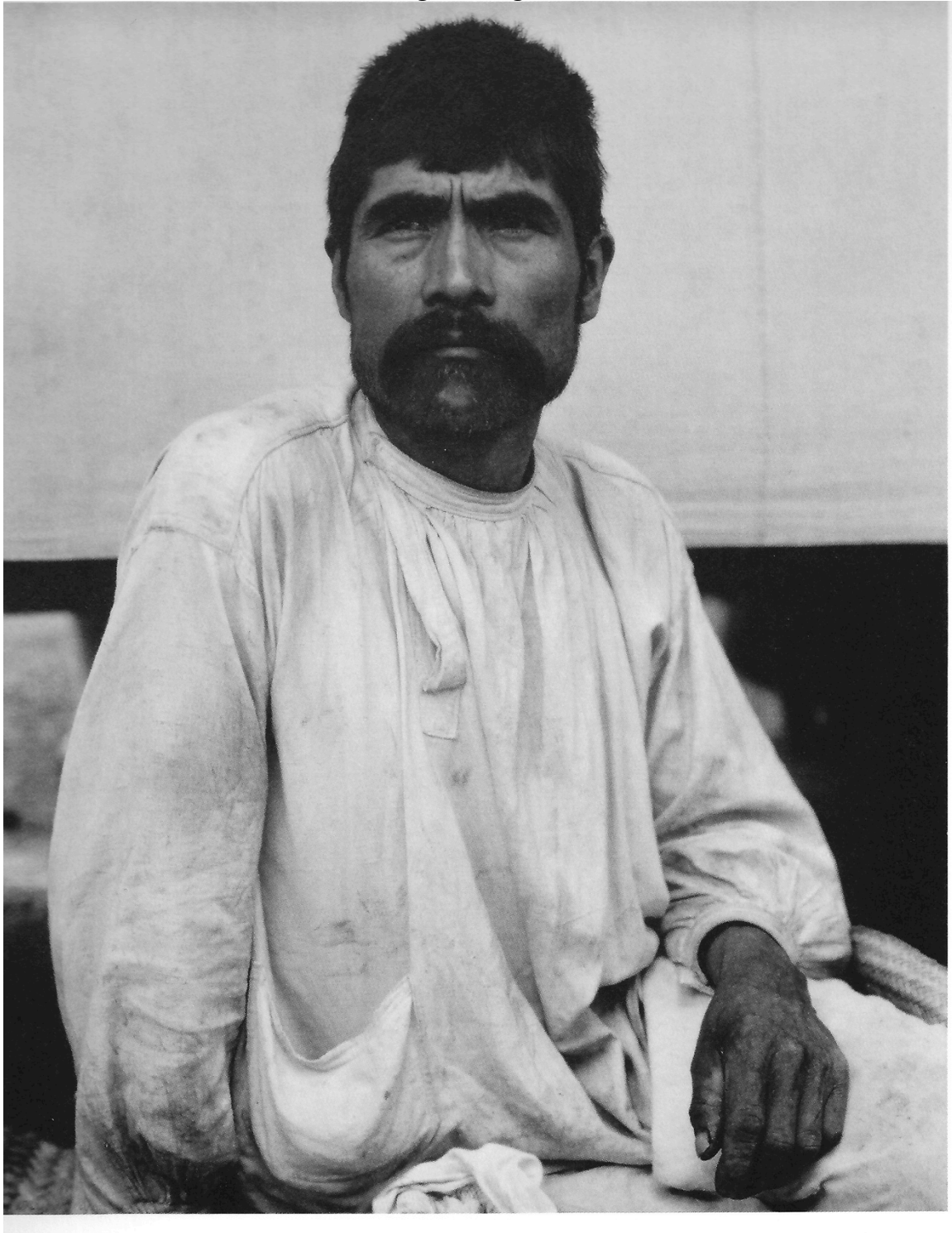


FIGURE 68, Paul Strand, *Boy, Uruapan*, 1933



FIGURE 69—Letter to Paul Strand from President Lázaro Cárdenas

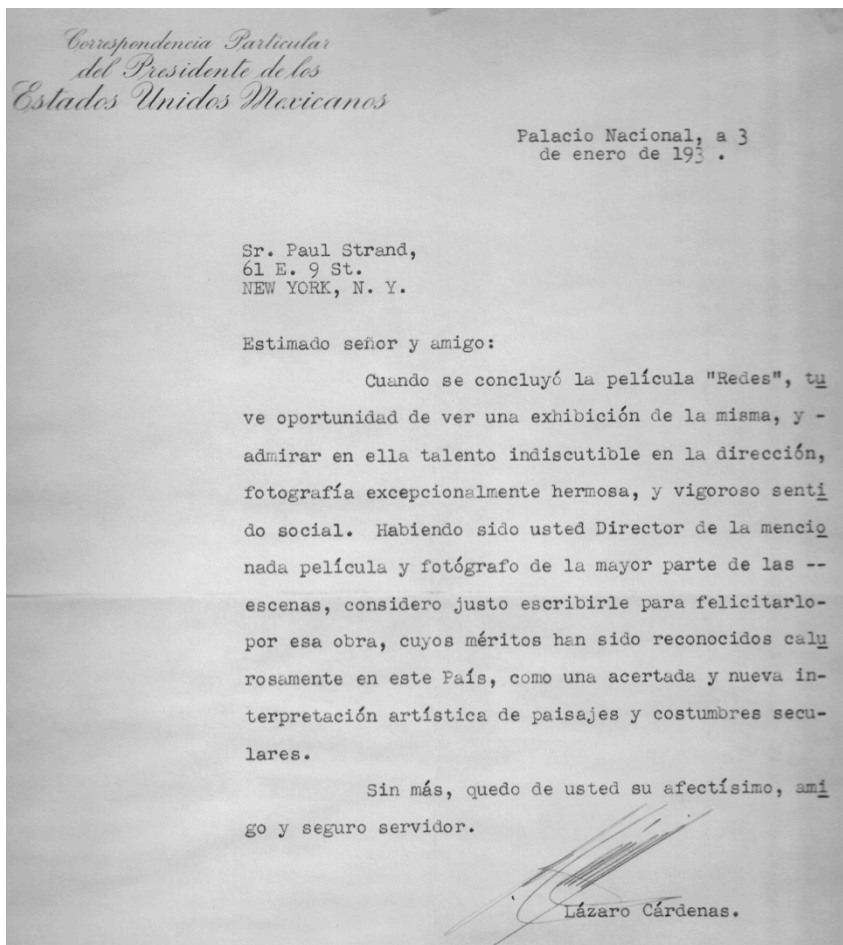


FIGURE 70, Saturino Herran, *Our Gods*, 1918



FIGURE 71, Weston, *Hand of Potter Amado Galvan*, 1926

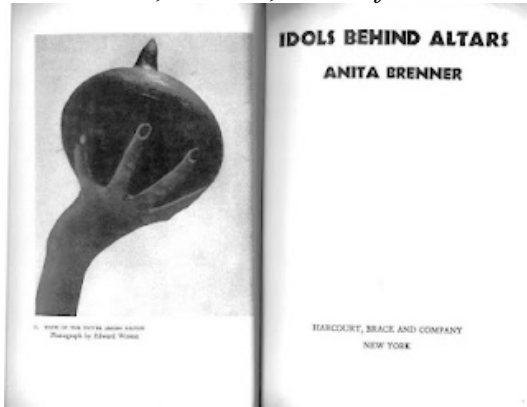


FIGURE 72, Edward Weston, *Ragdoll and Sombretio*, 1925



FIGURE 73, Edward Weston, *Hat and Shoes*, 1926



FIGURE 74, Edward Weston, *El Pinguino*, 1926

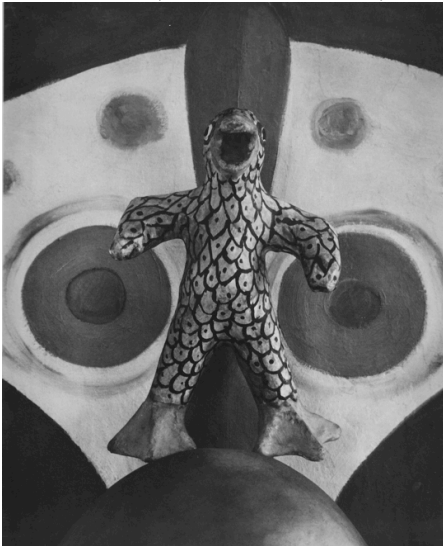


FIGURE 75, Rain God Tlaloc, Aztec Period



FIGURE 76, Edward Weston, *Three Fish—Gourdes*, 1926

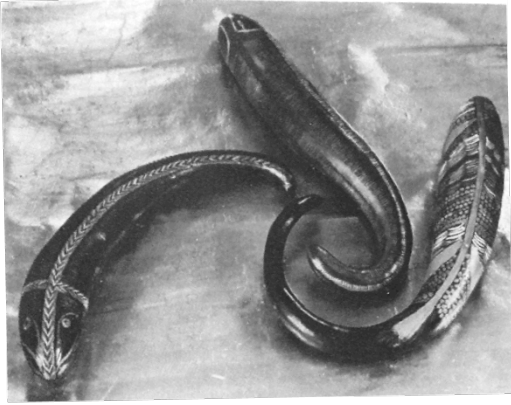


FIGURE 77, Tina Modotti, *Woman With Olla*, 1926



FIGURE 78, Tina Modotti, *Hands Resting on Tool*, 1927



FIGURE 79, Tina Modotti, *Corn, Guitar, Cartridge*, 1928



FIGURE 80, Agustin Jimenez, *Jugetes de Dia de Corpus*, 1929



FIGURE 81, Agustin Jimenez, *Jarritos*, 1932



FIGURE 82, Diego Rivera, *Entry into the Mine*, 1923

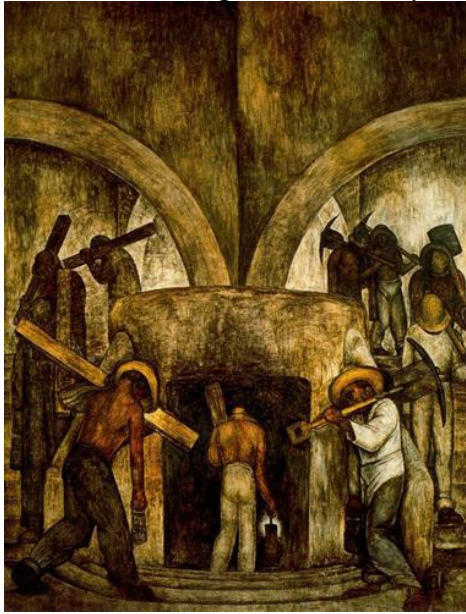


FIGURE 83, Diego Rivera, *Exit from the Mine*, 1923



FIGURE 84, Diego Rivera, *The Embrace*, 1923

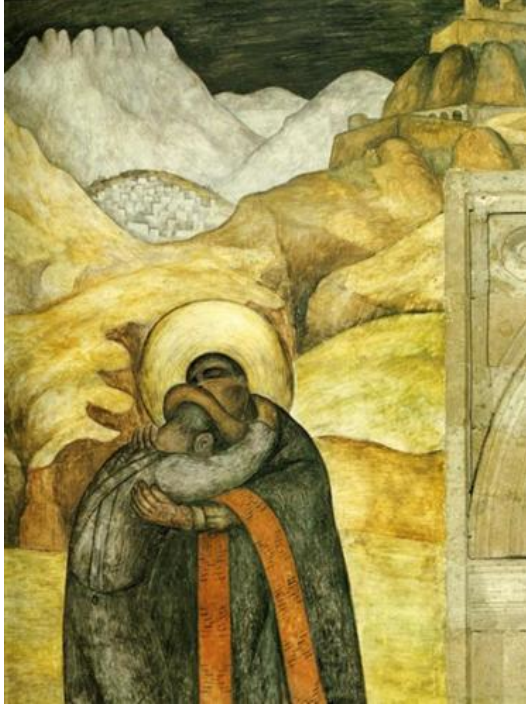


FIGURE 85, Edward Weston, *Palma Bendita, (holy palm)* 1926

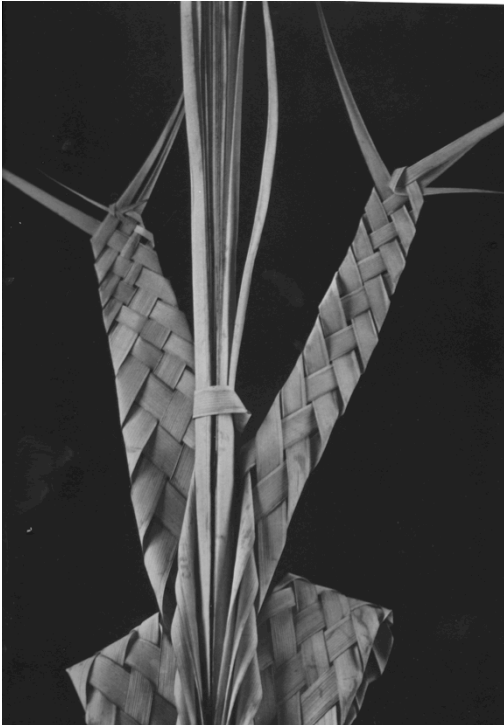


FIGURE 86, Paul Strand, *Cristo with thorns*, Huexolta, 1933

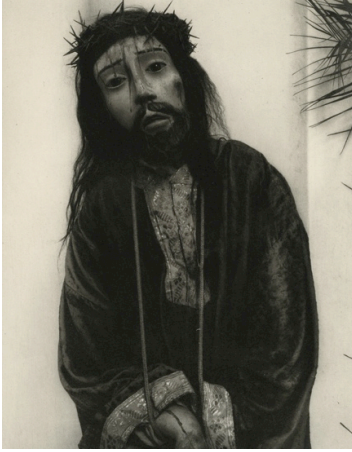


FIGURE 87, Paul Strand, *The bound Cristo*, Oaxaca, 1933



FIGURE 88, Perkins Harnley, *A Mexican Country Figure of Christ*, c. 1933

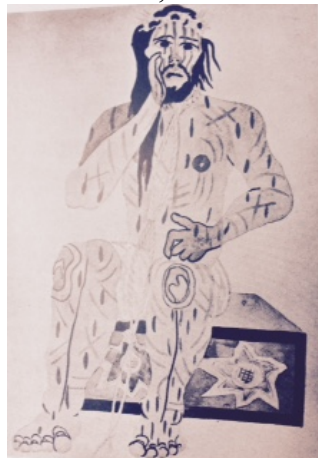


FIGURE 89, Paul Strand, *Virgin #1*, San Felipe, 1933



FIGURE 90, Paul Strand, *Virgin #2*, San Felipe, 1933



FIGURE 91, Paul Strand, *Woman with rebozo*, 1933

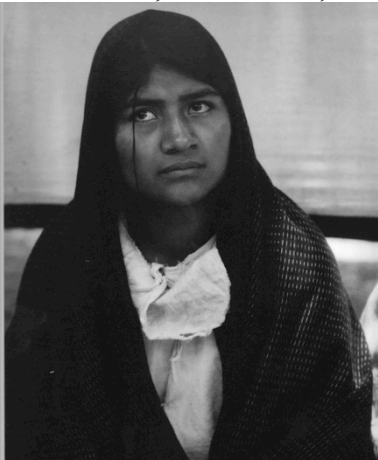


FIGURE 92, Paul Strand, *Girl with rebozo*, 1933



FIGURE 93, Paul Strand, *Church gateway, Hidalgo*, 1933



FIGURE 94, Álvarez Bravo *Sleeping Cristo*, 1925



FIGURE 95, Álvarez Bravo, *The Visitors*, 1935



FIGURE 96, Álvarez Bravo, *The Creators, the Makers*, 1935

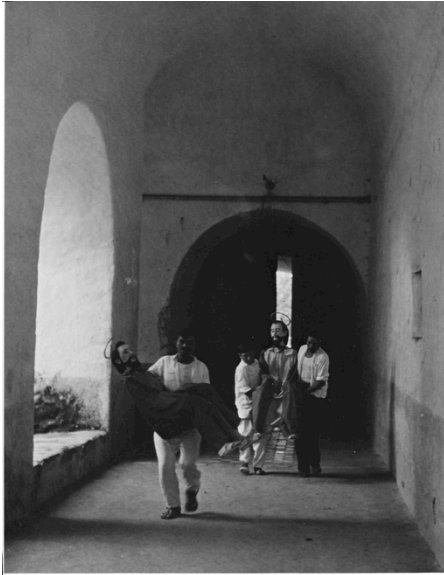


FIGURE 97, Álvarez Bravo, *Pair of Saints*, c. 1935



FIGURE 98, Paul Strand, *Cristo and cross*, 1933



FIGURE 99, Paul Strand, *San Luis Potosi*, 1932



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