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RENAISSANCE AND COUNTERREVOLUTION:

ANITA BRENNER'S MEXICAN EDUCATION, 1923-1927

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Je ne veux plus me retenir des erreurs de mes doigts, des erreurs de mes yeux. Je sais maintenant qu'elles ne sont pas que des pièges grossiers, mais de curieux chemins vers un but que rien ne peut me révéler, qu'elles. À toute erreur des sens correspondent d'étranges fleurs de la raison. Admirables jardins des croyances absurdes, des pressentiments, des obsessions et des délires. Là prennent figure des dieux inconnus et changeants. Je contemplerai ces visages de plomb, ces chènevis de l'imagination. Dans vos châteaux de sable que vous êtes belles, colonnes de fumées ! Des mythes nouveaux naissent sous chacun de nos pas. Là où l'homme a vécu commence la légende, là où il vit. Je ne veux plus occuper ma pensée que de ces transformations méprisées. Chaque jour se modifie le sentiment moderne de l'existence. Une mythologie se noue et se dénoue. C'est une science de la vie qui n'appartient qu'à ceux qui n'en ont point l'expérience. C'est une science vivante qui s'engendre et se fait suicide.

Louis Aragon, *Le Paysan de Paris*, 1924.

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Abstract

Following the end of the "armed phase" of the Mexican Revolution, the 1920s were in Mexico a period of ongoing factional conflict, social dislocation, and gradual political consolidation. They were also a time of intellectual renewal and artistic experimentation. José Vasconcelos pedagogical crusade, Manuel Gamio's *indigenista* nationalism, and the muralist movement are some of the most well-known manifestations of this moment of post-revolutionary cultural effervescence, which contemporary commentators came to refer to as a "Mexican Renaissance." Starting in the late 1910s and early 1920s, this confluence of political and cultural revolution caught the attention of an assortment of foreign, though mostly American, intellectuals, artists, and activists who visited the country, sought to understand it and went on to write about it, often relating to it as a projection screen for their own cultural anxieties and political agendas. The works of these 1920s cultural and political pilgrims influenced U.S. public opinion in favor of the Mexican Revolution and triggered an "enormous vogue of things Mexican" among progressive-minded Americans that reached its height in the mid-1930s.

This dissertation focuses on one of these 1920s pilgrims, Anita Brenner, a Mexican-born, Jewish-American journalist and anthropologist whose writings profoundly influenced the international embrace of the "Mexican Renaissance." The dissertation analyzes a brief period in the life of Anita Brenner, 1923-1927, the four years she spent in Mexico as an undergraduate student at the National University, a time when she became part of the vibrant, cosmopolitan artistic and intellectual "Mexican Renaissance" scene. During these years, Brenner composed an early draft of her first book, *Idols Behind Altars*, which went on to have a lasting impact on the reception of artists such as Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and

Carlos Mérida, among others. Anita Brenner's papers at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center offer a privileged perspective on the lives and works of the transnational network of artists, activists, and intellectuals as they "discovered" the "Mexican Renaissance" and interpreted it and promoted it for foreign audiences: Bertram Wolfe, Robert Haberman, Frances Toor, Errnest Gruening, Frank Tannenbaum, Jean Charlot, Tina Modotti, Edward Weston, and Frances Flynn Paine, among others. Following these figures, this dissertation offers a critical reinterpretation of the constellation of simultaneous interconnected artistic, cultural, and political phenomena that they defined as the "Mexican Renaissance."

This reinterpretation proceeds by taking up the perspective of Anita Brenner and her expatriate milieu and using it as a basis to take the Mexican Renaissance out of its usual political context as the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution in order to recontextualize it as an aftermath of the larger world historical crisis of the 1910s. The First World War and the international revolutionary crisis that followed were experienced across nations as a collapse of bourgeois society and a delegitimization of European culture. In the United States, this was also a period of catastrophic defeat for the socialist left and grave disappointment for progressive liberals. In the 1920s, the U.S. was emerging as the world's economic hegemon, but what this would mean politically and culturally remained uncertain. This dissertation argues that it was these conditions of uncertainty and disillusionment led to a countercultural identification with Mexico's cultural revolution among defeated radicals and alienated artists and intellectuals.

In the mid-1920s, two political developments led to a reorientation of the "Mexican Renaissance" toward the United States. First, the ousting of José Vasconcelos from the Secretaría de Educación Pública left the muralist movement without state patronage. Second, legislative moves by President Plutarco Elías Calles' administration led to a diplomatic crisis between Mexico

and the United States. This dissertation describes how at this juncture, Anita Brenner and her expatriate milieu helped facilitate the process by which the moment of post-revolutionary artistic and intellectual effervescence known as the "Mexican Renaissance" became an instrument of U.S.-Mexico diplomacy—the process by which the revolutionary muralists could be said to have gone from working for José Vasconcelos to working for U.S. ambassador Dwight Morrow. As this dissertation argues, the reorientation of the "Mexican Renaissance" toward the United States is best understood as an episode in a larger transitional period: the counterrevolutionary interregnum between the international revolutionary moment that followed the First World War and the emergence of a new U.S.-centered world capitalist order.

Introduction

In the Spring of 1930, the Harvard Society for Contemporary Art held an exhibition of modern Mexican art, titled, in self-explanatory fashion, "Exhibition of Modern Mexican Art." The show included works by Jean Charlot, Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, Abraham Ángel, Francisco Goitia, Xavier Guerrero, Carlos Mérida, Máximo Pacheco, Fermín Revueltas, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and Rufino Tamayo—in addition to an assortment of what the catalogue described as "peasant pottery." The brief introductory note is a strange specimen, worth quoting in full:

> "Racially, few of the Mexican artists are pure Indian. Most have had years of study and observation in Europe, and many have seen actual fighting. Art for Art's sake, and Pure Painting as practiced in Montparnasse have no place in Mexico. Drawing and painting became the language adapted for the teaching of all subjects—from geography to hygiene. The expression of a religious and political tradition in art is the living breath of the land and it tastes of the soil whatever the form that period and locality define. Thus, there is a greater difference between Maya and Aztec than between Frenchman and Greek; but the modern Mexican is closer to his ancestors than to his European colleagues. The architectural urge, the religious quality, the symbolic realism, the socially interpretative intention—these things of native spirit determine more than the scientific researches of the old world the modern form of Mexican art. The spirit does not dictate the plastic version, it is born of the image. Fra Angelico knelt to paint Christ, and Diego Rivera painted Zapata with a pistol in his belt. It is not improbable that future historians will find in Mexico City, in the fusion of architecture and painting, illustration and decoration, an actual renaissance, a rebirth of original values, far exceeding in importance the sterile ingenuities of the followers of contemporary Paris."[1]

This tangle of hyperbole and mystification is a typical example of the kind of publicity with which the United States welcomed the Mexican school of "revolutionary art." The themes are

[1] The Harvard Society for Contemporary Art, *Exhibition of Modern Mexican Art, 1930*, Exhibition Catalogue. Anita Brenner Papers, Box 13 Folder 8 (AB 13.8).

all there: Obsession with racial authenticity, rejection of Europe, formalism, and "art for art's sake," dubious historical claims about ancient civilizations, a vaguely religious tone, and perhaps most intriguingly, a comparison between twentieth-century Mexico and the European Renaissance of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Where did such imaginative excess come from? The name of the catalogue's author is not listed, but the source of his or her inspiration is included in a clarifying footnote: "These notes on the artists are taken more or less directly from IDOLS BEHIND ALTARS, by Anita Brenner, published by Brewer and Warren, New York City, 1929."[2]

Anita Brenner was a Jewish-American journalist and anthropologist who in the 1930s became one of the earliest interpreters of Mexican modern art in the United States, and one of the main promoters of what historian Helen Delpar memorably called "the enormous vogue of things Mexican,"[3] which reached its peak in the Depression years. Brenner was born in 1905 in the state of Aguascalientes, Mexico, to Jewish-Baltic immigrant parents. In 1916, after surviving several years amid the violence of the Mexican Revolution, the Brenners finally fled their home and resettled in San Antonio, Texas, where Anita spent her adolescence. In 1923, for reasons that are not wholly clear, Anita dropped out of her first year at the University of Texas and moved to Mexico City, where for the next four years she became part of the vibrant and cosmopolitan artistic and intellectual scene that in those years had taken shape around the Mexican Muralist movement. It was also during these years in Mexico that Brenner composed the first draft of her first book, which was originally titled "Mexican Renascence." In the Fall of 1927, Anita moved to New York

[2] Ibid.

[3] Helen Delpar, *The Enormous Vogue of Things Mexican: Cultural Relations between the United States and Mexico, 1920-1935* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995).

City to pursue graduate studies in anthropology at Columbia University under Franz Boas. During her time at Columbia, she began to write about Mexico for publications such as *The Nation*, *The New York Times Sunday Magazine*, and *The Brooklyn Daily Eagl*e, as well as looking for a publisher for her book, which finally appeared in 1929 under the title *Idols Behind Altars*.

As the exhibition catalogue cited above indicates, *Idols Behind Altars* was a defining influence in the reception of post-revolutionary Mexican modernist art in the United States. The book was not properly a work of art criticism, but rather a highly idiosyncratic, expansively rhapsodic hybrid of anthropological speculation, historical survey, and collective artist's biography. These ingredients added up to a grandiose mythopoetic narrative of national rebirth that came to be inextricably attached to the public perception, in the United States, of artists such as the ones exhibited in the Harvard Society for Contemporary Art's 1930 Mexican Modern Art exhibition. At the same time, for politicians and artists in Mexico, it became a sort of bonafide of international legitimacy.

This dissertation does not deal directly with *Idols Behind Altars*—at least not with its finished version—or with the American vogue for Mexican things of the Depression years. It focuses, instead, on the period immediately preceding. It follows Anita Brenner between 1923 and 1927, the formative years she spent in Mexico before taking up her role as a professional promoter and interpreter, in the United States, of the cultural phenomenon for which she used the term "Mexican Renaissance."[4]

[4] Anita Brenner did not coin the term but relied on it more than other commentators. The Renaissance idea ended up becoming inseparable from this particular moment of artistic and cultural effervescence. See, for instance Jean Charlot, *Mexican Cultural Renaissance* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1972); Virginia Stewart, *45 Contemporary Mexican Artists: A Twentieth-Century Renaissance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1951); Penny Morrill, *William Spratling and the Mexican Silver Renaissance* (Grand Rapids: University of Michigan Press, 2002); Karen Cordero, Patricia Albers, and Moderna Museet, *Tina Modotti: the Mexican Renaissance* (Stockholm: Clark Humanities Museum, Artists of the Mexican

This is something of a coming-of-age story. Anita was only eighteen years old when she first arrived in Mexico and registered as a student at the National University. It is a story about how the people that she met and the projects she got involved with during these years shaped her worldview and set her off on a career. In Mexico she helped launch the influential magazine *Mexican Folkways*. She wrote articles for *The Nation*, the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, and the *Jewish Morning Journal* promoting Mexico as a destination for Jewish migration. She worked as a translator and research assistant for the "father of Mexican anthropology" Manuel Gamio. She collaborated with the painter Jean Charlot—her on-and-off romantic partner—on a series of articles and book projects chronicling the Mexican muralist movement. She traveled around the country alongside the photographers Edward Weston and Tina Modotti, who she recruited as illustrators for her book-in-progress. When the painter José Clemente Orozco was barred from completing his mural paintings at Mexico City's Escuela Nacional Preparatoria, she led a successful campaign petitioning for his reinstatement.[5]

Renaissance, 2000); Alicia Azuela de la Cueva, *Arte y poder: renacimiento artístico y revolución social, México, 1910-1945* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica 2005).

[5] There are two biographies of Anita Brenner, as well as one book-length critical monograph: Susannah Joel Glusker, Anita Brenner: *A Mind of Her Own* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998); Marcela López Arellano *Anita Brenner: una escritora judía con México en el corazón* (Aguascalientes: Universidad Autónoma de Aguascalientes, 2016); Yolanda Padilla Rangel, *La Revolución Mexicana bajo la mirada de Anita Brenner* (Mexico: Plaza y Valdes, 2010); There are also a handful of book chapters, journal articles, and essays in exhibition catalogues: Rick A. López, "Anita Brenner and the Jewish Roots of Mexico's Postrevolutionary National Identity," In *Open Borders to a Revolution: Culture, Politics, and Migration*, eds. Jaime Marroquin Arredondo, Adela Pineda Franco, and Magdalena Mieri (Washington, DC, Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press, 2013); Marcela López Arellano, "Anita Brenner, correspondent to B'nai B'rith in Mexico during the 1920s: Women immigrants, white slave traffic, and rumours," *Women's History Review* 30, no. 2 (2021); Nadia Ugalde, *Anita Brenner: Visión de una época*; (Mexico City: Editorial RM); Karen Cordero and Laura Mart, *Another Promised Land: Anita Brenner's Mexico* (Los Angeles: Skirball Cultural Center).

This dissertation treats these kinds of small-scale episodes not as biographical ends in themselves, but as entry points to a larger-scale historical narrative, which I summarize below in broad strokes.

The 1920s in Mexico were across the board a time of social dislocation, political transition, and intellectual reorientation. Following a decade of revolution, the elements of a new national order based on the 1917 Constitution began to slowly, laboriously coalesce under an always-looming threat of rekindled civil war.[6] The generation of intellectuals who rose to prominence during the decade of armed upheaval set itself the task of deciphering the causes and character of the conflict and charting the future course of the newly revolutionized nation. Among their concerns was the redefinition of national identity in terms that could integrate the rural and indigenous masses who had emerged as the protagonists of the Revolution's political drama. There was the aforementioned Manuel Gamio, the disciple of Franz Boas and aspiring statesman who called for a scientific, research-based approach to indigenous uplift and ethno-nationalist social integration.[7] More notoriously, there was José Vasconcelos, the Mexican Revolution's first

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[6] The literature on Mexican post-revolutionary state formation in the 1920s is expansive and regionally specialized. For a general view of the politics of the period discussed in this dissertation see Hector Aguilar Camín and Lorenzo Meyer, *In the Shadow of the Mexican Revolution: Contemporary Mexican History, 1910-1989* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001); Frank Brandenburg, *The Making of Modern Mexico* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1964); Gilbert M. Joseph and Jurgen Buchenau, *Mexico's Once and Future Revolution: Social Upheaval and the Challenge of Rule since the Late Nineteenth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013); Jean A. Meyer, Enrique Krauze, and Cayetano Reyes García, *Estado y Sociedad con Calles*, Historia de la Revolución Mexicana, Vol. 11: Periodo 1924-1928 (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1977); Sarah Osten, *The Mexican Revolution's Wake: The Making of a Political System, 1920-29* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

[7] On Manuel Gamio, social science, and *indigenismo* in the 1920s see Ángeles González Gamio, *Manuel Gamio: Una lucha sin fin* (Mexico City: UNAM, 2003); David Brading, "Manuel Gamio and Official Indigenismo in Mexico," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 7, no. 1 (1988); Alan Knight, "Racism, Revolution, and Indigenismo: Mexico, 1910-1940," in Richard Graham, ed., *The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870-1940* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1990); Ricardo Godoy, "Franz Boas and His Plans for an International School of American Archaeology and Ethnology in Mexico," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 13 (1977); Mechtild Rutsch, *Entre el campo y el gabinete: nacionales y extranjeros en la profesionalización de la antropología mexicana* (1877-1920) (Mexico City: Instituto

secretary of public education. In the early 1920s, his grassroots campaigns for universal public education reached remote corners of the Republic and inspired waves of nationalist enthusiasm.[8] It was Vasconcelos who first commissioned artists such as Rivera, Siqueiros, Charlot, and Fernando Leal—among others—to decorate the walls of public buildings with edifying nationalist allegories, thus initiating the Mexican muralist movement which would gain international fame later in the decade.[9]

This post-revolutionary situation of mass-political flux and ethno-cultural reflux caught the attention of an assortment of foreign—but particularly American—intellectuals, artists, and activists who visited the country, sought to understand it, and went on to write about and promote it, often relating to it as a projection screen for their own cultural anxieties and political agendas. There were Debsian socialists like Robert Haberman and Communists like Bertram Wolfe, who landed in Mexico while fleeing from the Woodrow Wilson administration's persecution of

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Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2007); Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, "Stereophonic Scientific Modernisms: Social Science between Mexico and the United States, 1880s-1930s," *Journal of American History* 86, no. 3 (Dec. 1999), Alexander S. Dawson, *Indian and Nation in Revolutionary Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2004).

[8] On José Vasconcelos, post-revolutionary education campaigns and their adjacent cultural politics see: Claude Fell, *José Vasconcelos: Los años del águila, 1920-1925: Educación cultura e iberoamericanismo en el México posrevolucionario (*Mexico City: UNAM, 1989); John Britton, *Educación y Radicalismo en México* (Mexico City: Secretaría de Educación Pública, Dirección General de Divulgación, 1976); Rosa Bruno-Jofré and Carlos Martínez Valle, "Ruralizando a Dewey: El amigo americano, la colonización interna y la escuela de acción en el México posrevolucionario (1921-1940), *Encuentros sobre Educacion*, 10 (Fall, 2009), Ilan Stavans, *José Vasconcelos: The Prophet of Race (*New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011), Rick A. Lopez, *Crafting Mexico: Intellectuals, Artisans, and the State after the Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

[9] On Mexican modernism in the 1920s and the emergence of the muralist movement, see: Alicia Azuela de la Cueva, *Arte y poder: Renacimiento artístico y revolución social, Mexico, 1910-1945* (Zamora: El Colegio de México, 2005); Elissa, J. Rashkin, *The Stridentist Movement in Mexico: The Avant-Garde and Cultural Change in the 1920s* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009); Leonard Folgarait, *Mural Painting and Social Revolution in Mexico, 1920s-1940s: Art of the New Order* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Bertram D. Wolfe, *Diego Rivera: His Life and Times* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1939).

dissent—the worst in the country's history—and ended up conducting militant Mexican politicking of their own.[10] There were pacifist and anti-imperialist journalists and publicists such as Carleton Beals and Ernest Gruening, whose passion for the Mexican Revolution was based their opposition to their own country's expansionist ambitions. There were artists and art-adjacent bohemians, boosters, and *belles-lettristes* such as Edward Weston, Tina Modotti, Frances Toor, and Anita Brenner herself, who immersed themselves in the country's post-revolutionary phantasmagoria of ethno-national rebirth and spiritual authenticity—which they viewed as an escape from and an alternative to the materialism, consumerism, and racism of the United States.[11] These were some of the figures that defined the moment that Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo called the "cosmopolitan Mexican Summer," where, in his words, "the issues discussed in Mexico in those days paralleled the ones debated in New York or the radical Parisian cafés: social revolution,

[10] On American radicals in post-revolutionary Mexico see Dan La Botz, "American 'Slackers' in the Mexican Revolution: International Proletarian Politics in the Midst of a National Revolution," *The Americas* 62, no. 4 (Apr. 2006); Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, "Viejos gringos: radicales norteamericanos y su visión México, *Secuencia* 21 (Sep.-Dec. 1991); Charles Hale, "Frank Tannenbaum and the Mexican Revolution," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 75, no. 2 (May, 1995) 215-246; Gregg Andrews, "Roberto Haberman, Socialist Ideology, and the Politics of National Reconstruction in Mexico, 1920-1925," *Mexican Studies / Estudios Mexicanos* 6, no. 2 (Summer 1990).

[11] There are biographies, memoirs, and articles studying the life and work of each of the figures mentioned here. Patricia Albers, *Shadows, Fire, Snow: The Life of Tina Modotti* (New York: Clarkson Potter, 1999); Letizia Argenteri, *Tina Modotti: Between Art and Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Pino Cacucci, *Tina Modotti: A Life*, Trans. Patricia J. Duncan (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999); Peter A. Stern, "Frances Toor and the Mexican Cultural Renaissance," In Richard F. Phillips, ed, *Documenting Movements, Identity, and Popular Culture in Latin America: Papers of the Forty Fourth Annual Meeting of the Seminar on the Acquisition of Latin American Library Materials, Nashville, Tennessee, May 30-June 3, 1999* (Austin: SALALM Secretariat, University of Texas at Austin, 2000); Robert David Johnson, *Ernest Gruening and the American Dissenting Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); John A. Britton, Carleton Beals, *A Radical Journalist in Latin America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987); Bertram Wolfe, *Breaking with Communism: The Intellectual Odyssey of Bertram D. Wolfe* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 2004); Carleton Beals, *Glass Houses: Ten Years of Free Lancing* (New York: J.B. Lippinocott Company, 1938).

cultural exhaustion of the West, the problems of industrialization, rural peoples and revolution, and the rediscovery of natives and non-westerners in arts and politics."[12]

These Mexicophile visitors were all admirers of the artistic movement that, in the early 1920s, coalesced around Vasconcelos' ample pedagogical budget. The combination of cultural nationalism, revolutionary iconography, populist gesturing, and avant-garde iconoclasm of something like David Alfaro Siqueiros' 1922 manifesto of the Union of Technical Workers, Painters, and Sculptors (SOTPE) was as if tailor-made for Americans alienated from Americanism.

> "Not only the noble labor, but even the smallest manifestations of the material and spiritual vitality of our race spring from our native midst. Its admirable, exceptional, and peculiar ability to create beauty—the art of the Mexican people—is the highest and greatest spiritual expression of the world-tradition which constitutes our most valued heritage. It is great because it surges from the people; it is collective, and our own aesthetic aim is to socialize artistic expression, to destroy bourgeois individualism… We repudiate the so-called easel art and all such art which springs from ultra-intellectual circles, for it is essentially aristocratic."[13]

The fact that several of the painters were affiliated with the Mexican Communist Party (PCM) lent the movement an undeniable aura of authenticity.[14] Throughout the 1920s the PCM, like many other Comintern-affiliated parties, sabotaged itself by following the zig-zagging strategic dictates of Moscow. Although in the mid-1920s its labor organizing efforts were thwarted

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[12] Mauricio Tenorio Trillo, "Review: The Cosmopolitan Mexican Summer, 1920-1949," *Latin American Research Review* 32, no. 3 (1997).

[13] David Alfaro Siqueiros, "Manifesto issued by the Union of Technical Workers, Painters, and Sculptors," in Laurence E. Schmeckbeier, *Modern Mexican Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1939).

[14] On the relationship between proletarian politics and post-revolutionary Mexican modernism in the 1920s, see Stephanie J. Smith, *The Power and Politics of Art in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Alicia Azuela, "Graphics of the Mexican Left, 1924-1938," In *Art and Journals on the Political Front, 1910-1940*, ed. Virginia Hagelstein Marquardt (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1997), 247-68, William Harrison Richardson, "The Dilemmas of a Communist Artist: Diego Rivera in Moscow, 1927-1928" *Mexican Studies / Estudios Mexicanos* 3, no. 1 (Winter, 1987); John Lear, *Picturing the Proletariat: Artists and Labor in Revolutionary Mexico, 1908-1940* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017).

by the government-affiliated labor federation, the CROM, in those years it enjoyed the prestige imparted to it by association with the Russian Revolution and attracted to itself members of Mexico's radical intelligentsia.[15]

And yet, despite recognition among foreigners and radicals, the movement's future prospects were uncertain. The political changes brought about by the failed military rebellion led by Adolfo de la Huerta in 1923-24, including the ascendance of Plutarco Elías Calles to the presidency, alienated José Vasconcelos from the regime, and he resigned from his post in 1924, leaving the painters without a patron in high office. Further, starting in 1925 the country went into a long economic recession that lasted well into the 1930s, leading to fiscal crisis and reduced budgets for the Ministry of Education which had funded the movement at its inception. As mural commissions dwindled, Diego Rivera's contentious resignation from the SOTPE delivered a major blow to the movement, leading to organizational disarticulation and geographical dispersal.

Meanwhile, diplomatic relations between Mexico and the United States were rapidly deteriorating. Despite the fact that diplomatic recognition had been granted in 1923, starting in 1925, legislation by the Calles administration concerning subsoil rights provoked intensified antagonism on the part of U.S. oil companies, who in turn increased pressure on the State Department to take a more aggressive stance toward Mexico. At the head of this campaign was U.S. ambassador to Mexico, James R. Sheffield, who had close relations with the oil lobby and

[15] On the Mexican Communist movement in the 1920s see Barry Carr, *Marxism and Communism in Twentieth Century Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992); idem, "The Fate of the Vanguard under a Revolutionary State: Marxism's Contribution to the Construction of the Great Arch," In *Everyday forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico*, ed. Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniel Nugent (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994); Paco Ignacio Taibo II, *Los Bolshevikis: Historia narrative de los orígenes del comunismo en México* (Mexico City: Editorial Joaquín Moritz, 1986); Daniela Spenser, *Los primeros tropiezos de la Internacional Comunista en México* (Mexico City: CIESAS, 2009); idem, *The Impossible Triangle: Mexico, Soviet Russia, and the United States in the 1920s* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

spent his time in office promoting the notion that the Calles administration was filled with dangerous Bolshevik revolutionaries. This red-baiting and saber-rattling was additionally motivated by the Mexican government's rapidly intensifying conflict with the Catholic Church. Tensions mounted throughout 1926, reaching a climactic turning point at the beginning of 1927, when State Secretary Frank B. Kellogg made his case before the U.S. Senate that Mexico had become a beach head for international Communism—a development that many observers at the time interpreted as a sign of impending armed intervention.[16]

Fortunately for Mexico, this crisis came at the height of an international upswing of pacifist and anti-imperialist sentiment. Throughout the 1920s, a wide array of civil society organizations—from the Jane Addams-founded Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) to the Comintern-affiliated Anti-Imperialist League of the Americas (LADLA) had been working with some success to mobilize public opinion against U.S. military intervention in the Americas. At the same time, improving economic conditions in Europe and successful arbitration of territorial disputes pending since the Peace of 1919 created a short-lived but widespread enthusiasm for peace and arbitration sometimes called the "spirit of Locarno" in reference to the 1925-26 treaties which temporarily normalized relations between Germany and the Allies.[17] This often-overlooked

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[16] On diplomatic tensions between Mexico and the U.S. in the 1920s, see Alan Knight, *US-Mexican relations, 1910-1940: An Interpretation* (San Diego: Center for US-Mexican Studies, 1987); James J. Horn, "Did the United States Plan an Invasion of Mexico in 1927?" in *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, 15, no. 4 (Nov. 1973); Robert Freeman Smith, *The United States and Revolutionary Mexico* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977); Daniela Spenser, *The Impossible Triangle: Mexico, Soviet Russia, and the United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999); Clint Smith, *Inevitable Partnership: Understanding Mexico-U.S. Relations* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000); Lorenzo Meyer, *Mexico and the United States in the Oil Controversy, 1917-1942*, trans. Muriel Vasconcellos (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014); José Luis Ramos, "Diplomacy, Social Politics, and United States-Mexico Relations after the Mexican Revolution, 1919-1930," (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 2014).

[17] On transnational pacifism and anti-imperialism in the 1920s see, Emily Rosenberg, *Financial Missionaries to the World: The Politics and Culture of Dollar Diplomacy, 1900-1930* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2004); Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Colonial Nationalism* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2009); Robert Dallek, *The American*

moment of interwar pacifist optimism was described by diplomatic historian J.B. Duroselle as follows:

> For five years between 1925 and 1929, a certain portion of mankind, like those parched travelers in the desert who think they have glimpsed the oasis which will save them, believed that the gate to lasting peace was at hand. This, as we now know, was only a mirage. But such a mirage had never before existed. People had never believed so fervently in the blessings of peace or hoped so passionately that peace would be perpetual.[18]

In this ideological climate, the defense of Mexico and its revolution against imperialist aggression came to express itself with a vocabulary that had been developed in the "cosmopolitan Mexican Summer." Whether it was Manuel Gamio lecturing at the University of Chicago, Carleton Beals in the pages of *The Nation*, or Herbert Croly in *The New Republic*, the depiction of Mexico and its people was more or less the same: a spiritually and racially authentic civilization, with deep ties to the soil, whose recent civil war ought to be understood as a prelude to a process of self-discovery amounting to a kind of national rebirth which was most clearly expressed in its ongoing artistic renaissance.[19]

In early 1927 the threat of intervention fizzled when it found no support in Congress. Later that year, diplomatic relations between Mexico and the United States improved when James

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style of Foreign policy: Cultural Politics and Foreign Affairs (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Frederik Petersson, "'We are Neither Visionaries Nor Utopian Dreamers'. Willi Münzenberg, the League against Imperialism, and the Comintern, 1925-1933," (Ph.D. Thesis, Abo Akademi University, 2013); Vijay Prashad, *Red Star Over the Third World* (London: Pluto Press, 2019).

[18] J.B. Duroselle, "The Spirit of Locarno: Illusions of Pactomania," *Foreign Affairs* 50, no. 4 (Jul. 1972).

[19] On the history of representations of Mexico in the United States James Oles, *South of the Border: Mexico in the American Imagination, 1914-1947* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993); Andrea Boardman, *Destination Mexico: "A foreign land a step away": U.S. tourism to Mexico, 1880s-1950s* (Dallas: De Goyler Library, William P. Clements Center for Southwest Studies, 2001); Alejandro Ugalde, "The Presence of Mexican Art in New York between the World Wars: Cultural Exchange and Art Diplomacy," (Ph.D. Diss., Columbia University, 2003); John Britton, *Revolution and Ideology: Images of the Mexican Revolution in the United States* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2015).

Sheffield was removed as ambassador and replaced by Dwight Morrow. During his time in office, Ambassador Morrow, together with his wife, Elizabeth Cutter Morrow, famously became patrons and promoters of Mexican art in the United States.[20] It was upon their initiative that the American Federation of Arts and the Carnegie Corporation organized the landmark "Mexican Arts" exhibition, curated by René D'Harnoncourt, which opened at the Metropolitan Museum of art and traveled to fourteen cities across the U.S. between 1930 and 1932, the years when the aforementioned "Enormous vogue for things Mexican" reached its height—and when the Anita Brenner's *Idols Behind Altars*, fresh off the printing press, became a small sensation. The Carnegie exhibition, which combined folk, colonial, and modern art, was conceived as an experiment in cultural diplomacy, meant to shift U.S. public perception of Mexico and its people, from that of an uncivilized land of Indian savages and barbarous *bandidos*, to that of a colorful folkish idyll, a friendly neighbor, a commercial partner, and an ideal destination for American tourism.

In the four years Anita Brenner spent in Mexico as an undergraduate before settling in New York City, the work of Mexican modernists such as Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, Jean

[20] Dwight Morrow's political and cultural work in Mexico has long been a favorite topic for diplomatic historians on both sides of the border: see Robert Freeman Smith, "The Formation and Development of the International Bankers Committee on Mexico," *The Journal of Economic Hist*ory 23. no. 4 (Dec. 163) and idem., "The Morrow Mission and the International Committee of Bankers on Mexico: The Interaction of Finance Diplomacy and the New American Elite," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 1, no. 2 (Nov. 1969); Stanley Ross, "Dwight Morrow: Ambassador to Mexico," *The Americas* 14, no. 2 (Jan. 1958); Abdiel Oñate, "La batalla por el Banco Central: las negociaciones de Mexico con los banqueros internacionales, 1920-1925," *Historia Mexicana*, 49, no. 4 (Apr.-Jun. 2000); Richard Melzer, "The Ambassador Simpático: Dwight W. Morrow in Mexico, 1927-1930," In *Ambassadors in Foreign Policy: The Influence of Individuals on U.S.-Latin American Relations,* eds. C. Neale Ronning and Albert P. Vannucci (New York, Praeger, 1987); Stephen Bodayla, "Bankers versus Diplomats: The Debate over Mexican Insolvency," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 24, no. 4 (Nov. 1982); Joaquín Cárdenas, *American diplomacy in Mexico, 1929: According to the National Archives, Washington, D.C.* (Cuernavaca: Centro de Estudios Históricos Americanos, 1988); María del Carmen Collado, *Dwight W. Morrow: reencuentro y revolución en las relaciones entre México y Estados Unidos, 1927-1930* (Mexico City: Instituto Mora, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, Dirección General del Acervo Histórico Diplomático, 2005).

Charlot, Rufino Tamayo, Francisco Goitia, Carlos Mérida, David Alfaro Siqueiros, went through a decisive reorientation. Having originally emerged, in the early 1920s, as a nationalist revolutionary avant-garde under Mexican state patronage, in the late 1920s it became an instrument of cultural diplomacy, often supported by U.S. philanthropy and always in search of a U.S. audience.[21] This reorientation should not be seen as a betrayal or principle or a pernicious "co-optation." There were hardly any coherent principles to betray, and to the extent that artists require patrons in order to sustain their practice, they are always necessarily looking to be "co-opted." Rather, it was an adaptation to a rapidly changing historical horizon.

The 1920s were everywhere characterized by a profound sense of historical indeterminacy, a sense that an old order had passed away and a new one was being born whose nature was not yet known. The passing of the old order—bourgeois, imperialist, enlightened and European—had been expected and announced for decades by radicals and conservatives alike. The coming of the First World War, with its industrialized butchery, its collapsing empires, and its delegitimization of traditional authority, confirmed these omens. But the Peace of 1919 did not offer clear indication of what the new order would look like.

In Europe, before the War, the most enthusiastic anticipators of the coming crisis of bourgeois society were the Social Democrats. Armed with a theory of universal social

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[21] On the muralist movement's turn toward the United States, see Anna Indych-López, *Muralism without Walls: Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros in the United States, 1927-1940* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009); Renato Gonzalez and Diane Miliotes, eds, *José Clemente Orozco in the United States* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2002); Alejandro Ugalde, "Las exposiciones de arte mexicano y las campañas pro México en los Estados Unidos, 1922-1940," In *La mirada mirada: transculturalidad e imaginarios del México revolucionario, 1910-1945*, ed. Alicia Azuela and Guillermo Palacios (México: El Colegio de México/UNAM, 2009); Lizette Le Falle Collins Shifra M. Goldman, and Raquel Tibol, *In the Spirit of Resistance: African American Modernists and the Mexican Modernist School* (Washington, D.C.: American Federation of Arts, 1996); José Clemente Orozco and Jean Charlot, *José Clemente Orozco: El artista en Nueva York (cartas a Jean Charlot, 1925-29, y tres textos inéditos)* (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1971).

emancipation and an international mass movement, they had for decades expected to seize power and save society from itself in the occasion of a general crisis such as the one that came in 1914. However, when the moment came, the majority of the movement took the side of their respective national governments against international revolution. Nevertheless, despite capitulation of much of its leadership, the revolution came anyway. Starting in 1917, wartime authorities in Central and Eastern Europe found themselves beset by widespread mutiny and insubordination. As the German, Austro-Hungarian, and Russian Empires collapsed, revolutionary councils of workers and soldiers (known in Russian as Soviets) formed in cities from Berlin to Budapest to Petrograd and vied for political authority—with varying levels of success. By the time the Peace was signed, the imperialist war had become a pan-European civil war between revolution and reaction. By the beginning of the 1920s, reaction had come out victorious and the left had been destroyed everywhere but in Russia, where amid unprecedented devastation and against all odds, the revolution survived long enough to establish itself as a government.[22]

The War led to the self-destruction of Europe's revolutionary socialist left just as it occasioned the emergence of the world's first revolutionary socialist regime. Throughout the 1920s it was clear that an old order had passed away in Europe, but the question of whether revolution or counterrevolution had come out victorious from the crisis remained without a definitive answer.

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[22] On the revolutionary aftermath of the First World War, see Pierre Broué, *The German Revolution*, Historical materialism book series, vol. 5 (Boston: Brill, 2005); William Pelz, *A People's History of the German Revolution* (London: Pluto Press, 2018); CLR James, *World Revolution, 1917-1936: The rise and fall of the Communist International* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017); Charles L. Bertrand, ed., *Revolutionary Situations in Europe, 1917-22: Germany, Italy, Austria-Hungary* (Montreal: Interuniversity Centre for European Studies, 1977); Chris Harman, *The Lost Revolution: Germany 1918-1923*, (London: Bookmarks, 1997); Leon Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017); Allen Mitchell, *Revolution in Bavaria, 1918-1919: The Eisner Regime and the Soviet Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965); Francis L. Carsten, *Revolution in Central Europe, 1918-1919* (London, 1972); Robert Gerwath, "The Central European Counter-Revolution: Paramilitary Violence in Germany, Austria, and Hungary after the Great War," *Past and Present* 200 (Aug. 2008).

In the 1920s, a new age of mass political participation was at hand. The working class was being integrated into political life across Europe in ways the social democratic movement could scarcely have imagined during its turn-of-the-century heyday. And yet, the internationalist horizon that defined prewar socialism was quickly passing away. Although the Soviet Republic tried to position itself as the spearhead of international revolution early in the 1920s, by the middle of the decade internationalism had become a liability for the regime's survival. By decade's end, the nascent party-state had consolidated around the slogan of "socialism in one country," and Comintern-affiliated parties around the world shifted their priorities from their original avowed purpose of promoting revolution in their own countries to the defense of the socialist fatherland.[23] This process of state consolidation amid counterrevolutionary retreat also meant that the artistic and cultural experimentation that the Revolution had encouraged in its early, internationalist years was harshly curtailed. By the time Diego Rivera visited the Soviet Union in 1927, the transition was well under way from constructivist sculpture and futurist theatre to socialist realist heroics and monumental portraits of Joseph Stalin. Revolutionary art would have to find a home elsewhere.[24]

In the United States, entrance into the War in 1917 went hand in hand with an unabashed reactionary turn. The nation was flooded with xenophobic and jingoistic propaganda, the persecution of immigrants and ethnic minorities was encouraged, civil liberties were severely curtailed, and anti-war dissent of any kind was persecuted. For the Progressive coalition who had

[23] The historical literature on Soviet politics in the 1920s is vast. Having read some of the more modern contributions, E.H. Carr's monumental history of the Soviet Union's first two decades is still the most convincing. The breadth of his international perspective and the realism of his political judgment (rare among historians of the Soviet Union, who always moralize), make his work more definitive than everything that has come since new archival sources were made available post-1991. For this dissertation, the most useful volume in the series was *Socialism in One Country, 1924-26*, A History of Soviet Russia, Vol. Three (New York: Macmillan Company, 1958).

[24] The best place to begin with Soviet cultural politics in the 1920s is Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).

assembled around Woodrow Wilson's 1912 reform agenda, his 1916 anti-war stance, American involvement in the War came as a great disappointment. For those who believed in the wartime idealist rhetoric of "making the world safe for democracy," American involvement in the Peace, which failed to promote its avowed ideals, came also as great disappointment. For the U.S. socialist movement, which had reached the height of its political influence just before the War, the second Wilson administration meant the suppression of its publications, the disintegration of its organization, and the terrorizing of its membership.[25] This was the United States from which American radicals like Robert Haberman and Bertram Wolfe were fleeing when they arrived in Mexico in the late 1910s and early 1920s.

The globalization of Americanism was a manifestation of the United States' ascension as the world's new international hegemon, a position it reached, not by military conquest or political leadership, but by commercial and financial expansion. U.S. economic gigantism had been on this path to world domination since the late nineteenth century, but investment in the European War and subsequent reconstruction by American financiers was the turning point in which financial power finally translated into political authority over the old European powers.[26] In this sense, American global hegemony was a material achievement of the private sector—of civil society—

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[25] On the effects of the War on American politics, see David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); On the effects of Wilsonian idealism on U.S. Progressives, see Alan Dawley, *Changing the World: American Progressives in War and Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005). On the repression and decline of socialism in the United States, I was particularly influenced by Jack Ross, *The Socialist Party of America: A Complete History* (New York: Potomac Books, 2015), which liberally uses the term "Wilson's Terror"; The classic work on this largely overlooked topic is James Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in America, 1912-1925* (New York, Vintage Books, 1969), and also Daniel Bell, *Marxian Socialism in the United States* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968); Perhaps the book that most influenced my understanding of the period's mentality was Christopher Lasch, *The New Radicalism in America, 1889-1963: The intellectual as a social type* (New York: Knopf, 2013).

[26] An argument made most clearly by Adam Tooze in *The Deluge: The Great War, America, and the Remaking of the Global Order* (New York: Penguin Books, 2014).

with national political consciousness lagging behind. As the theory goes: political superstructures lag behind their economic base; social being determines consciousness; the owl of Minerva flies at dusk. In this sense, the vacillating, "isolationist" attitude of U.S. foreign policy as well as the manic-depressive alternation between anxious catastrophism and euphoric grandiosity among American intellectuals throughout the decade can be interpreted as an expression of this delayed coming to terms with the new order which was already taking shape. Ambivalence about technological progress and unease about the coming of a "machine age," consternation about the morality of Empire and fascination with revolution, skepticism about notions of racial and cultural hierarchy held in the nineteenth century, doubts about the superiority of European culture and openness to its avant-garde currents—these urgent themes of the 1920s were bound up with the larger question of the preeminent role of the United States in the twentieth century. The changing attitude of the U.S. ruling class toward Mexico, from contemptuous repudiation of its revolution around 1919 to curiosity and fascination with its "renaissance" around 1929 was inextricably bound up with this transition in U.S. national consciousness.

David Alfaro Siqueiros concludes the 1922 manifesto quoted above with words about the birth of a new historical epoch:

> We proclaim that this being the moment of social transformation from a decrepit to a new order, the makers of beauty must invest their greatest efforts in the aim of materializing an art valuable to the people, and our supreme objective in art, which is today an expression for individual pleasure, is to create beauty for all, beauty that enlightens and stirs to struggle.[27]

The self-avowedly revolutionary modernist art movement that came into being in Mexico following in the immediate aftermath of its revolution fashioned itself as a contribution to the

[27] David Alfaro Siqueiros, "Manifesto issued by the Union of Technical Workers, Painters, and Sculptors."

culture of a new historical epoch. The specific shape of this new cultural order was not yet known, but it was certain that it would address itself to the working masses and break with the established canons of bourgeois Europe. It only became gradually evident in the 1920s that this new order would not arise from the victory of the revolutions of the 1910s, but rather an outcome of their defeat.

In this dissertation, I approach the often-self-contradictory cultural politics of the "Mexican Renaissance" as a phenomenon conditioned by the passing of a Europe-centered and culturally bourgeois world order and its replacement, not by proletarian socialism, but by the emerging global hegemony of American capitalism. To express this perspective, it is necessary to narrate a many-sided simultaneity of shifting cultural and political horizons. While an exhaustive examination of these shifts would have been a task beyond the scope of a dissertation, in Anita Brenner's engagement with Mexico and its Renaissance between 1923 and 1927 I found a limited, workable standpoint from which this landscape of change could be studied and narrated. Brenner's journals from this period and her voluminous collection of personal papers at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center offered a detailed, close-up view of life among the artistic, intellectual, and political milieu that introduced the Mexican Renaissance into the United States. Personalities and episodes jumped out of the archival material, suggesting rich historical ramifications and demanding to be placed into context and woven together by means of historical narrative. As the reader will notice, the resulting text veers off from the standard style of argumentation usually expected from a history dissertation. The reason for this is that while I was trying to stay true to the anecdotal details and individual idiosyncrasies of the episodes and personalities I encountered in the archival sources, I was simultaneously attempting to assemble these small-scale features into a narrative structure that could also offer, as it were, a substantial, large-scale, world historical

frame. The outcome of this admittedly tentative, experimental method is not a series of arguments organized by logical progression, but an assemblage of stories, psychological portraits, and essayistic reflections set against a panoramic backdrop of international historical narrative. Using Anita Brenner's experiences in Mexico as a vantage point and a temporal frame, this dissertation seeks to vividly convey a simultaneity of cultural and political phenomena the nature of whose interconnectedness has, I believe, been invisible to conventional histories of Mexican or American arts, the Mexican Revolution, or the European 1920s.

Chapter One introduces the setting with a gesture of defamiliarization. Rather than beginning the story with a summary of the Mexican Revolution or with Anita Brenner's childhood, I narrate the impressions of the Soviet poet Vladimir Mayakovski during his visit to Mexico in the Summer of 1925. In these pages, the Futurist poet puzzles over Mexico's revolutionary politics and finds himself unmoved by nationalist fascination with antiquity characteristic of Mexico's cultural avant-garde. The reason Mayakovski visited Mexico was that he was trying to get into the United States, which had just enacted major immigration restrictions that would have prevented him from arriving directly by ship. This was also the situation of thousands of European migrants, many of them Jews, who were arriving in Veracruz that same Summer in the hope of eventually crossing the Rio Grande. This relatively small and largely forgotten immigration crisis opens up to a brief discussion of the xenophobic mood in the United States at the time as well as the plight Eastern European Jews in these years of growing antisemitism. This discussion about Jewish immigration to Mexico serves as the occasion to introduce the story's protagonist, Anita Brenner. At the time, Anita was working at Mexico City's B'nai B'rith lodge, an organization dedicated to helping settle newly arrived Jewish migrants, while simultaneously writing dispatches for the international *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* chronicling the problems faced by the new arrivals.

Although conditions were difficult for the migrants, Anita was convinced that Mexico was an ideal destination for Jewish migration. This was a case she made in one of her first pieces of writing for a major publication, "The Jews in Mexico," for a 1924 special Mexico-focused issue of *The Nation* published on the occasion of Plutarco Elías Calles' presidential campaign. In that article, Anita depicted Mexico as a nation in the midst of a process of ethnic self-definition, uniquely lacking in the kind of racial prejudice that ran rampant in the United States. As I argue in the chapter, this perspective was influenced by Manuel Gamio's version of *indigenismo*, which appealed to her less because of what it had to say about Mexico's indigenous population and more because it indicated the possibility of a freely and deliberately self-made ethnic identity. Anita believed that in Mexico she could freely and creatively inhabit her Jewishness without, as in the United States, having to be defined by her condition as an ethnic minority or, alternately, having to assimilate into a dominant culture.

Chapter Two describes Anita's early contacts with the community of expatriate intellectuals of the "cosmopolitan Mexican Summer," in particular Frances Toor, Carleton Beals, Robert Haberman, and Ernest Gruening. I write about Anita's participation in the launching of Frances Toor's influential magazine *Mexican Folkways*, and the influence of Carleton Beals in her decision to become a professional writer. The chapter primarily concerns itself with the shared historical experiences of the figures that shaped Anita Brenner while she was in Mexico. For this purpose, it flashes back to the time of America's entry into the first World War and discusses the devastating effect this moment had on the socialist left, and the disorienting, disillusioning effect it had on progressive intellectuals. The main argument I introduce in this chapter is that fascination with Mexico in the 1920s was linked to a process of political alienation and displacement that began during the War and extended into the Harding and Coolidge administrations. For Americans

who saw their political projects and engagements crushed in those years, Mexico represented an escape route into an alternate countercultural realm full of unsuspected opportunities for self-reinvention.

Having laid out this background, I then follow two very different figures who were defined by it and who went on to play an important role in Anita Brenner's Mexican education, Robert Haberman and Ernest Gruening, and use their stories to further flesh out the historical moment. Haberman was a Jewish-American Socialist Party member who landed in Mexico soon after the U.S. joined the first World War. In Mexico, Haberman soon got involved with Felipe Carrillo Puerto's Socialist Party of Yucatan. Following Carrillo Puerto's demise during the 1923-24 military rebellion led by Adolfo de la Huerta, Haberman became a kind of double agent working simultaneously for the CROM and the AFL, as well as a promoter of the Calles administration in the United States. One of Haberman's attempts to push progressive opinion in favor of Mexico's incoming administration was the 1924 issue of *The Nation* discussed in the previous chapter. This was made possible thanks to Haberman's relationship with Ernest Gruening, who was closely connected with that publication. In the 1910s, Gruening had been an admirer of Woodrow Wilson's reformism at home and idealism abroad. Disappointed with the terms of the Peace of 1919, he went on to become a life-long critic of U.S. imperialism, campaigning against the military occupation of Haiti, joining the staff of *The Nation,* and working for the Progressive Party Presidential campaign of "Peace Progressive" senator Robert La Follette. Through his relationship with Haberman, Gruening established a close connection with the Calles administration and became a leading pro-Mexico voice in the United States. In those days he visited Mexico frequently and began working on an ambitious book about the country, for which he hired Anita

Brenner as a research assistant. As I conclude in the chapter, this research became Anita's main source of income in those years, as well as an important source for her own Mexican writings.

Chapter Three narrates some of Anita Brenner's defining experiences as a student of Mexican art and culture, as well as her involvement with the Mexican muralist movement at a decisive turning point in its history. It begins with a description of the urban space she inhabited in those days, largely in downtown Mexico City, as well as her coursework at the National University. This description opens up to a discussion bringing together reflections on the place of the city in the imagination of foreign visitors searching for rural authenticity, the meaning of the "Renaissance" metaphor as applied to Mexico in those years, and the role of José Vasconcelos' education reform and Manuel Gamio's ethno-cultural nationalism in the context of national reconstruction. This discussion leads to a narrative about the early days of the muralist movement highlighting the figure of Jean Charlot and an account of Charlot's close relationships with José Clemente Orozco and Anita Brenner. The chapter then goes on to discuss some of Anita Brenner's earliest writings about Mexican Art, including the article "Mexican Renascence," which she wrote for the U.S. journal, *The Arts*, and already contained the core "Renaissance" narrative that would later prove so influential in the reception of Mexican modernism in the United States. Having established Anita's relationships with Charlot and Orozco, the chapter depicts their fate at the time of the muralist movement's post-Vasconcelian decline. While these were the years when Diego Rivera started gaining international recognition, Orozco was barely scraping by, and was only allowed to complete his murals at the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria thanks to Anita's direct intervention. Meanwhile, Jean Charlot, having lost his job as a mural painter, had to put his developing romantic relationship with Anita on hold when he found himself a job as an

archaeological illustrator for the Carnegie-funded archaeological project at Chichen Itza, led by Sylvanus Griswold Morley.

Chapter Four opens with a panoramic account of the international political conditions underlying the upswing of pacifist and anti-imperialist sentiment of the mid-1920s. These were the years of the Comintern's so-called "Second Period," in which the perspective of immediate world revolution, which the international Communist movement had held since 1917, was abandoned for a strategy of peaceful co-existence and defensive anti-imperialism. Moscow's turn to a discourse of national self-determination was in part an adaptation to the pacifist mood that emerged in Europe following the signing of the Dawes Plan, the Locarno treaties, and the admittance of Germany into the League of Nations, a mood that was expressed in the United States by the growing influence of a multitude of philanthropic non-governmental organizations opposing U.S. intervention in countries like Haiti and Nicaragua. In these circumstances, anti-imperialism and national self-determination became, in the mid-1920s, a common language shared widely across the political spectrum. As tensions grew between the U.S. and Mexico in 1926, this common language made it possible for the State Department to label all kinds of political actors as part of an international Communist conspiracy, from actual Communist affiliated front groups like LADLA, to the anti-Communist CROM, to the relatively conservative pacifist Ernest Gruening.

Having laid out this international context, I zoom back into Anita Brenner's activities in Mexico City, where in 1926 she had was hard at work on the manuscript that would eventually become *Idols Behind Altars*. I examine a book proposal submitted by Anita to the New York-based publisher Albert Boni, parsing out the variety of discursive appeals and rhetorical devices she rehearses and deploys in her attempt to present and sell a product which had at that point not yet

been sold in the United States—the Mexican Renaissance. Part of her sales pitch was the promise that the text would be accompanied by a wealth of illustrations, which she commissioned in 1926 to the photographers Edward Weston and Tina Modotti.

At this point, the chapter makes a series of sharp turns. From an account of Edward and Tina's relationship and their travels in search for images for Anita's book, the text shifts to a discussion of the tensions immediately preceding the Cristero War. Some remarks on the gendered dynamic of these tensions, in which women tended to be more closely associated with the Church and men with anti-clericalism, lead to a discussion of the transformation of sexual mores and the disintegration of traditional family structures taking place in the United States at the time. This discussion then leads to a series of psychological portraits Edward, Tina, and Anita, speculating on their alienation from the United States, their fascination with Mexico, and their relationship to art and politics.

The final stretch of the chapter follows Anita on her trip to the Yucatan Peninsula to visit Jean Charlot at the Carnegie excavation at Chichen Itza. In addition to continuing the story of Jean and Anita's tortured relationship, this section spends some time fleshing out a portrait of the archaeologist Sylvanus Morley touching on his work as a spy during the War, as well as the changing relationship between social science, philanthropic foundations, and U.S. Empire.

Chapter Five weaves together an account of the rapprochement between Mexico and the United States in 1927 with a narrative of Anita Brenner's activities that same year, her last in Mexico before settling in New York City, where she began her career as an interpreter and promoter of Mexico and its Renaissance. These stories are punctuated by brief descriptive digressions on the drawings José Clemente Orozco was producing around this time, the turning

point in his career when, having concluded his first round of mural work in Mexico City and seeing no further prospects there, he decided to try his luck in the United States. The first part of the chapter deals with the political circumstances that led to the defusing of the crisis in early 1927, including the Calles administration's efforts to influence U.S. public opinion in favor of Mexico, and the decisive intervention of Thomas Lamont and Dwight Morrow of the International Committee on Bankers on Mexico. The second part of the chapter is a close-up view of Anita's life in mid-1927. Upon returning to Mexico City from her trip to Chichen Itza, Anita had to put her own writing on hold to concentrate on helping Ernest Gruening complete research for his own book about Mexico. As her journal entries of those days reveal, this was a disorienting time filled with emotional turmoil. The third part of the chapter takes up the narrative of Mexico's reconciliation with the United States and uses it as a point of departure for an essayistic reflection on the appeal of Mexico in the 1920s as a place of civilizational rebirth at a time when social and cultural progress seemed to have driven society into a condition of barbarism. The fourth and fifth parts of the chapter follow Anita in the second half of 1927, her last weeks in Mexico City and her first months in New York. These final pages describe the circumstances of Anita's crucial involvement in one of the first major exhibitions of Mexican modernism in the United States, the Exhibition of Mexican Art which opened at New York City's Art Center and was co-sponsored by Mexico's National University and the Rockefeller Foundation's General Education Board.

Chapter One

> And the apostate or assimilated Jew, who might express delight and wonder at the Japanese tea ceremony and retain these impressions throughout a lifetime, is hard pressed to remember if Rosh Hashanah precedes or follows Yom Kippur. This is not a 'lack of interest.' It is panic.
>
> David Mamet, "Jewish but not too Jewish," (2006).

1.1. The Futurist

"The first class puke up wherever they like, the second—down over the third class; and the third, over themselves."[1]

This is how, in his memoir, *My Discovery of America*, Soviet poet Vladimir Mayakovski describes class relations aboard the steamship *L'Espagne* in the Summer of 1925, as it sailed the rough waters between a refueling stop in Havana and its final destination at the Port of Veracruz.

> "The classes fall out quite naturally. In the first class you get merchants, manufacturers of hats and collars, artistic big shots [he probably means himself] and nuns… In second class you get small-time travelling salesmen and apprentice intellectuals, who bang away at their Remingtons. Unnoticed always by the crew, they worm their way on to the first-class decks. They strike an attitude, as if to say, I'm no different from you: I'm wearing collars and cuffs too. But they are different, and they're asked, almost politely, to go back where they belong. Third class—is mere hold freight: economic immigrants from the Odessas of the whole world—boxers, snoops, Negroes."[2]

During the Cuban pit stop Mayakovski had met a Jewish typist from Odessa who said he was headed to Mexico to await entry into the United States. According to the typist, the wait for him would be about two years long. Mayakovski's situation was not so different. Like the typist, the poet was on his way to Mexico where he would have to apply for a visa to enter the United

[1] Vladimir Mayakovski, *My Discovery of America*, trans. Colum McCann (London: Hesperus Press, 2005), 6.

[2] Ibid., 4.

States. Unlike the typist, the poet was not arriving as a refugee, but as a Futurist, to see America's futuristic sights. Surely this would shorten the wait.

One sight that surprised him upon arrival in Veracruz was that of the luggage carriers, whom he described as "hundreds of little men in hats half a meter… fighting with each other over suitcases."

> But where are the Indians?' I asked my neighbor.
> "These are the Indians," my neighbor replied.
> I was mad about Indians, out of [the novels of James Fennimore] Cooper and Mayne Reid, until the age of twelve. And here I stand, dumbstruck, as though before my very eyes peacocks were being turned into chickens."[3]

It is doubtful the Futurist was so naïve as to expect Chief Chingachgook to meet him at the shore. More likely, he was setting up the next line in the account of his arrival, where instead of finding the expectedly exotic, he is welcomed by an unexpectedly familiar sight:

> I was well rewarded for my initial disappointment. Immediately beyond the customs house there began an incomprehensible, idiosyncratic, and amazing way of life.
> The first thing was a red flag with a hammer and sickle in the window of a two-story building.
> And this flag had nothing to do with any Soviet consulate. It was the "Prow Organization."
> A Mexican moves into an apartment and hoists a flag.
> It means: 'I'm pleased to have moved in and won't be paying any rent.' And that's it.
> Just try—and you'll be chucked out.[4]

Mayakovski is here referring to the tenants' movement that took hold of the city in the first half of the 1920s. Its figurehead was the *jarocho* anarchist Herón Proal—hence the garbled "Prow." But the movement was in fact led by María Luisa Marín, an anarchist who mobilized the city's women, particularly prostitutes and domestic workers, to oppose the exploitative practices

[3] Ibid., 11.

[4] Ibid., 12.

of local landlords. In 1922, at its height, the movement had forged an alliance with the revolutionary state governor, Adalberto Tejeda, as well as the longshore and textile workers' unions. Over thirty thousand of the city's poorest tenants had stopped paying rent. However, by the time Mayakovski passed through Veracruz, the movement was in decline. The red banners the Futurist saw had in fact gone up during a campaign to get Herón Proal out of jail.[5]

After a few hours exploring Veracruz, Mayakovski boarded a night train to Mexico City, where he expected to be received by fellow revolutionary artist, Diego Rivera.

> "The rail route from Vera Cruz to Mexico City is, they say, the most beautiful in the world. At the height of nine thousand feet it rises along precipices, between cliffs and through tropical forests. I don't know. I didn't see it. But the tropical night which passed by the carriage was something… In a completely blue ultramarine night, the black silhouettes of the palms looked like—long-haired bohemian artists."[6]

Mayakovski spoke no Spanish or English, only a bit of French. But Diego, who met the Futurist at the station, spoke a good amount of Russian. In the previous decade, Diego Rivera had lived for several years in Paris, and there had grown close to several artists in the Russian émigré community, such as Maximilian Voloshin, Ilya Ehrenburg, and the mother of his first child, Angelina Beloff.[7]

> From the station we went to the hotel to leave the luggage, then to the museum. On the way Diego acknowledged hundreds of greetings, shaking hands with those closest to him and exchanging shouts with people walking on the opposite side of the street. In the museum we looked at the ancient, round Aztec calendars engraved in stone from Mexican pyramids and at two-faced wind deities whose one face was chasing the other…They were not shown to me for nothing. The Mexican ambassador in Paris, Mr. [Alfonso] Reyes, a well-known Mexican novelist [sic], had already informed me that modern art in that country had its origins in the ancient, colorful, unsophisticated folk art of the Indians, not in the decadent eclectic

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[5] The definitive account of the tenants' movement is by Andrew Grant Wood, *Revolution in the Street: Women, Workers, and Urban Protest in Veracruz* (Wilmington: SR Books, 2001).

[6] Mayakovski, *My Discovery of America*.

[7] Ramón Favela, *Diego Rivera: The Cubist years* (Phoenix: Phoenix Art Museum, 1988).

> forms imported from Europe, and that the idea of art is part--perhaps not yet quite consciously so--of the idea of the struggle and liberation of colonial slaves.[8]

Mayakovski had journeyed across a continent and an ocean to reach, not Mexico, but New York City. As the flag bearer of not only Russian Futurism, but the entire Soviet avant-garde, Mayakovski had little use for "ancient, colorful, unsophisticated folk art," whether it be Russian or Mexican. In his angular verses, fantastical theater scenarios, and outlandish stage presence, he had fashioned himself as a prototype of the man of the future. Although some of his avant-garde colleagues—Sergei Eisenstein or Victor Shklovsky—may have found quaint folkish things interesting, he surely must have felt that a revolution is not a museum.

For over a century, the cultural establishments of both Russia and Mexico had looked to European and especially French artists and scientists as leading lights of universal culture. They did not admire and imitate these artists and scientists because they were representatives of French culture. Rather, they admired and imitated French culture because it had produced such artists and scientists. Without a doubt, this cultural hierarchy came to be taken for granted and led to all sorts of prejudices as it grew old and stale. But it originally emerged as a result of the unique Western European intellectual ferment surrounding the democratic, or "bourgeois" revolutions that shook the world between the 1760s and the 1810s.

Then at the turn of the twentieth century, a new revolutionary period began. Confrontations between labor and capital, the people and the state, were reaching a boiling point seemingly everywhere at once. Events like the 1905 sailors' mutiny on the Russian imperial battle cruiser Potemkin and the 1906 Cananea miners' strike in the Northern Mexican State of Sonora kicked

[8] Mayakovski, *My Discovery of America*, 15-16.

off a new era of international mass democratic insurrection. At just the same time, modernist artists in both Russia and Mexico found themselves increasingly skeptical and even resentful of the thoughtless low regard their French and British leading lights—the academicians, Comteans and Spencerians that reigned in late nineteenth century arts and science—held for the rich artistic traditions of their own provinces' provincials: Catholic Mexican *indios* and Orthodox Russian *muzhiks*.

Modernists came to believe that the arts and crafts of primitives, ancient and contemporary, should be embraced as national tradition, a legacy no more or less valid than the universal inheritance of the European Renaissance. This work belonged in an art gallery, not a natural history museum. By the time the revolutions of the 1910s arrived, modernists everywhere agreed that the "decadent eclectic forms imported from Europe," as Mayakovski put it, paraphrasing ambassador Alfonso Reyes (an important writer, but not of novels), needed to be overthrown.

In Europe during the 1910s, Diego Rivera's search for the most advanced painting practices had landed him in Montparnasse, where he became, for several years, a recognized figure of the cubist movement. During the War and the international revolutionary crisis of 1914-1919, Diego Rivera's pursuit of cubism was a result of his recognition that the times called for an uncompromising rebellion against established artistic practices of a decaying bourgeois order. However, by the end of the War, he was growing impatient with the social and cultural marginality he faced as a result of his cultural rebellion among the bohemians of the Montparnasse art colony. As the painter's best biographer, Bertram Wolfe, put it,

At no time in history was art so isolated from life as the moment when Diego came to Europe. Folk arts and communal feeling for art had perished in the great centers of modern industry. Poverty could provide no patronage, degraded taste no sustenance nor inspiration. The public building and the public statue no longer had any connection with art. The bourgeois had no use for painting and sculpture; the plutocrat, if he took a flyer in aesthetics, could not trust his own taste, preferring to invest in dead beauty of assured value rather than risk sums on living artists.[9]

Fig. 1.1: Diego Rivera, *Maternidad, Angelina y el niño Diego*. After August 1916, oil on Canvas. Museo de Arte Alvar y Carmen T. de Carrillo Gil, Mexico City, Mexico.

Further, even if his prodigious talents had allowed him to become a credible practitioner of cubism, he also began to resent the ascetic attitude its methods demanded of him. Diego's

[9] Bertram D. Wolfe, *The Fabulous Life of Diego Rivera* (New York: Stein and Day, 1963), 109.

natural inclination was not toward dissonance but toward harmony. In his cubist work, it was often as if he only approached the shattering of the picture plane reluctantly, while relishing only in its reconstruction. This tendency is exemplified in the portrait he painted of his romantic partner, Angelina Beloff, and their child, baby Diego (Fig. 1). The perspective is not so much shattered as it is gently cracked. The fragments of color and form are arranged decoratively, they are modernist ornaments decorating a solidly rendered old-fashioned Madonna figure. For a painter so keen on artistic revolution, Diego Rivera always wanted to make pleasing, inviting pictures that could be admired by all.

After his infant son died due to the poverty of life during wartime in the Montparnasse art colony, Diego Rivera abandoned France, Angelina, and cubism, and found his way back to Mexico in 1921. The Mexican Revolution allowed him to leave behind his condition of dissidence and marginality to become instead part of a revolutionary cultural establishment. Always everywhere ruthlessly productive, Diego had little trouble gaining an erudite understanding of "the ancient colorful sophisticated art of the Indians"—as Alfonso Reyes put it to Mayakovski—and inventively developing and integrating new popular and nationalist motifs to his already wide repertoire of modernist methods.

In Russia, Mayakovski had also gone from marginal dissident to leading member of a cultural revolution. Before the Revolution, he began his career as a Russian Futurist co-signing the 1913 manifesto "A Slap in the Face of Public Taste," and writing hallucinatory poems like "Backbone Flute." Then, after 1917, he became a major figure in the Soviet avant-garde as an agit-prop jack-of-all-trades during the Russian Civil War and as a theorist of revolutionary art in the journal Left Front of the Arts, (LEF), which he co-founded. But he was not as adaptable to changing political conditions as Diego Rivera. Following the Civil War, the Soviet State began to

distance itself from the kind of independent cultural organizations that had defined Mayakovski's career as a revolutionary poet. By the time the Futurist visited Mexico, Futurism was no longer the kind of literary current encouraged by state authorities, and Mayakovski was having a hard time finding his place in the coalescing revolutionary order.

Throughout his career, Diego was always able to change with the times, adapting to shifting political moods and changing the nature of his work in relation to the changing demands of his patrons. Mayakovski had been a Futurist in 1913 and stayed a Futurist all the way until 1930 when, finding himself unable to let go of the revolution in counterrevolutionary times, he famously ended his life by shooting himself in the heart.

But that was still five years away. In the Summer of 1925, when he arrived in Mexico, it must have been strange for Mayakovski when Diego Rivera took him straight from the train station to an archaeology museum. He had little patience for exotic curiosities.

> There is exotica in the shops, but it's for the idiots, for tourists buying up souvenirs, for scrawny American women. For their benefit there are jumping beans, glaringly bright serapes which all the donkeys of Guadalajara would shy away from, handbags with printed Aztec calendars, postcards of parrots from real parrot feathers. The Mexican is more likely to stop in front of the Germans', the linen shops of the French, or the furniture shops of the Americans."[10]

What the Futurist saw around him was not ancient spiritual wealth, but contemporary material dispossession:

> This is a country cleaned out by civilizing American imperialists. A country in which before the discovery of America, the silver that was lying about and was not even considered a precious metal. A country in which now you can't buy a pound of silver, but have to look for it on Wall street, in New York. American silver,

[10] Vladimir Mayakovski, *My Discovery of America*, 26.

> American oil. In the north of Mexico both the dense railway network and the industry, with its up to the minute technology, are under American ownership...[11]

When he was taken to a bullfight, Mayakovski was appalled by the cruelty on display, and reportedly "experienced supreme joy" when "the bull managed to drive a horn between the bullfighter's ribs, taking revenge for his comrade-bulls…" The only thing he regretted was "that it was not possible to mount machine guns on the bull's horns and train him to shoot."[12]

Mayakovski's impressions were not all negative, more than once he commented on the unique graciousness of Mexicans toward foreign visitors. He was also impressed by the futuristic spirit with which Mexicans had embraced the automobile:

> Mexico City is the world's top town—for its number of car accidents… A driver in Mexico is not held responsible for causing injuries (watch out for yourself!), therefore the average expectation of life without injury is ten years. Once every ten years everyone gets run over. It's true that there are people who may go twenty years without getting run over, but that's at the expense of those who get run over every five years.[13]

The speeding vehicles were a preview of the kind of thing he was hoping to see in New York City. Not American Indian artifacts at the Smithsonian Institution or medieval Russian icons at the Metropolitan Museum, but things that did not yet exist in Europe. Steel armature towers, one hundred stories high, and crowds who spoke a thousand different languages transported by electrical trains across great suspension bridges. There were so many automobiles in the city center that they used colossal elevators to stack them one on top of another for storage! There was a district in the city where the free children and grandchildren of Southern slaves had set up shop to

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[11] Ibid., 24.

[12] Ibid., 21.

[13] Ibid., 25.

write revolutionary poetry. Mayakovski knew little about them, since he did not read English. But maybe they were futurists in the making. He had met one of them, Claude McKay, three years before, when he visited Moscow.

Perhaps, had the Soviet poet not been misled by Diego Rivera and Alfonso Reyes' characterization of the Mexican Revolution as a return to distant provinces of the past, Mayakovski would have found things other than car crashes to appeal to his sensibilities. Anyone who looked closely, for instance, at the oil fields of Tampico would have been able to see that Mexico's working masses had a lot more in common with the proletariat in New York and Moscow than with the Mayans of ancient Chichen Itza. The sight of such an alien industrial landscape would have appealed to him, as well as the militancy of the oil workers, who since the early 1920s had been terrorizing their employers. The danger of "Bolshevism" south of the border was a real fear for American oil men, though they certainly exaggerated their fear in their efforts to get the State Department to intervene on their behalf. Still, even in Tampico, as in Veracruz, political radicalism was in decline. Mayakovski had arrived too late to see the most revolutionary sights of the Mexican revolution. He was certainly not too impressed with the achievements of his fellow Communists: "The Mexican Communist party is small; in a proletariat of a million and a half, there are about two thousand Communists—but out of this figure only about three hundred comrades are working activists…"[14]

After a few weeks' wait, Mayakovski got his tourist visa and left Mexico for the United States. As a Bolshevik and a Futurist, he had not been particularly impressed, but like almost every foreign visitor, he appreciated the warmth of his welcome. "I left Mexico unwillingly. All the actions I have described so far are carried out by extremely hospitable and extremely pleasant and

[14] Ibid., 30.

kind people… A Mexican giving his address, will never just say 'this is my address.' A Mexican will inform you 'now you know where your home is.'[15]

1.2. Zion, Sonora

The reason Vladimir Mayakovski landed in Veracruz in the first place was that he would have certainly been turned away at Ellis Island. The new immigration quotas of 1921 and 1924 had severely restricted migration to the U.S. from Europe. It was an epochal change. The days were gone for good when the "New Colossus" welcomed the "huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore… the homeless, tempest-tost."[16] A decade before, in preparation for its reluctant-yet-inevitable entry into the War, the Wilson administration granted itself an arsenal of emergency powers to whip the country into shape for the conflict. By 1917, the federal government had not only restricted immigration, but had also begun a campaign of mass deportation. Following the peace of 1918, few of these emergency measures really went away. They rarely do. With the German enemy defeated, wartime state-sanctioned xenophobia found a new peacetime nemesis: revolutionaries; foreigners like Mayakovski, but more often, long-term immigrants, like the anarchist Emma Goldman, who after more than thirty years in the United States, was deported to Russia in 1917.

In the face of the new restrictions, it was not just Mayakovski that tried his luck getting in through the southern border. Hundreds of East European Jews, like the typist from Odessa Mayakovski met in Cuba, had recently started disembarking in Veracruz and Tampico every month. They were seeking refuge from the swelling tide of anti-Semitic terror that had gradually

[15] Ibid., 35.

[16] Emma Lazarus, "The New Colossus," first published on the Statue of Liberty, New York, 1875.

flooded their homelands since the turn of the century. More than a million Russian Jews had migrated to the United States in the two decades before the War. And if things were bad in the old country before the War, they only got worse after. The collapse of the Russian, Austro-Hungarian, and German empires submerged the region in a long protracted civil war between revolution and counterrevolution, Reds and Whites. Atrocities were committed on both sides, to be sure. But while the leading ranks of the Reds were full of Jewish revolutionaries on a mission to destroy the pro-pogrom authorities of barbarous Russia, the Whites' stated political program more or less openly claimed that anti-Jewish pogroms made the world a better place. Their virulent antisemitism spread westward throughout the 1920s, a contagion carried and spread by those Europeans most hell-bent on saving their national homelands from the international Bolshevik menace. It did not cease until the 1940s, when all of Europe united, more or less willingly under German leadership, to lead a final campaign to put an end to the Soviets and finally wipe out the Jews. The former campaign fell apart when it reached Stalingrad, but the latter was a near complete success.

The refugees landing in Veracruz at the time mostly settled in Mexico City. Whether they saw it as a temporary station on the way to the United States or as a final destination, life in Mexico City was not easy. They arrived, often alone and always penniless, speaking no Spanish, and worst of all, not welcome by the small, previously settled communities of Western European and Middle Eastern Jews. Several weeks after Mayakovski's arrival, Anita Brenner, a Jewish, nineteen-year-old aspiring journalist born in Aguascalientes, Mexico and raised in San Antonio, Texas, wrote about the sad death of one of these refugees in a short dispatch for the international *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*:

> Mexico City, Mexico. August 1, 1925… Jacob Muze, a young Jew from Bukovina, hung himself in his living quarters here two days ago. He was found by

> his companion and roommate, a German and non-Jew who stated that he did not know why Muze took his own life.
>
> Muze came here about six months ago and has since been engaged in peddling and doing commerce on a small scale. He had very little to do with the Jewish community. It was stated that he owed his German companion six hundred pesos and did not see his way clear to paying them, for which reason he committed suicide.
>
> Due to the excessive rates demanded for room in the only Jewish cemetery of Mexico City, which belongs to the Sephardic colony, Muze was not buried in Jewish ground.[17]

Anita Brenner had arrived in Mexico a year and a half prior, in late 1923, after dropping out of the University of Texas at the end of her freshman year. She had convinced her parents to let her transfer to Mexico's National University. To calm the Brenners' worries about such a risky venture, Anita found herself an opportunity to work part time for Dr. Joseph Weinberger. When Dr. Weinberger was not serving the Mexico City expat community with American-standard dental care, he was serving the Jewish Community as director of the city's B'nai B'rith lodge. The Brenner's rabbi had known Dr. Weinberger for years and assured them the dentist was of good character and could be trusted to keep an eye on Anita. Several months later, working at the B'nai B'rith, the recently arrived Anita witnessed the influx of Jewish refugees with her own eyes. This impression must have had something to do with her lifelong commitment to refugee aid. It was also during this time that she first made up her mind to become a professional journalist. The plight of the Jews in revolutionary Mexico was a good scoop. A draft for another dispatch from the Summer of 1925 reads:

> Five hundred Jewish farmers make a hostile demonstration in the streets of Mexico toward the representatives of the American Emergency Relief Committee. And this is why:
>
> They want to work on the land, and they cannot, because they have no land, and they attribute to the indifference of American Jewry their plight. The Mexican government, strong as never before, maintains consistently a friendly and helpful

[17] Anita Brenner, draft dispatch for *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, August 1, 1925, AB 25.1.

> attitude toward Jewish colonists, promising free *viseés*, free entrance of machinery and other necessities, material reduction in transportation—everything a government can do which has no land of its own to give, and which needs its money for its own peasants, and which is faced with a serious agrarian problem.
>
> In the meantime, Jewish farmers report favorably on the possibility of agricultural colonization, and letter after letter from refugees in Europe announce their intentions of coming to Mexico, intentions which are confirmed when boat after boat brings immigrants in ever increasing numbers…
>
> The association of Jewish Farmers of Mexico—farmers without farms—was formed in December 1924, with a membership of one hundred and fifty… This was immediately after the invitation of President Calles of Mexico to stranded Jews, and his manifestation of sympathy and willingness to aid and protect the refugees. It was thought by the Jewish community in Mexico that this proposal was looked upon favorably.[18]

In late 1924, President-elect Plutarco Elías Calles had indeed published a statement to "…welcome warmly the immigration of Jews from Eastern Europe to engage here in agricultural and industrial pursuits."[19] Calles was, on the one hand, sincere. Without a doubt, for however long he considered the refugees persecution, he must have found it abhorrent. But Calles was famously never a man of humanitarian motives. The invitation is better understood as part of a larger campaign by the incoming administration to ingratiate the Mexican Revolution in general, but his administration in particular with U.S. progressives. This impressionable but influential sector of public opinion, Calles' team may have wagered, could be led to tell themselves a story about a "peasant revolution" so radically generous, and a "labor government" so cosmopolitan and progressive that it could offer a homeland to a group of aspiring *kibbutzniks*. A glance at the proverbial small print would have informed the reader that all Calles was offering was a good deal on a piece of real estate. That is to say, if the American Jewish community would be willing to

[18] Anita Brenner, draft for dispatch for *The Jewish Telegraphic Agency,* n.d., AB 25.1.

[19] Calles' invitation was first published in *El Universal*, August 11, 1924. Since 1920s Mexican newspapers are sorely unavailable nearly anywhere outside the UNAM hemeroteca, I found it quoted in Daniela Gleizer, *Unwelcome Exiles: Mexico and the Jewish Refugees from Nazism, 1933-1945* (Boston: Brill Academic Publishing, 2013).

purchase some national land for their stranded brothers, the Mexican Revolution would be happy to accommodate them. The revenue was sorely needed, and as Calles well knew, the Jews would be more or less safe in Mexico, where pogroms were reserved for the Chinese.[20]

As part of this same public relations effort, the progressive weekly *The Nation* celebrated Calles' accession to the throne by publishing a special issue on Mexico. The contents announced on the cover included "Art and Revolution," by Bertram Wolfe, "Mexico's Credit," by Rafael Nieto, "'Calles' Program,' an election speech by the new president," "What Freedom Means" by José Vasconcelos, and "The Jew in Mexico," by Anita Brenner. It also included some excellent caricatures of notables such as Calles, Vasconcelos, and Diego Rivera by the Mexican cartoonist resident in New York, Miguel Covarrubias (Figs. 1.2, 1.3, and 1.4). Two non-Mexico features were also included in the issue: "The New Peace in Europe," and a glowing profile of Progressive Party presidential candidate Robert La Follette, who would soon be defeated by the Republican Calvin Coolidge.[21] Because she was just starting out, Brenner's article made the beginners' mistake of being too thoughtful and inconclusive for the bleeding heart boosterism the occasion called for. Although some of Brenner's claims are indeed a bit foggy and farfetched, the piece comes off as a sincere and original meditation on the meaning of Jewish identity and assimilation in the context of the Mexican Revolution.

> It is practically an historical axiom that the Jew thrives on prejudice, on persecution; tolerated, he loses the intensity of his race consciousness, tends to disseminate and assimilate. But in Mexico, the assimilation of the Jew is more than a tendency, it is the key of his future and the new land. Not only does the Jewish

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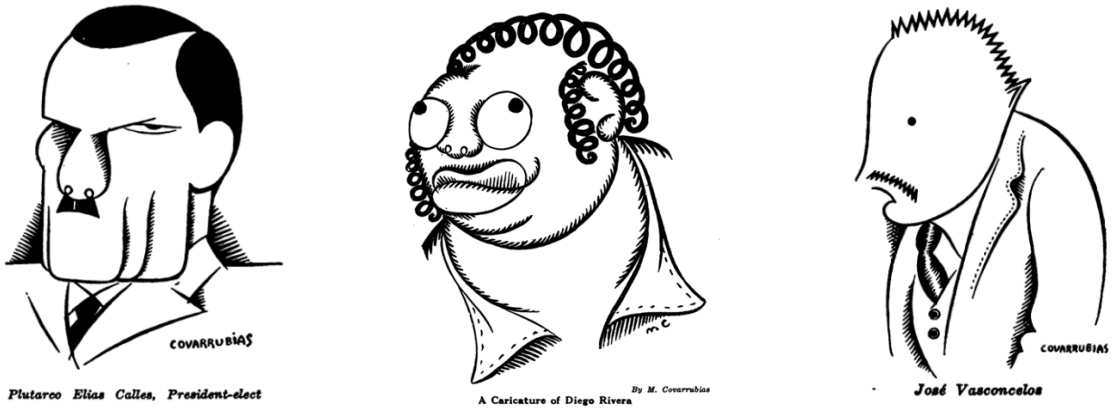
[20] Sad but true. *La casa del dolor ajeno: Crónica de un pequeño genocidio en La Laguna* (Mexico City: Random House, 2016)

[21] In the early 1950s, Daniel Bell described the La Follette candidacy as an "Indian Summer of Progressivism." Much of what this dissertation examines takes place under the spell of this pre-Great Depression Indian Summer. Daniel Bell, *Marxian Socialism in the United States* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

> tradition of race preservation struggle—if one may put it so—against a wholly unexpected tolerance; it is completely disconcerted, undermined, by the Mexican attitude of indifference… The Mexican attitude of casual tolerance does not, however, limit itself to religious fields. Personally, socially, he does not hate the Jew, and consequently the Jew cannot despise him, as he always has despised the Gentile in other lands. If there is no hate and contempt, there is no reason for aloofness. That is why Mexico City, with its very large Jewish population, has no Jewish community.[22]



Figs. 1.2, 1.3, 1.4: Miguel Covarrubias, Caricatures of Plutarco Elías Calles, Diego Rivera, and José Vasconcelos, 1924, *The Nation* 119 (August 27, 1924) 207-13.

Unlike the high-minded *Nation*-reading target audience of Calles' public relations campaign, the leaders of Mexico's newly formed Association of Jewish Farmers understood that despite the invitation and relative tolerance, they could not expect to get something for nothing. Knowing that it was up to them to convince American Jews to help with the purchase, the Association took the initiative and sent a crew to survey available lands in Sonora. Their report was positive. The desert could be made to bloom. So, they went and met with Maurice Hexter, representative in Mexico of the American Jewish Congress (AJC), their line of communication with American Jewry. But Hexter informed them that unfortunately, the AJC had already received

[22] "The Jews in Mexico," *The Nation* 119 (August 27, 1924).

and rejected a similar offer from President Álvaro Obregón two years before, and after some investigation, it was decided that colonization of Mexico would not be encouraged by the AJC any time in the near future. Despite traversing a continent and an ocean in search of a new homeland, the Association of Jewish Farmers was left high and dry. How do you say "háganle como puedan" in Yiddish?

According to Brenner's account, this was the reason for their public demonstration.

> Hence, when a special investigator representing the Emergency Relief Committee stated that 'I have advised them not to come in great numbers from Europe without the means of capacity to become real farmers' a wave of resentment and disappointment, fermented by misunderstanding, lifted Jewish feeling into a mob demonstration that was an unheard of and not understood thing in Mexico. The leaders of the mob stated, as the reason for the attack, "We came here filled with enthusiasm, and nothing tangible has come out of all the promises… and Dr. Hexter informed us that no money was forthcoming nor would land be procured for us.[23]

Their dream of property, a place to call their own, suspended in the balance of unknown political intrigues; their anxious filling of forms and signing of collective petitions; their desperate declarations advocating for their own and every man's right to live by the fruits of his labor; the vanishing public advocates and contemptuous bureaucrats; the bad news delivered by allies who could be doing much more to help… These Jews were having an authentic campesino experience; the universal, transnational, campesino experience of being a government's official talking point while remaining its lowest priority.

Maurice Hexter was only the messenger. The decision had been made by Rabbi Martin Zielonka, of El Paso. In 1922, he had written to Obregón: I'm not a Zionist, but I would prefer that the money for such projects be spent in Palestine rather than Mexico. There we could have

[23] Anita Brenner, rough draft for dispatch for *The Jewish Telegraphic Agency,* AB 25.1.

'sentiment' holding our immigrants to the soil."[24] Zielonka's comment illustrates, not only the growing acceptance of Zionism among American Jewish community leaders, but also the influence of the Wilsonian version of national self-determination, a vaguely segregationist vision where every national group ought to be attached by "sentiment" to their corresponding ethno-state. This emerging normative view of a world order of nations began to take hold after the War and became the reigning orthodoxy among leading member of American Jewish community in the 1920s and 30s.

Anita Brenner always kept such national "sentiments" at arm's length. She consciously fashioned herself after the model of the non-Jewish Jew, described in an essay with that title by Isaac Deutscher, biographer of Leon Trotsky, who counted Spinoza, Marx, and Trotsky among such Jewish non-Jews, "They were a priori exceptional in that as Jews they dwelt on the borderlines of various civilizations, religions, and national cultures. Their mind matured where the most diverse cultural influences crossed and fertilized each other. They lived on the margins or in the nooks and crannies of their respective nations. Each of them was in society and yet not in it, of it and yet not of it."[25]

At a time of growing anti-Semitism in the United States, Anita Brenner saw Mexico as a place where she could inhabit her rootlessness without being made a pariah. And just as there was no antisemitic prejudice to set her apart, neither was there a cohesive, established Jewish community to impose its values and obligations on her. It was the perfect place for a non-Jewish Jew like herself to come of age and get an education. In Mexico, her own Judaism became

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[24] Corinne A. Krause, "Mexico--Another Promised Land? A Review of Projects for Jewish Colonization in Mexico: 1881-1925," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 61, no. 4 (Jun. 1972), 338.

[25] Isaac Deutscher, "The Non-Jewish Jew" In *The Non-Jewish Jew: Essays on Judaism in the modern world, from philosophy and history to art and politics*, eds. Isaac and Tamara Deutscher (New York: Verso, 2017).

something like a personal quirk, a literary resource, a cultural artifact, a series of beautiful pictures and stories to be studied and appreciated but not necessarily lived by. In Mexico Jewish folkways were neither more nor less valid than ancient Mayan codices, Aztec stone monuments, or colonial ex-votos.

> Even did the Jews not wish themselves acclimatized, adapted, and molded into the future of Mexico they would be powerless to prevent it. A synagogue and a rabbi could serve only retardation purposes. Intermarriage is certain, simply because Jewish men are many and Jewish women few. In spite of rabbis, Jewish homes, papers, and clubs, the Jew will be forced into the fiber of the coming Mexico. He is losing himself in a race that is finding itself. For Mexico, all Latin America, is today breaking into its first stride, is literally being born. The complex elements that have for several hundred years made Mexico a land of many peoples are beginning to web together. The Jew here is at his old-world task of disseminating, underpinning, pushing, spreading the new civilization. If he has ever had a purpose, a special mission, this is of welding, because of his remarkable fitness for it, it is his surely his 'divine role'… Consciously or unconsciously, unwilling acquiescent, or deliberate, the Jew in Mexico, whether he is Arabian Turkish, Russian, English, Polish, or German, whether he is a merchant, teacher, peddler, or artist, educated or ignorant, is becoming as Mexican a Mexican as the descendent of the conquistador or the son of the native Indian.[26]

The conspicuous word, "welding," is a reference to Manuel Gamio's famous metaphor, "forjar patria." According to Manuel Gamio, Mexico was a fatherland right out of the furnace, a racial and cultural alloy, hotter than any melting pot, somewhat like bronze, but metaphorical, heated, or perhaps reheated, to the ideal temperature and ready for the artist's hammer and tongs. The metaphor is often repeated, despite its awful awkwardness—which may after all be what makes it memorable. The awkwardness was the result of the opposed purposes that his nationalism failed to reconcile. Gamio was a thinker of two minds. On the one hand, as an anthropologist who earned his degree under Franz Boas, he was a scientific opponent of pseudoscientific racial biologism and eugenics. On the other hand, as nationalist ideologue and aspiring statesman, he

[26] Brenner, "The Jews in Mexico."

could not help himself in wanting to "*mejorar la raza*," he could not help but dredge up the old obsession with miscegenation characteristic of the Mexican ruling class.[27]

In Mexico Anita Brenner immediately got to work mulling over and appropriating the ideas of Manuel Gamio, dean of Mexican anthropologists, among other "*caudillos culturales*" and adjacent artists, revolutionists, politicos, propagandists, philanthropists and social scientists—Mexican, American, and other. It was an education she could not have gotten at the University of Texas. They bequeathed to Anita many profound questions and few convincing answers about the recently revolutionized world and its social and political destiny, where she would be spending the rest of her life. Here are a few of them: As a non-practicing Jew, was she free to opt out of the stubborn custom of being persecuted? If so, could it be done without becoming American? Could a nation really reassess and reinvent its traditions the way Mexico seemed to be doing? As a Jew, had she been granted a higher degree of liberty to trade in such creations? If so, was her experience of cultural tradition less real, less authentic? Must racial ideologies be abandoned, or could they be repurposed? Is national identity nothing more than artifice? If so, are nations works of art to be put on display?

Anita Brenner was sure about one thing at least: in Mexico, unlike anywhere else, she would be safe from both European pogroms and from the American Jewish community. She would be safe from both persecution and assimilation—safe from the dreary destiny that awaited the rest of her freshman class back in Austin. The spiritual death of assimilation. Becoming a gentile, becoming genteel, protestant, a middle-class Texan—a white-collar Babbitt, or worse, the wife of a middle-class Texan or a white-collar Babbitt.

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[27] These statements on Gamio originate from David Brading, "Manuel Gamio and Official Indigenismo in Mexico," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 7, no. 1 (1988), and Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, "Stereophonic Scientific Modernisms: Social Science between Mexico and the United States, 1880s-1930s," *The Journal of American History*, 86, no. 3 (Dec. 1999).

This anxiety of assimilation was common among the expatriate community of Mexico City, both Jewish and non-Jewish. Vladimir Mayakovski, would have diagnosed this anxiety as a familiar symptom of a bohemian neurasthenia, typical of the petit bourgeois in decline. Jakob Muze—*desde ultratumba*—would have not understood what the problem was. The young Ukrainian Jew from Bukovina who sailed across the Atlantic but could not afford to make it across the Rio Grande, would have found the notion of rejecting a life of full-bellied Americanism absolutely unfathomable

Chapter Two

> There is no passage back across to the lands of yesterday. Those for whom yesterday means anything, whose interests and credentials are on the other side of the barrier, exhort us dully or frantically to scale that obstacle (largely built by their blunders and egotisms) and return to the Past. On the other hand, those whose interests lie all ahead, whose credentials are in the future, move in this abrupt shadow with satisfaction, forward, and away from the sealed and obstructed past.… So we, then, are the creatures of a new state of human life, as different from nineteenth-century England, say, as the Renaissance was from the Middle Ages. We are, however, weak in numbers as yet, and to some extent, uncertain and untried. What steps are being taken for our welfare, how are we provided for?
>
> Percy Wyndham Lewis, "The Children of the New Epoch" (1921).

Anita Brenner's 1924 article, "The Jews in Mexico," for *The Nation*, was a promising debut for her career as a public intellectual. In the pages of a well-established publication with a wide readership, she had brought together several topics that contemporary American liberals, progressives, and radicals viewed as great pressing questions of the day: revolution, race, migration, and the plight of European Jews. Although its approach was rather impressionistic and its conclusions equivocal, the article displayed its author's particular talent for cross-pollinating big questions and timely topics in unfamiliar and provocative ways. The mass arrival of Jewish migrants to Mexican shores in 1924-25 was a major event, an unforeseen consequence of U.S. immigration policy change with international ramifications.[1] That is, it was a major scoop, and as an aspiring journalist working at Mexico City's B'nai B'rith lodge, Anita was uniquely positioned

[1] In addition to the literature already cited in Chapter One, on twentieth century development of the Jewish Community in Mexico in Mexico see also, Ingrid Rehn Decker, and Marie-Elisabeth, *Jüdisches Exil in Mexiko und der Dominikanischen Republik 1923-2010* (Vienna: Erhard R. Konstanz, Hartung-Gorre, 2011); Adina Cimet, *Ashkenazi Jews in Mexico: Ideologies in the Structuring of a Community* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997).

to report on the matter, and was able to successfully take it as an opportunity to earn a measure of public recognition.

In the Summer of 1925, the English language section of a major Mexico City newspaper, *El Heraldo de México*, mentioned her by name as a leading voice on the issue. The article, which was itself largely based on Anita's own reporting for the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, lamented the difficult conditions faced by the refugees and described the inadequate efforts of Mexico City's Jewish community to help their newly arrived brethren. "Since these pioneer efforts failed to form into a definite society for the relief of the Hebrews, the B'nai B'rith then came into the field and is today virtually the headquarters of poverty-stricken Jews in Mexico. As far back as August 1924, articles began to appear in the American publications dealing with the Jewish situation in Mexico and among those mostly commented in Hebrew circles was an article in 'The Nation' by Anita Brenner."[2]

Although writing about Jewish issues for publications like the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, The *Jewish Morning Journal*, and *Menorah Journal* would be an important part of Anita Brenner's career, the focus of her work as a writer would be Mexico—its revolution and its post-revolutionary artistic and cultural "renaissance." This chapter seeks to answer the questions of how it came to be that Anita Brenner began to pursue this particular subject, and why it was that there were so many other Americans doing the same. It is divided into three parts. The first describes the way our protagonist made her earliest contacts among the community of expatriates that introduced her to her Mexicanist vocation. Having laid out the circumstances of Anita's apprenticeship among figures such as Frances Toor and Carleton Beals, the second part flashes back and zooms out to present a larger scale historical panorama of the generational experience,

[2] "Jews in Country are not In Want," *El Heraldo de México*, August 6, 1925. AB, 25.2.

during the War and in its immediate aftermath, that led such figures to seek refuge and redemption in Mexico. The third part follows the political adventures of one of these U.S. expatriates in Mexico, Robert Haberman, which serve to set up the Mexican political context in which Anita Brenner and her milieu operated in the mid-1920s.

2.1. Folkways

Anita Brenner arrived in Mexico City in the Fall of 1923, when she was just eighteen years old. At this point she had not yet started keeping a detailed daily journal—she would not start until about a year later—so the early months of her stay in Mexico are something of a blur. According to her daughter and biographer Susannah Glusker, upon arrival Anita was enrolled in the National University and taught English at the Presbyterian Escuela Normal de San Angel, where her wages included room and board.[3] Although her parents had only agreed to let her go to Mexico on the condition that J.L. Weinberger, head of the Mexico City B'nai B'rith headquarters, would keep some kind of supervisory eye on her, it is not clear whether she started working for him immediately upon arrival. It is also not clear whether her work at B'nai B'rith was the reason she stopped teaching English at the Presbyterian school and moved out on her own. Whatever the precise order of events may have been, what it certain is that it was J.L. Weinberger's wife, Frances Toor—known to posterity as Paca Toor, the founder of the influential magazine Mexican Folkways—that Anita Brenner was introduced to the transnational milieu of artists, radicals, and

[3] Anita Brenner's archive contains a wealth of material about her life and times. However, it seems like she did not start collecting her papers until about 1924. The same is the case with her journal, which is also very rich and detailed, but only begins in 1925. For details on her earliest months in Mexico, in 1923, I had to rely on a handful of lines from the biography written by her daughter. Susannah Joel Glusker, *Anita Brenner: A Mind of Her Own* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 2010).

intellectuals who set her on her path to a career as a promoter of Mexico's post-revolutionary cultural "renaissance."

The available details of Toor's life before *Folkways* are rather sketchy. Among the group of American women who played leading roles in the Mexican Renaissance, including Katherine Anne Porter, Ella Wolfe, Alma Reed, Thorberg Haberman, and Frances Flynn Paine, she was the one who most influenced the course of Anita Brenner's own involvement. Toor grew up in upstate New York, graduated from the University of California, and taught high school Spanish somewhere on the West Coast. She arrived in Mexico in 1922 to attend the National University's Escuela de Verano. This summer school was, at its core, meant to teach pedagogy to Spanish language teachers visiting from abroad. But following the designs of its founder and director, the philologist and peripatetic Pan-American man of letters Pedro Henríquez Ureña, the Escuela de Verano became a center for the international promotion of the Vasconcelian cultural project. Among the summer school's personnel were the philologist Federico de Onís, the historian Daniel Cosío Villegas, and the art historian Manuel Romero de Terreros. In 1922, the art critic Walter Pach, one of the earliest proponents of European modernist painting in the United States, taught a course on modern art at the Escuela de Verano, which was attended by members of the nascent muralist movement, including Jean Charlot and José Clemente Orozco.[4] Three years later, the post-Vasconcelian pedagogue Moisés Sáenz was able to bring his admired role model, John Dewey, to the school as a visiting lecturer.[5] The Escuela de Verano was a great success. In its first session,

[4] About Walter Pach as proponent of European modern art in America, see Laurette E. McCarthy and Walter Pach, *Walter Pach (1883-1958) The Armory Show and the Untold Story of Modern Art in America (*University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011).

[5] About Moisés Sáenz and his Deweyism, see Raúl Majía Zúñiga, *Moisés Sáenz, educador de México* (Apodaca: Presidencia Municipal de Apodaca, N.L., 2001).

Summer 1921, it was attended by 67 foreign students, the number grew to 403 the following year—when Frances Toor attended—and then over six hundred in 1923. As Henríquez Ureña had envisioned, the summer courses turned their participants into allies. Walter Pach and John Dewey both returned to the United States as great admirers and vocal champions of Mexico's post-revolutionary cultural rebirth. In an essay on Diego Rivera and Jose Clemente Orozco, Walter Pach recalls his impressions when he first visited in 1922:

> The Mexican room of our Museum of National History had been a source of deep pleasure to me, and I thought, my study of the collections there had prepared me for what I was to see in the country itself. But that was one of my mistakes, a big one. The impact of those tremendous works in Mexico City was not simply greater than I dreamed, it was a new horizon that opened up for me. I wrote to Elie Faure that New York seemed by a comparison a mere prolongation of London, Paris, and Berlin: for the first time in my life I felt myself to be in a New World…
>
> Everything was for the revolution: men's enthusiasm in teaching people how to read and how to write, the beauty of the new buildings, the cheap editions of the classics, popular dancing and music, and the restoration of pyramids and temples. I doubt that latter-day Russia can show the spirit of new life I saw in Mexico, and I know that the land of the Soviets has no such idea of art. The scholarly and the political interest in Mexico's past was, I found, of less importance to the people than was their pleasure in ancestral objects simply as wonderful things, admirable things, whether or not 'beautiful' would have been their word for them. I would not surmise what went on behind the impassive faces of the peasants I saw every day in the museum as they stared at the objects in the glass cases. Usually, they were silent during their long and careful scrutiny, and when they exchanged a few words among themselves it would be in an Indian language.[6]

Only a few weeks after her arrival in Mexico City, Anita wrote a to Jerry Aaron, one of the friends she had left behind at the University of Texas, enthusiastically boasting about the exciting and exotic social scene in which she was immersing herself.

> "It is quite fashionable, particularly tea-time. But at breakfast it is different. You lounge through your meal, and interesting people whom you know—or ought to know, drop along and talk—oh, books and theatre and gossip—over the cigarettes and the coffee. There is Goopta, a Hindu revolutionist, who teaches

[6] Walter Pach, *Queer Thing, Painting: Forty years in the World of Art* (New York and London: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1938), 282-83.

> Sanskrit at the University and also teaches in the public schools, who is famous and intriguing and delightful. There are the Wolfes, communists, avid readers, satisfying and quite charming, particularly the lady. There are lots of others—everybody who has any sort of claim to intellectual—ism (?) is sort of loosely bound into it. Artists, sculptors, writers, socialists, musicians, poets—intelligentzia [sic] but not the imitation of it that we have, Jerry. They are not a bit startling. That love is free is a matter so accepted that no one ever thinks to bother to state so. They all speak the same language, that is, all understand each other, whether they approve or not… Of course, I bask in it… No snobbishness, prejudice of any sort, racial monetary, apparent. As to racial there couldn't be. There are too many shades of skin and flag represented. As to monetary—well, practically all of them have their "nombramientos" which means an hour or two of work at the government schools, which means much politics and a haphazard chance of being paid. Everybody is always borrowing from everybody else which is quite comfortingly like home, you know. But it is so real, so easy, so unconstrained and not at all hectic, that I feel like lifting wings, putting my typewriter under my arm and going to heaven or to some quieter place to achieve a masterpiece."[7]

Among the latter group, Toor was particularly close to Bertram and Ella Wolfe, who Anita mentions in the letter above. Bertram Wolfe, the son of Jewish immigrants to the U.S., began his political life in 1917 as a peace activist and then went on to join the Socialist Party of America. In 1919, when the Socialist Party split around the question of the Russian Revolution, he became a founding member of the American Communist Party. For several years he was somehow able to remain in the United States, weathering the worst of the wartime and Red Scare persecution of political dissidence in a half-fugitive state, moving from place to place, frequently changing jobs, and taking on several pseudonyms. It was not until 1923 that he ended up in Mexico, where he was immediately set up with a job teaching English at a public high school. This job, the kind of thing Anita refers to in her letter to Jerry Aaron as a "nombramiento" was secured for him by fellow exile, Robert Haberman, who had been in the country for several years and had acquired some political influence (more on him later).

[7] Anita Brenner to Jerry Aaron, Sept. 24, 1923, AB 52.1.

Soon after arriving in the country, Bertram joined the Mexican Communist Party. At this point the Party was still a minuscule organization, so it was easy for Wolfe, who had arrived with a substantial amount of experience as an organizer, to quickly rise among its ranks. Soon after joining, he became a member of its executive committee alongside Diego Rivera, who became a close friend.[8] As a leading member, Wolfe made at least two important contributions to the Party's development. He was involved with the launching of the Party's famous periodical, *El Machete*; He was responsible—at least in part—for the Party's growing influence among the railroad workers in the mid-1920s. Wolfe recalls this period in his often disingenuously rose-tinted memoirs:

> Soon after I joined the Mexican Communist Party, I was able to write for *El Machete*, become an active editor of the paper, and open a course in history in the Spanish tongue… My course was a mixture of history, sociology, economics, and political thought, called "The Class Struggle through the Ages." The lessons were given by invitation in the headquarters of the Union of Railway Carpenters. Gradually, railway workers of other crafts began to attend, and I came to be a considered the educational director of the railwaymen's unions. When in 1925 sixteen of the seventeen railway crafts set up a strike committee, they insisted that I should serve on it in an advisory capacity.[9]

Having introduced her to this transnational milieu of intellectuals and revolutionists, Frances Toor recruited Anita to help her put together the first issue of *Mexican Folkways*, the influential bilingual magazine whose illustrations, perhaps more than its texts, may be credited with pioneering the fashion for Mexican folk art that reached its peak in the early 1930s. Toor explained her project in a letter to her friend, the anti-imperialist muckraking journalist Carleton Beals:

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[8] …and twice biographer, though his second biography, due to its anti-communism, brought about the end of the friendship. See Bertram D. Wolfe and Robert Hessen, *Breaking With Communism: The Intellectual Odyssey of Bertram D. Wolfe (*Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1990);
[9] Bertram Wolfe, *A Life in Two Centuries: An Autobiography* (New York: Stein and Day, 1981), 297.

> Carletonchik, the magazine idea which I mention to you half in jest, is taking shape, and I expect it soon to be a reality. I hope you are in a good mood, for I want both help and advice from you.
>
> The title, I believe I told you is to be "Mexican Folkways," It is to be of the size of the Pan American Union or Century, of from 24 to 32 pages, artistic in its make up, and will be published every two months. Gamio is very enthusiastic about it, as are many others. I shall have some financial aid and shall be able to publish the names of Gamio and others as collaborators, as well as that of Diego and others, who will give me illustrations. Now will you permit me to publish your name also, and give me an article for my first issue which I expect to publish next month? The subject matter will consist of stories, legends, dances, fiestas, popular art, songs, archaeology, etc. etc.
>
> Now I want to ask your advice about two important features of the magazine. I had thought all along of making it bi-lingual. It would then be of special interest to high school and university Spanish students, as well as others, and also the articles would be more attractive if they were not translated. In spite of its very special nature, it has been suggested to me that a bi-lingual magazine has never yet succeeded. On the other hand, José Vasconcelos and others think it ought to be in both English and Spanish. Please tell me what your opinion is and try to get some others for me.
>
> The next point is with regard to price. An issue of 2000 copies will cost somewhere about 15 cents apiece. There are other costs as well. I thought of selling it in Mexico for about 35 or 40 centavos and in the U.S. for from 20 to 25 cents, with special rates to students and subscriptions. What do you think?[10]

Carleton Beals' life as a dissident began in 1917, when having just graduated from Columbia University's Teachers' College, and having just secured a high school teaching post in Northern California, he was thrown in prison for dodging the draft. In 1918, as soon as he got out, Beals crossed the border and made it all the way down to Mexico City on foot. After some days of dereliction and some months barely scraping by as an English tutor, he got involved in a successful entrepreneurial scheme to establish an independent English language school, and in addition became a literature teacher at Mexico City's American School. Having acquired a measure of stability, Beals began his career as a commentator on Latin American politics.

[10] Frances Toor to Carleton Beals, March 15, 1925, AB 53.2

Following the revolt of Agua Prieta, Beals collaborated with fellow radical expatriate Robert Haberman on an article titled "Mexico Abroad from the Radical Standpoint: the Mexican Government and the Workman," for the October 1920 issue of Max Eastman's periodical, *The Liberator*, where he argued that the overthrow of Venustiano Carranza by Álvaro Obregón represented a victory for the Mexican labor movement. Beals was an admirer of Obregón and kept close relations with radical "slacker" expatriates such as Linn A.E. Gale, M.N. Roy, and Michael Borodin, who at the time were founding the earliest incarnation of the Mexican Communist Party. Despite such political sympathies, Beals never joined a political party. What he really wanted to do was to write fiction and poetry. In 1921 he moved to Italy, together with his wife Lillian, with the purpose of concentrating on his writing. This Italian episode was catastrophic, leading to a deep depression and to the dissolution of the marriage. It was only upon his return to Mexico City in 1923 that his career as a journalist began in earnest. It was also around this time that he became part of the social circle of expatriates that formed around the Weinberger-Toor household, which included, in addition to Bertram and Ella Wolfe, Frank Tannenbaum, Edward Weston, Tina Modotti, and Anita Brenner.[11]

One thing this group of Americans shared in common was a desire to distinguish themselves from other Americans who were living in Mexico for reasons they imagined to be less authentic than their own. In his memoirs, Bertram Wolfe recalls this impulse: "We found that our American colleagues were too much thrown together in each other's company, remaining for the most part a clannish foreign enclave of strangers in a strange land. Though they were pleasant enough to associate with, my wife and I decided that we would not become denizens of the

[11] This account of Carleton Beals' life between 1917 and 1923 is based on John Britton, *Carleton Beals: A Radical Journalist in Latin America* (Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 1987).

American colony, but would seek to study, and if possible, become an accepted part of the life of this colorful land."[12] Carleton Beals was harsher in his rejection of the American colony, whose wealthier inhabitants he had become familiar with through his work at the American School. "Scratch an American in Mexico and you find a Tartar of an interventionist," he declares in his 1923 book, *Mexico: An Interpretation*. He goes on:

> "Such people, not knowing the language well, not mingling with the Mexicans, ignorant of the country, unfamiliar with Spanish-Mexican history, believing in race-superiority and class rule, reactionary in politics, out of touch with world-movements—people who in this day and age can talk in favor of the regime of Díaz, or can soil their minds with support of a reckless assassin such as Huerta, who have done so little to help to elevate the standards of those among whom they live, who are interested in business, in commercialism, in getting-rich-quick, in living in ease—such people may be excellent authorities on how much henequen Yucatan produces in a year, or on the business of exporting oil or importing socks, but they can never know the heart, the spirit and the soul of the Mexican people; they can never understand the Mexican's aspirations; they can never be safe guides for international conduct or for the solution of the problems that confront Mexico; they can never cooperate in helping the people to stand upon their feet before the world as free men and women, as prosperous, happy, and dignified individuals, as masters of their own destiny."[13]

Not long after writing these words, Beals met Anita Brenner and became an important early influence. In 1924 he read and workshopped the earliest work she submitted for publication. At this time, after several years of struggling to make a living, Beals was enjoying the take-off of his journalistic career, frequently traveling back and forth between Mexico City and New York City to attend to business matters. Just before going away on one of these trips, the recently divorced mentor had an affair with his young mentee. Anita was smitten, but only very briefly. The letters

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[12] Bertram Wolfe, *A Life in Two Centuries: An Autobiography*, 279. Bertram Wolfe's dedication to mastering the Spanish language and his infatuation with Mexico's culture was authentic enough. Aside from his political activities, in those years he began to collect popular verses of the oral *romance* tradition, under the supervision of Pedro Henríquez Ureña.

[13] Carleton Beals, *Mexico: An Interpretation* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, Inc., 1923), 231.

she wrote Carleton after the affair are remarkable in the combination of sincere feeling, self-absorbed introspection, and performative histrionics.

> Carléton---
>
> It has been a week now, since it happened. But to me just days and days, and days and days. Days that have taught me how very foolish I was and how little I knew when I accepted you, casually, and wondered why I didn't care for you so awfully much. And in those days there has been a revolution in the depths, and much has been brought to light which has made me curious, and dreary, and afraid. I am an interesting subject for self-analysis, because of this remarkable feelin' I have that all of me isn't here, that part of me has despegadoed itself and gone wandering somewhere, and I staring stupidly and hunching helplessly and wondering if this ache will ever stop…..[14]

To further illustrate the youthfully theatrical personality of our protagonist and to give a sense of the everyday drama among her social milieu I hereby include a couple of paragraphs from the following February 1924 letter from Frances Toor to Anita Brenner:

> Anita, I am writing especially because, quiero hacer una aclaración. Bert and Ella have told me that you said I hold it against you because your parents are rich, and that I do not think you are a socialist because you have too many dresses. I question that you have really arrived at such a stupid conclusion, but in the event that you have any doubt as to why I have broken off my friendship with you, I shall clear it up.
>
> You remember that day at the Regis Turkish Baths. I told you then that your week-end visits were becoming insufferable because of several things which I enumerated. After that for a while you very profitably tried to improve. But the last three weeks that you were in my room, you acted simply abominably. It was an immense relief to have you go, and I felt as if I never wanted you around me again. Yet when you had that hysterical fit, I came to you. Then followed more acting, more imposing, and more lying. These are the reasons, but there is no use in going into detail. You are a very foolishly conceited girl. Your oft-repeated boast, that you cannot give of yourself to people, is only one of your many stagey gestures.[15]

In any case, when Frances Toor wrote to Carleton Beals asking for advice about launching her magazine, Mexican Folkways, one of the questions she had was about funding:

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[14] Anita Brenner to Carleton Beals, n.d., AB 53.2.

[15] Frances Toor to Anita Brenner, Feb. 17, 1924, AB 108.4.

> And, now last but not least, do you know anyone who would be dying to help subsidize the thing? Some rich gink, who wants to help Mexico. Dr. Gamio thinks it will be of immense social value and will help to a better understanding of the poor people of Mexico, aside from its artistic merit. He is going to give me an article for the first number.
>
> And, now you dear Shagetz, what do you think of it all? Write me soon. And, please do send me those books.[16]

She was on the right track. At this time, the number of "rich ginks" willing to help Mexico and the amount of cash they were willing to devote to this new enthusiasm were just about to blow up. Starting in the mid 1920s, the philanthropic arms of Rockefeller, Carnegie, and Guggenheim began to offer enormous financial support to all things Mexican. As scholars have previously noted and as I will elaborate in later chapters, this investment came in part as a result of a specific juncture in U.S.-Mexico diplomacy. But a deeper and less immediate origin for the American enthusiasm for Mexico went back to the Progressive era and flowed out of it as a byproduct of its traumatic collision with the first World War. The Mexican Renaissance was imported to the United States by people as different from each other as Frances Toor, the anti-Yanqui mudslinger Carleton Beals, the peace activist Ernest Gruening, the heiress and socialite Frances Flynn Paine, the New York City gallerist Alan Bement, the JP Morgan banker Dwight Morrow. Their backgrounds could not have been more different, and yet their pursuits had been shaped by a shared historical experience, namely, the more or less simultaneous collapse of Progressive and Socialist politics following the American entry into the First World War. This experience, which I outline below, determined the course of development of the Mexican Renaissance, perhaps just as much as anything that happened in Mexico.

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[16] Frances Toor to Carleton Beals, Mar. 15, 1925, AB 53.2.

2.2. Americanism

> "Imperialism emerged as the development and direct continuation of the fundamental characteristics of capitalism in general. But capitalism only became capitalist imperialism at a definite and very high state of its development, when certain of its fundamental characteristics began to change into their opposites, when the features of the epoch of transition from capitalism to a higher social and economic system had taken shape and revealed themselves in all spheres. Economically the main thing in this process is the displacement of capitalist free competition by capitalist monopoly. Free competition is the basic feature of capitalism, and of commodity production generally; monopoly is the exact opposite of free competition, but we have seen the latter being transformed into monopoly before our very eyes, creating large scale industry and forcing out small industry, replacing large-scale by still larger scale industry, and carrying concentration of production and capital to the point where out of it has grown and is growing monopoly: cartels, syndicates, and trusts, and merging with them, the capital of a dozen or so banks, which manipulate thousands of millions. At the same time the monopolies which have grown out of free competition do not eliminate the latter, but exist above and alongside it, and thereby give rise to a number of very acute, intense antagonisms, frictions and conflicts. Monopoly is the transition from capitalism to a higher system."[17]

In his famous yet rarely read pamphlet, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Lenin sets aside the commonplace moral critique of imperialism's violations of national sovereignty and generally dehumanizing methods, which he recognized, in order to lay out an explanation of the phenomenon as a necessary result of capital accumulation and industrial concentration—a pattern followed by the world's largest national economies: first Britain, followed by France, the United States, Germany, and Japan. In the fourth quarter of the nineteenth century, following the American Civil War, tghe unification of Germany and Italy, and the Meiji restoration, social life in these countries was completely turned upside down in the span of a single generation as labor became a commodity bought and sold in ever more expansive and integrated

[17] Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism: A Popular Outline* (New York: International Publishers, 1939).

markets. Competitive labor-saving innovations led to higher productivity. Accumulated productivity led to economic concentration, economic concentration led to monopoly and financialization, monopoly and financialization led to collaboration between great financial interests and national states in the search for outlets for surplus capital beyond national borders, competition for such outlets led to inter-imperial antagonism.

These were not merely ideas out of Lenin's head; the pamphlet, subtitled "a popular outline," was not meant as a theoretical innovation. The relationship between monopoly and empire was an observable process that, by 1915, the year of the pamphlet's writing, was finally starting to become an object of scholarly study and public debate. In the 1900s and 1910s, Marxists such as Karl Kautsky, Victor Adler, Edouard Bernstein, Rudolf Hilferding, Rosa Luxemburg, and Lenin himself debated these questions with greater scientific rigor than the officially vetted intellectuals of the pre-War period were generally able to muster. Although these Marxists were widely read within the bounds of an international socialist movement counting millions of members across about a dozen countries, these thinkers and their polemics remained on the margins of established scholarly debate. For this reason, they enjoyed greater freedom from the provincial prejudices, the guild preoccupations, and obligation to flatter the ruling class that hamstrung the efforts of scholars in polite society. This was the reason socialists labeled such scholars as "bourgeois"; not to condemn their social origin, but to recognize the institutional and political limitations under which they labored.

Relatively free from nationalist prejudice, pre-War Marxists recognized the previous decades' gradually escalating inter-imperial conflicts, from the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 to the Spanish-American War—from the Boer War, to the Boxer Rebellion, and the Russo-Japanese War of 1904—as manifestations of a mounting systemic crisis which would sooner rather than

later lead to an explosive rearrangement of economic and political life on a global scale. As Lenin put it in the passage above, monopoly was a "transition from capitalism to a higher system." In Lenin's view, whether this higher system would represent a transition to a more rational order—socialism on a world scale—or merely bring about new advanced forms of capitalism and empire—barbarism—was something that could not be determined by scientific interpretation of social economic patterns, but rather would have to be decided in the heat of the political conflagration precipitously developing at the time of the pamphlet's writing. Figures on the left wing of international Social Democracy, from Lenin, to Karl Liebknecht, to Eugene V. Debs, recognized that the outbreak of the War in 1914 was the revolutionary crisis their movement had long anticipated. Europe's working classes were being armed by their national governments and compelled to murder each other. Socialists had spent decades building a movement among these same workers—preparing them, as they could, for the task of political self-determination. The moment had come for the workers to turn their guns on their masters and come together to save civilization from being wrecked by its rulers.

In this sense, the left wing of the movement was not seeking to destroy industrial society and replace it with some kind of invented utopia. Rather, they wanted to preserve the spiritual and technical achievements of industrial society from sabotage and debasement in the hands of a self-interested and increasingly irrational ruling class. The right wing of the movement, however, was reluctant to go down this revolutionary road.[18] As they saw it, quite reasonably, the movement had

[18] The growing tension between these contradictory impulses in international Social Democracy, a revolutionary left vs. a "pragmatic" right, was the substance of the famous but rarely read "revisionist debate" of 1899-1904. Although the Left side (Kautsky, Luxemburg, Parvus, Lenin, etc.) won the argument against the right (convincingly represented by Edouard Bernstein), the debate did not stop the institutional strengthening of the movement's right wing in the decade leading up to the War. An excellent account of the debate's origins and outcomes is J.P. Nettl "The Social Democratic Party as a Political Model', *Past and Present* 30 (1965).

gained too much to simply squander itself on such an adventure. Social Democracy had fought for decades to earn a seat at the table, especially in Germany, where they had become the largest political party, and now more than ever socialists were duty bound to prove themselves responsible political representatives of the working class. In the resulting schism, the Left agitated for revolutionary peace, and as the War went on, ended up splitting off into separate organizations. The Right kept control of Social Democracy, its national organizations (which were now literally at war with each other), its assets, and the word "socialism" itself[19]--which for the first time in its history could be attached to the term "national" without incurring in an oxymoron. Thus, Europe's socialists stepped up to their newly assigned role as junior partners of Empire, joining the war effort and encouraging their membership to sacrifice their lives in a spirit of patriotism.

In the United States, Socialism faced the exact same crisis, albeit with American characteristics. At the movement's highest point, just before the War, Eugene Debs ran against Woodrow Wilson, earning 6% of the vote. Socialist Party members held something like 1,200 government offices in 340 cities, including 79 mayoral positions across 24 states. In 1916 the first ever Socialist congressman was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. Like the European Socialist Parties, the Socialist Party of America played a prominent role in labor politics. Far from being an isolated sect, it was politically capacious enough to be cohabited by leading members of both the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and the American Federation of Labor (AFL).

[19] The word "communism" was the anti-war faction's reappropriation of the *Communist Manifesto*. They were "taking it back" to define their opposition to the movement's mainstream. Before the War, Socialists viewed Marx's 1848 *Manifesto*, and its titular term "Communism" as venerable artifacts from an earlier period which had been superseded by Socialist political practice. At the time of the split, "Communism" was meant to express loyalty to the intellectual foundation of the movement—the work of Karl Marx—and denounce the Social Democratic mainstream's presumed progress—which had led them to support the War in 1914.

The organization was made up of hundreds of thousands of members, it had dozens of affiliated publications, published in many languages, enjoyed an even larger readership.

Just as it had in Europe, the War separated the movement into a pro-War right wing and an anti-War left wing. Morris Hillquit, one of the leading anti-war Socialists, explained how the two ruling parties, Democrats and Republicans, were one and the same when it came to the War.

> "If Mr. [Charles Evans] Hughes had been elected instead of Mr. Wilson, as he almost was, the probable result would have been that the Republican Party would have drawn us into the war, while the Democratic Party would have remained in the opposition and continued to condemn the policy of 'hurling us headlong into the maelstrom of war across the seas,' as did Martin H. Glynn in his eloquent keynote speech at the National Democratic Convention in 1916. But as it happened, it was a Democratic administration that led us into this war. The Democratic Party thus changed from a peace party to a war party, leaving the republicans no choice except to go it one better as an ultra-war party… The only party that still remained a peace party in American politics was the Socialist Party."[20]

When Woodrow Wilson first took office, he arrived as bearer of the accumulated wisdom of three decades of American Progressivism. The years leading up to the Wilson presidency saw the ascendance of a new kind middle class reformer whose efforts to cure society's ills took the form of a wide and disarticulated assortment of schemes and campaigns to discipline, educate, and re-engineer, the general population's social interactions in order to produce more efficient outcomes. It was not the Socialists who called this kind of reformism "middle class," Wilsonians defined themselves as such. As Walter Lippmann put it in his 1914 book *Drift and Mastery*, this class was "the dominant power expressing itself through the Progressives and through the Wilson administration."[21] Educated advocates as varied as food industry regulation, public education,

[20] Quoted in Jack Ross, *The Socialist Party of America: A Complete History* (New York: Potomac Books 2015), 51.

[21] Walter Lippmann, *Drift and Mastery: An Attempt to Diagnose the Current Un*rest (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 167.

liquor prohibition, Chinese repatriation, sexual education, women's suffrage, forced sterilization, child labor abolition, and other such Progressive causes and social therapies tended to view the President favorably as a fellow intellectual open to experimental methods of social improvement and scientific approaches to public administration. Unlike the Socialists, Progressives tended to view imperialism as a question of political morality, and President Wilson shared their view. In his 1916 reelection campaign he convincingly positioned himself as a vocal critic of European militarism and expansionism.

When the time came for the United States to defend Britain's transatlantic supply chain from disruption by German submarines, it was not Wilson himself who first dreamed up the idea of justifying participation in the War as a crusade for democracy. In his essay about the *New Republic's* support for the War, Christopher Lasch suggests that Wilson's wartime democratic internationalism, while being in essence a rationalization for an unpopular policy, was also something more. Only an aspiration as righteous and ambitious as universal democracy could justify a conflict so shameful that by the time the United States joined, it had already wrecked irreparable damage to the legitimacy of the European powers. When Lansing suggested, "making the world safe for democracy" as a reason of state, "Wilson's adoption of this suggestion reflected not so much a cynical intention to get public opinion behind any slogan that could be used to justify the war effort, as an awareness of the problem that unavoidably confronted all powers engaged in the war—the fatal gap between the sacrifices they were now called upon to make and the original objects for which they had gone to war."[22] Like Napoleon Bonaparte, Abraham Lincoln, or even Pancho Villa, Wilson announced his government's commitment to the only morally acceptable

[22] Christopher Lasch, *The New Radicalism in America, 1889-1963: The Intellectual as a Social Type* (New York: W.W. Norton, Inc., 1997), 201.

aim for war on such a scale: social emancipation and political enfranchisement for those who fight—a war of liberation. Unfortunately, unlike Napoleon, Lincoln, or Villa, Wilson did not mean it seriously. The President understood that the world was entering a revolutionary period and took it upon himself to play a decisive counterrevolutionary role, taking up the responsibility of radically remaking the world order only as an afterthought to his primary objective of keeping it politically and economically the same.

In February 1917, while the Russian people overthrew the monarchy, Leon Trotsky, still at this point a member of the Russian Social Democratic Party which Lenin's Bolsheviks had already abandoned, found himself in New York City rallying support for the anti-war faction of the Second Socialist International. He had arrived as an envoy of the left-wing minority which had come together in the famous Zimmerwald Conference of 1915 and would soon split off to form the Third International. In his autobiography, the Russian revolutionary recalls his time in the United States: "During those months America was getting ready for war. As ever, the greatest help came from the pacifists. Their vulgar speeches about the advantages of peace as opposed to war invariably ended in a promise to support war if it became 'necessary.'"[23] He was likely referring to fellow socialists, but he may as well have been talking about *The New Republic*, a publication that described itself as being "radical without being socialistic," and which at the time served as unofficial mouthpiece of the Wilson White House. *The New Republic* had at first been opposed to the War on the grounds of Wilson's non-interventionism of 1916, but when their patrons in the administration requested it, the non-interventionists saw no other choice but to become interventionists and got to work building a case for War. So, while on the one hand the War was sold to the general public who did not read *The New Republic* on the more traditional basis of

[23] Leon Trotsky, *My Life, An Attempt at an Autobiography* (London: Dover Publications, 2009), 272.

arousing patriotic pride and hatred for the enemy, what the magazine offered to the technocratically inclined, Progressive middle-class supporters was a new narrative: war as an opportunity for administrative innovation. John Dewey, for instance, claimed to view the War as a unique opportunity for the introduction of "more conscious and extensive use of science" on an international scale to raise European governance above "narrow group interests" in favor of the general good by means of "the creation of instrumentalities for enforcing the public interest in all agencies of modern production and exchange."[24] Here was a goal the Progressive Dewey shared with the Socialists: "enforcing public interest in all agencies of modern production and exchange." This was a revolutionary moment, after all. Where Dewey and other Progressive technocratic dreamers—the engineer Herbert Hoover, for instance—disagreed with the Marxists was in the means to achieve these ends. It was not through mass political participation, but through administrative expertise, that the public interest could be better served. Perhaps the War's devastation was an opportunity for science to triumph over society and its stubborn group interests.

Viewed separately, each one of Woodrow Wilson's "Fourteen Points" is diplomatically sensible and impeccably liberal. Taken all together as an agenda for a new Pax (Anglo-) Americana, they add up to an impossibly ambitious radical utopia—radical, that is, "without being socialistic." To achieve such a virtuous international order without the protracted and arduous work of gaining political leadership of civil society by means of voluntary organizations such as political parties and trade unions—the path which the socialists had hoped to take—would have required other methods. Something like an international police crusade of universal behavioral adjustment that American State did not (yet) have the power to pursue.

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[24] John Dewey, "The Social Possibilities of War," in Joseph Ratner, ed., *Characters and Events: Popular Essays in Social and Political Philosophy*, vol. 1 (New York: Henry Holt, 1929), 557.

Rather than this millenarian scenario, the Wilson administration limited itself to suppressing radicals at home and aiding counterrevolutionaries abroad. Following the Peace of Versailles, the Progressive president spent the last of his political capital on campaigns of police terror, both foreign and domestic. In Europe he joined allied efforts to pacify the Revolutions in Germany, Russia, and the lands formerly known as the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This meant not only further military action but also financial and logistical aid to the local counterrevolutionaries who blamed the Revolution on the Jews and who, as mentioned in the previous chapter, believed pogroms made the world a better place. At home, he supported the expansion of the secret police service that would go on to become the FBI, an unelected bureaucracy dedicated full time to making wartime restrictions on civil liberties into a permanent feature of government, impervious to legislation. The federal government's new powers and techniques of censorship and surveillance dovetailed with the passion for social hygiene that, before the war, had developed along with the managerial middle class. Dissidents were harassed, arrested, and deported. Publications to the left of *The Nation* were shut down. Immigrants were persecuted as suspected radicals, and radicals were deported as unauthorized immigrants. A young J. Edgar Hoover found his life's calling serving under Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer. Right wing mass organizations such as the American Legion and the renascent Ku Klux Klan grew nationally at a rate never seen before (or since). These groups often joined together with the police and the National Guard in bloody assaults on striking workers, playing a key role in suppressing the great national steel and mining strikes of 1920-21. Since it is obscured by the milder memory of mid-century McCarthyism, it is easy to forget that the Red Scare of the late 1910s and early 1920s entailed something far worse

than anti-Communist blacklists and paranoia: it was a full-fledged national campaign of state-sanctioned reactionary terror.[25]

Wilson's domestic terror was popular with the voting public, but his international utopia was not. The war and the revolutions that followed had made everyday Americans wary of foreign subversion at home, but what could they ever have to gain from policing the whole planet? Disappointment with the grandiose blunders of Wilsonism made it possible for the Republicans to take the White House for the rest of the decade while offering little more than a "return to normalcy." Rather than making the world safe for democracy, the Harding and Coolidge administrations focused on securing the country's "new prosperity." As the U.S. was making its "isolationist" turn away from the impracticable internationalist aspirations Wilsonism, it was also becoming the worlds' leading capitalist economy and entering the most economically expansionist decade in its history.

It was "American" to pursue a fashionable lifestyle, just as it was "American" to view Italians, Russians, and Jews, as dangerous congenital anarchists, criminals, and perverts. Despite the fact that the quotas set by the 1924 Johnson-Reed immigration Act agreed with the scientific establishment that these ethnicities suffered from a biologically determined, hereditary incapacity for full "American" prosperity, these Europeans stuck by their faith that becoming American was a matter of hard work, not skull shape, and the status that came with "whiteness" was a matter of education and acculturation rather than ethnic origin. They were right. Their children became more American and "white," than their immigrant parents had been. Biological science eventually caught up with the rest of society and abandoned biological notions of "whiteness" and racial

[25] David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

hierarchy. But this kind of assimilation was a generations-long process. A quicker, less commendable way for working class ethnics to strive for whiteness was to assert their imagined racial superiority by means of violence against working class blacks. In places like Chicago and St. Louis, the race riots of the late 1910s and early 1920s saw European immigrant communities driven to pogrom-like violence against black workers arriving also as immigrants from the South. Management learned to exploit these racist horrors against the labor movement and frequently used black workers as strikebreakers.

The "new prosperity" promised by post-War "Americanism" was not necessarily a matter of tangible material improvement. It was more like a state of mind. It was about being up to date, having a good attitude, living life in the hope of individual upward mobility. Thanks to wartime developments in advertisement and public opinion management, all those who did not get a piece of the pie could at least look at the menu, which was now full of photographic images. It was a new, unprecedented historical development that millions of Americans across social classes and cultural backgrounds were joining together in admiration of photographic figures of fantasy such as Mary Pickford, Rudolph Valentino, or Charles Lindbergh. People longed to feel the feelings prefigured by this firmament. Consumer credit, particularly in the form of installment plans, was made more available than ever so that spectators would be able to purchase the minimum amenities required to make life a little bit less awfully unlike the image of oneself the pictures inspired. During the War, the film studios consolidated into four or five big firms and moved away from their original New York City headquarters to set up their own company town in Southern California. Tasked with producing so many films for so many people, the studios focused on streamlining their workflow and optimizing their line of products and discovered that what the film audience desired was not a variety of new experiences, but a repetitive rehearsal of fantastic

projected intimacy with the stars. They concluded that the images and stories they manufactured ought to be designed as appealing packaging for this specific emotional phenomenon. This insight only intensified the competition among the big studios to develop the most appealing packaging made possible by modern technology.

Like the Soviet avant-garde or the Mexican muralists—but far more successfully—Hollywood was working to create a post-bourgeois culture. In the words of Eric Hobsbawm:

> "The 'modern,' the truly 'contemporary' art of this century developed unexpectedly, overlooked by the guardians of cultural values, and with the speed to be expected of a genuine cultural revolution. But it was no longer, and could no longer be, the art of the bourgeois world and the bourgeois century, except in one crucial respect: it was profoundly capitalist. Was it 'culture' in the bourgeois sense at all? Almost certainly most educated persons in 1914 would have thought it was not."[26]

Throughout the War and the decade that followed, the movies evolved from cheap urban entertainments to the become the leading artform of a new, industrialized, vertically integrated culture industry serving the aesthetic and spiritual needs of the isolated individuals of all classes that made up the new mass audience. Meanwhile, the hallowed cultural institutions of the previous century, such as the opera, were paying attention and taking notes. Piece by piece, in the United States and beyond, the totality of cultural production was becoming a little bit more "American," a little bit more democratic, a little bit more like the movies. Despite the many differences among them, and all their pending and precipitating conflicts, in the 1920s, the peoples of the world came together for the first time to form an international audience.

With Woodrow Wilson having betrayed his non-interventionism and bungled his internationalism, Progressivism lost its political foothold in the Democratic Party, which in the 1920s reverted back to its traditional base of Southern white supremacists and urban ethnic

[26] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1871-1914* (London: Vintage, 1989), 241.

machines. Consequently, the Progressive middle-class intellectual constituency of Wilsonism—the political current which Walter Lippmann had celebrated in *Drift and Mastery*—found itself adrift without an anchor in national party politics. America was progressing beyond progress. Alienated and disillusioned, Progresssive intellectuals began to see themselves as having more in common with the shipwrecked Socialists than they had previously imagined. The Socialists, were, after all, nowhere near as threatening as they had seemed in the previous two decades. Weakened by Wilsonian persecution and having lost their left wing to the emerging Communist movement, the Socialists joined the coalition that came together as a "Progressive Party" in support of the 1924 presidential candidacy of "Peace Progressive" senator Robert M. La Follette. As it turned out, there was no electoral constituency for a third party. La Follette's defeat in 1924 became the final resting place of pre-war reform politics, both Progressive and Socialist. The pre-1914 world was vanishing rapidly. As Lenin put it in 1915, the world was going through a transition from bourgeois capitalism as hitherto known, to "another system."

As the American century began to take shape without their participation, many American progressives and socialists found themselves detached from practical politics and thus freer than ever to follow their radical impulse wherever it may lead. With their opposition to the status quo now exempted from the arduous calculation of the actually achievable, many reformers and radicals regressed into a kind of polymorphous political condition. Their political libido, cut off from real, achievable pursuits, branched off into esoteric varieties of criticism, protest, and condemnation, reaching beyond earlier concrete targets such as monopoly and empire, and grasping instead for more abstract antagonists such as "Western Civilization." Born from political retreat, the new countercultural anxiety found its way to popular works of highbrow social criticism and high-minded works of popular entertainment. In consequence, the fear of (and

corollary wish for) an imminent collapse or overthrow of the reigning social order and its cultural mores ceased to be a thing for *poètes maudits*, millenarian sects, and bomb-throwing anarchists—as it had been in the previous century—and became instead a sophisticated pose for the philosophically inclined layman to strike in polite company. End-times enthusiasms became a distinguishing marker of haute-bourgeois learnedness which, in the new democratic age, could be worn by the angst-ridden and literate of all social classes and cultural backgrounds. The Weimar spirit of middle-class apocalypticism was an international phenomenon. In the U.S., this meant that Greenwich Village real estate was going up in value, both literally and figuratively. The countercultural seekers of "alternatives" to a widely acknowledged but unclearly perceived civilizational malaise had little patience for the immediate challenges of politics proper. Their searched instead for distant and exotic artistic and anthropological horizons.

The character of this polymorphous, para-political, countercultural radicalism is neatly summarized by Christopher Lasch in his essay on the anti-war progressive writer Randolph Bourne:

> "The new radicalism differed from the old in its interest in questions which lay outside the realm of conventional politics. It was no longer his political allegiance alone which distinguished the radical from the conservative. What characterized the person of advanced opinions in the first two decades of the twentieth century—and what by and large continues to characterize him at the present time—was his position with regard to such issues as childhood, education, and sex; sex above all. Politics by comparison was almost immaterial, if by politics one refers to the traditional business of government and statecraft: taxes, tariffs, treaties. But the new radicals had not so much abandoned politics as redefined it, bringing to political debate questions formerly reserved to art and letters."[27]

Were progressives moving left or socialists moving right? It could be said it was both, but more importantly, they were moving away from the practical engagement and sense of political

[27] Christopher Lasch, *The New Radicalism in America, 1889-1963: The intellectual as a social type*, 90.

responsibility that tied them to their own country. Many of them set their sights on promised lands where they may escape the new "Americanism." There was the traditional retreat to Paris, famously taken in these years by writers of the "lost generation," but disillusioned counterculturalists increasingly searched for more exotic and revolutionary alternatives. Russia was the obvious destination, a beacon of hope for those still committed to the revolutionary hopes that seemed so tangible just before the War.

There was also Mexico, whose revolutionism lacked the Russians' theoretical consistency, but which enjoyed other advantages such as good weather, proximity to the U.S., and a generally friendlier atmosphere than Russia's. Itzok Granich, aka. Mike Gold, a radical writer and publicist whose political commitments always followed the latest trends, visited both revolutions and found both to his liking. Around the time that he was joining the Communist Party, he wrote of the Mexican Revolution: "I conceive of the revolution as an attack on all that we have named Western Civilization. The great nervous cities, the gray commercialism, and the shallow eager competitiveness that marks its every feature, even its art and science and so-called culture."[28] To be sure, American advocates of the Mexican Revolution and its "cultural renaissance" were rarely so coarse. The fact that some of the sharpest critical minds of the day all at once felt a collective escapist yearning for revolutionary tourism should not lead us to dismiss them all as thoughtless followers of fashion. Rather, it should give us a clue about the scale of the historical crisis they experienced.

[28] Quoted in Helen Delpar, *The Enormous Vogue of Things Mexican: Cultural Relations Between the United States and Mexico, 1920-1935* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995), 24.

2.3. Refuge

The lives of the artists, patrons, and publicists that made the Mexican Renaissance were all in one way or another shaped by these international historical processes and these American historical experiences. The group of expatriates who introduced Anita Brenner to her vocation as a Mexicanist had lived through the social, political, and cultural sea-change of War, revolution, counterrevolution, and "Americanism." Carleton Beals, as well as Bertram and Ella Wolfe had left the U.S. behind and ended up in Mexico as a direct result of these political developments. A publication such as Frances Toor's *Mexican Folkways,* which blended social science, revolutionary propaganda, and modernist art into a tourist-friendly middlebrow package would have likely not made sense in the pre-war cultural landscape. But while Toor, Beals, and the Wolfes, were old enough to have consciously experienced the sea-change, Anita, born in 1905, arriving in Mexico barely out of high school in 1923, was too young. She was post-War through and through. By the time she came on the scene, the experience of political disintegration and defeat shared by her radical elders was already tucked away and out of sight in the laundry basket of the recent past.

A journal entry from 1927 finds Anita in Mexico City, at a casual gathering of such elders.

> At [Ernest] Gruening's. Charles W. Erwin, former editor of The [New York] Call. He is very amiable but somewhat of a bore… talks a great deal but says the obvious. There was also Bob Haberman, brilliant, as usual, nervous, elusive. Gave me an unpleasant impression because he spoke badly of [Manuel Hernández] Galván, on the grounds of 'not being useful,' meaning not wearing a CROM button. Also John Dos Passos… His head looks a little fat, and his hat is crushed, like Max [Gorelick's]. They talked about labour and other things of the 'good old days' of socialist devilment in New York, and also of other things and people I don't know,

> and the stories told did not interest me. They were talking about how strange Mexico is, but I was almost at the other end of the telescope."[29]

Through the other end of the telescope, these men and their memories of "good old days of socialist devilment" appeared either very small, or very far away. There was something more than a generational chasm between Anita Brenner and these men. Charles Erwin, John Dos Passos, Bob Haberman, and Ernest Gruening, were all refugees from a different era—a different political universe that Anita did not recognize.

Back in 1912, at the height of the Socialist Party's influence in American politics, Charles W. Erwin took over as managing editor of *The New York Call*, which had been founded in 1908 as the second English-language Socialist daily in the country, following the Chicago Daily Socialist. (German and Yiddish-language dailies had been established earlier). *The Call's* original editors were William Mailly, founding member of the Socialist Party of America, and the syndicated socialist muckraker Charles Edward Russell, whose reporting on the Chicago stockyards served as inspiration for Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, and whose political career as a Socialist included the founding of the NAACP and two candidacies for governor of New York. In 1917 after it took an anti-war stance, *The Call's* circulation was curtailed under the Anti-Espionage Act, which among other things banned publications critical of the war effort from using distribution through the mail. The paper continued publication for a few more years, relying on door-to-door distribution. Although it survived the Espionage Act, it didn't survive the splitting of the Socialist Party and the reduction of membership that came with the Red Scare.[30]

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[29] Anita Brenner, Journal, February 6, 1927, AB 120.8.

[30] Walter Goldwater, *Radical Periodicals in America, 1890-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), 46.

In 1919, before the start of his celebrated literary career, John Dos Passos wrote to his friend Ernest Hemmingway, lamenting the sorry state of labor politics in the U.S: "Labor's belly up completely—the only hope is the IWW, (which no one mentions even in a whisper) and the Nonpartisan League which has just captured the Democratic primaries in North Dakota and I think Montana too."[31] Dos Passos had just returned from several years in Europe, where among other things, he had worked as an ambulance driver for the Red Cross on the Western Front and studied anthropology at the Sorbonne. The following year, the young writer was one among the 950,000 Americans who cast their ballot for Eugene Debs, who famously ran his 1920 presidential campaign, his fourth, while serving a ten-year sentence in Atlanta for treasonous activities as defined under Woodrow Wilson's Anti-Espionage Act. In 1921, Dos Passos began writing for *The Liberator*, whose founders Max and Crystal Eastman founded in 1918 to replace *The Masses*, which had been shut down as a result as the Anti-Espionage Act. Among the publication's contributors were also John Reed, Claude McKay, Edmund Wilson, and Mike Gold. In 1920, as mentioned above, it was also the first place that published Carleton Beals' writings on Mexico.

Charles Erwin and John Dos Passos were only passing through Mexico. Bob Haberman, in Anita's words, "brilliant, as usual, nervous, elusive," had made himself into a heavyweight of Mexican politics and a behind-the-scenes influence on the Mexican Renaissance. Haberman arrived in the United States as a Romanian Jewish immigrant in 1901 and was naturalized as a U.S. citizen in 1905 following his service in the U.S. Army Hospital Corps, where he acquired the rank of Sergeant. While working as a pharmacist, he got his law degree from New York University.

[31] Quoted in Virginia Spencer Carr, *Dos Passos: A Life (*Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2004), 172.

Before the War, he was a member of the Socialist Party of America and worked for Charles Erwin's *New York Call*, where he was in charge of advertising, which led to a job working for the firm Joseph Ellner Co. Ltd., an advertising firm that specialized in left-wing causes. In 1917, through one of his clients at Ellner's, Haberman was hired to travel to Yucatan to look into a potential "business opportunity." There is little information about this "business opportunity," but it had something to do with settling immigrants in the region to give them work in the henequen industry. The industry was suffering a labor shortage because, on the one hand, the War had caused a spike in demand for the fiber, and on the other, the state's revolutionary governor, Salvador Alvarado, had passed new labor legislation shortening the workday. This was, at least, the story Haberman gave to the FBI, which upon his return to the U.S. that year, started to investigate him as a draft dodger and potential spy.

As Dan La Botz argues, the "business trip" was likely a cover story for his real aim in Yucatan, which was to establish relations between the U.S. Socialist Party and Salvador Alvarado's Socialist Party of Yucatan (PSY).[32] In 1918, likely in part to escape persecution in the U.S., Haberman returned to Yucatan and became a political advisor for Salvador Alvarado's party and its lead organizer, Felipe Carrillo Puerto. In the late 1910s, there were many regional political parties in Mexico calling themselves "socialist."[33] But among these, the Yucatecan party was notable for its success at defeating local elite resistance and enacting far reaching reforms that

[32] Dan La Botz, "Roberto Haberman and the Origins of Modern Mexico's Jewish Community," *American Jewish Archives* 63, no. 1 (1991), 9.

[33] This was not exactly a misnomer. The international revolutionary crisis that followed the first World War had made the word "socialism" more popular—and its meaning less clear—than ever before. In Mexico, as the civil war became a struggle to define the terms of national reconstruction, political legitimacy for revolutionary leaders across many of the country's regions came to depend on commitment to radical agrarian and labor reform and the ability to lead mass political participation. In this environment, being "socialist" meant, above all not being reactionary.

greatly improved conditions for workers in the henequen industry, whose working conditions had often been compared to slave labor. Although these improvements were made possible by a booming henequen market, the swiftness and decisiveness with which they were enacted was a result of the PSY's successful mobilization of mass support for reforms among plantation workers. This success was largely due to Felipe Carrillo Puerto's innovative organizing approach based on *Ligas de Resistencia*.[34] These *Ligas* were the basic organizational unit of the PSY, and combined aspects of armed militia, collective bargaining unit, mutual aid organization, and local self-governing body. Viewed in the context of the international revolutionary wave of the late 1910s, they could be seen as the peninsula's homegrown soviets. This comparison was made by Haberman himself in an article titled "With the Bolsheviks of Yucatan," which he submitted to *The New York Call* in 1919 but never made it to print because it was intercepted and suppressed under the authority of the Anti-Espionage Act.

As a leading member of the PSY, Bob Haberman's main job was to advise *Ligas de Resistencia* in organizing consumer cooperatives. In April 1918, he participated in the First Socialist Workers Conference in Motul, known for passing a motion in support of women's suffrage. At the conference, in addition to speaking on the issue of consumer cooperatives, Haberman advocated for education reform based on the pedagogical theories of the Spanish anarchist Francisco Ferrer i Guàrdia,[35] as well as calling for strengthening ties between the PSY and socialist parties outside Mexico.

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[34] On the Ligas, see Gilbert M. Joseph, *Revolution From Without: Yucatán, Mexico, and the United States, 1880-1924* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Sarah Osten, *The Mexican Revolution's Wake: The Making of a Political System, 1920-1929* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

[35] In his memoir *El desastre*, José Vasconcelos recalls that during his time as Education Minister he was visited by a member of the PSY making proposals based on Ferrer's ideas, which Vasconcelos dismissed as "lugares communes que dos o tres meses antes les había predicado por allí el judío Haberman, del ghetto de Nueva York. Desde la prédica de Haberman, la plana mayor revolucionaria remataba sus discursos con

Haberman abandoned Yucatan soon after, however. Since 1916, Salvador Alvarado and Felipe Carrillo Puerto had carried out their reform and organizing efforts as representatives of Venustiano Carranza's national government. But by 1919, Carranza had removed Alvarado from his position as governor and turned against Carrillo Puerto and his PSY. When socialist leaders started being persecuted with the federal government's blessing, Haberman quit the party and moved to Mexico City where he once again took up his work as a pharmacist. As it turned out, he was only out of politics for a brief time. In 1920 Carrillo Puerto supported Álvaro Obregón during the Agua Prieta revolt. In Mexico City, Haberman became a kind of go-between linking the PSY and the Obregón administration, among whose leadership he became particularly close with Plutarco Elías Calles.[36] It was around this time that Haberman also became a close friend of Carleton Beals and the two co-authored the pro-Obregón article for *The Liberator* which began Beals' career as a left wing chronicler of Latin American politics for U.S. audiences, "Mexico Abroad from the Radical Standpoint: the Mexican Government and the Workman." It was at this point, in the aftermath of Obregón's ousting of Carranza, that Haberman abandoned the radical margins and ascended to the higher echelons of Mexico's political establishment. As Carleton Beals put it in his memoir *Glass Houses*: "Soon after the Obregon Revolution [Haberman] paid a call on Morones, whom he had considered something of a shyster, and came back a complete convert. From then on he was very intimate with Morones and soon became a prominent liaison officer between him and Gompers of the American Federation of Labor."[37]

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el grito de: "Viva el Diablo y muera Dios." En sí los gritos, en momentos de exaltación reivindicatoria, podían explicarse como una protesta contra el Dios de los explotadores." José Vasconcelos, *El desastre* (Mexico City: Editorial Trillas), 200.

[36] Greg Andrews, "Robert Haberman, Socialist Ideology, and the Politics of National Reconstruction in Mexico, 1920-1925," *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 6, no. 2 (Summer 1990), 192.

At the time, the Confederación Regional de Obreros Mexicanos, or (CROM), led Luis N. Morones, was working to consolidate the chaotic galaxy of urban and rural labor organizations that had emerged explosively after the collapse of the old regime in 1914. Although it called itself "anarcho-syndicalist," the CROM really modeled itself after the American Federation of Labor. Its goal was to consolidate and discipline the labor movement, to suppress dissident elements so that it may collaborate with business and government for the peaceful and gradual improvement of conditions for its working-class membership. About Haberman's turn to the CROM, Dan La Botz writes:

> "In choosing to go to work for Morones, Haberman had made a momentous, opportunistic decision to break with his radical past, for throughout the early twenties, Morones' 'yellow' trade union federation was engaged in a frequently violent struggle with the anarchist and Communist 'red' labor unions for control of the workers' movement. In taking up with Mexico's new revolutionary nationalist establishment, Haberman assured himself not only of employment but also of a substantial salary and the prerequisites of office, which could be lucrative, With his energy, ambition, talent, experience, knowledge of languages (Romanian, English, Spanish, and some French and German), and ties to U.S. socialist labor circles, Haberman soon created a role for himself and became part of the inner circle of the ruling elite."[38]

There is no doubt that Haberman was an opportunist, but La Botz may here be exaggerating the gravity of his betrayal. In the United States, Haberman had been part of a broad socialist movement whose right wing was involved with the AFL. And while Haberman had been opposed to the War and sympathetic to the Russian Revolution in 1917, he was never a Communist and he was known for expressing skepticism about the IWW's methods. As a member of the PSY, Haberman was an enemy of Carranza and a supporter of Obregón, who at least in the early months of his presidency was highly tolerant of radicals of all sorts. As an Obregonista interested in mass

[37] Carleton Beals, *Glass Houses: Ten Years of Free Lancing* (New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1938), 71.
[38] Dan La Botz, "Roberto Haberman and the Origins of Modern Mexico's Jewish Community," 13.

organizing, it makes sense that Haberman was attracted to the CROM, which in 1920-21 had not yet established its reputation for "yellow" villainy. Further, in both the United States and Mexico, the founding of the Third International in 1919 was followed by sectarian splintering of political party and trade union allegiances that must have appeared terribly self-destructive to a pragmatist like Haberman. It was not just Haberman; the rupture among socialists around 1919 was such that anyone and everyone involved with the movement at the time was, as La Botz puts it, "breaking with their past."

As it ascended to a position of governmental power the CROM's political responsibilities expanded beyond the labor movement. In the early 1920s, the Mexican labor federation's leadership was involved in efforts to improve diplomatic relations with the United States, a factor without which no Mexican government has ever survived very long. Since its signing in 1917, Mexico's revolutionary Constitution became a source of concern, not just for Mexicans who accrued their wealth before the Revolution, but also for Americans with assets south of the border. The famous constitutional articles 123 and 27 potentially put American investments at risk. The former—which was in part modelled after Salvador Alvarado and Felipe Carrillo Puerto's Yucatecan reforms[39]--protected Mexican workers' rights to form unions and strike. The latter gave the national government eminent domain over all lands in its territory, regardless of proprietor. It gave the government authority to expropriate and redistribute land and to impose duties and levy taxes on the exploitation of subsoil resources. Oil companies spent the first ten years of Mexico's

[39] In her study of Yucatecan Socialism, Sarah Osten makes a convincing argument about the influence of Salvador Alvarado's reforms on the 1917 Constitution and Felipe Carrillo Puerto's organizational innovations on the development of Mexico's political system in the 1920s. Unlike many 'revisionist' and 'post-revisionist' studies of regional politics in the period, its findings do not constitute a mere local exception to the larger national story, but rather complement and deepen this story. Sarah Osten, *The Mexican Revolution's Wake: The Making of a Political System, 1920-1929* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

constitutional government demanding that the U.S. State Department do something to protect their business from these new laws, especially article 27. In its search for a counterweight to the oil industry and other U.S. anti-Mexico lobbyists, Mexican officials and the CROM looked to the American Federation of Labor. While the AFL's whole outlook was based on opposing anything remotely related to revolution, it was a big supporter of the new Mexican Constitution. Thanks to article 123, the whole country found itself in need of labor organizing, and if the AFL could capitalize on it, this would mean an hemispheric expansion of its political influence—a kind of "Gompers Corollary." A CROM-AFL axis was viable in part because it would enjoy a high degree of anti-Communist credibility and would thus make a convincing case against intervention and in favor of negotiating U.S. diplomatic recognition of the Obregón government. An alliance with the CROM would gain the AFL leverage against the U.S. private sector, with all its Mexican investments. Meanwhile, as Gompers' lieutenant south of the border, Morones could gain even more influence in Mexico—perhaps even the presidency.

When he went to work for Morones, Bob Haberman's official position was as Mexican representative of the AFL-aligned Pan-American Labor Federation. From then on, his two major political priorities became, first, to establish friendly relations between the CROM and the AFL, and second, to sabotage "red"—that is, Communist and IWW affiliated—labor organizing efforts. These two goals went hand in hand, and their ultimate purpose was to secure AFL support for U.S. diplomatic recognition of Mexico. In the Summer of 1921, Calles sent Haberman to the United States to visit Samuel Gompers and tell him about the CROM's successes in battling rival left-wing unions and the Obregón government's efforts to deport American radicals involved in Mexican labor politics. He also communicated a Mexican government proposal to buy American

goods exclusively from AFL-approved U.S. firms. Haberman also visited J. Edgar Hoover to share Mexican government intelligence on Wobblies and other U.S. radicals' activities in Mexico.

Between 1921 and 1923, Haberman traveled between Mexico and the United States as a kind of labor diplomat. According to Greg Andrews, his work in this time was indeed instrumental to establishing a close alliance between the Mexican and American labor federations.[40] Although it is difficult to know just how important this work was in U.S. diplomatic recognition of Mexico in the Bucareli accords of 1923, as it turned out, the AFL-CROM alliance became unexpectedly important just after recognition was granted. When Adolfo de la Huerta—the uncomfortable leg of the four-legged tripod that also included Obregón, Calles, and Morones—mobilized most of Mexico's armed forces into a military rebellion, the regime was barely able to survive. If it did, it was thanks in part to the CROM's military mobilization of its membership and the AFL's lobbying of the Coolidge administration to help equip the regime's loyal forces while refusing arms sales to the rebels. The fact that Washington was willing to arm forces aligned with labor against the State Department's favored kind of foreign ally—military men—ought to say something about the importance of the AFL's pro-Mexico commitments at this particular juncture. Although the regime survived, Haberman's political mentor in Yucatan did not. Felipe Carrillo Puerto, by then governor of the state, was overthrown by a federal army detachment that had joined de la Huerta's rebellion. While waiting for a ship that would take him to the United States, he was captured and summarily shot.

Bob Haberman was at the peak of his influence in the first half of the 1920s, both before and after the Bucareli accords and the de la Huerta affair. During this time he enjoyed several

[40] Greg Andrews, *Shoulder to Shoulder? The American Federation of Labor, The United States, and The Mexican Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 163-67.

government sinecures and developed an expansive political network in both Mexico and the United States. Aside from his position in the Pan American Federation of Labor, he was head of foreign languages for the Ministry of Education, director of a National University-affiliated Institute of Social Science, and even taught one or two courses. He became a U.S. representative for the Comisión Exportadora de Yucatán, the agency regulating the state's henequen exports. Throughout this period, he was always in search of public relations opportunities to promote a positive image of Mexico in the United States. According to Dan La Botz, it was Haberman who first came up with the idea (discussed in the previous chapter) of inviting Jewish refugees to settle in Mexico—a gesture that he believed would find favor among U.S. progressives.[41] He may have also have had something to do with the Calles administration's offer of land for sale to the Association of Jewish Farmers.

Haberman was particularly interested in developing writers to produce pro-Mexico content for U.S. publication. Carleton Beals' career as a journalist was launched by Haberman. In 1923, when Beals returned to Mexico from Italy as a failed fiction writer--depressed, divorced, and penniless—it was Haberman who helped him secure a stable position as an English teacher, making sure the job allowed Beals ample leisure time to write pro-Mexico articles for publication in the United States. That same year, it was Haberman who invited Bertram and Ella Wolfe to spend some time in Mexico, offering them English teaching positions. According to Bertram Wolfe's memoirs, Haberman was hoping to recruit Wolfe as a propagandist for the Obregón government:

> After we had been teaching for a few weeks, Roberto Haberman sent for me to visit him at his office in the Secretariat of Education. "Bertram," he said, "I know

[41] Dan La Botz, "Roberto Haberman and the Origins of Modern Mexico's Jewish Community," 17.

> that you are a writer as well as a teacher. Have you seen the articles written jointly by me and Carleton Beals, and published in the Nation, the New Republic, and other liberal and radical newspapers in the United States?'
>
> "Yes, I have read some of them."
>
> "What did you think of them?"
>
> "I was more impressed by them before I got here."
>
> "Well, Carleton has refused to write any more articles jointly with me. He is ill-tempered and we have quarreled too much about what is to go into them. That's why I appointed you and your wife as teachers here. I should like you to collaborate with me on articles on Mexico.' I realized then that I had gotten the unexpected cable [inviting Wolfe to Mexico] because he needed a ghostwriter."
>
> "No Roberto," I said, "I don't think I can collaborate with you."
>
> "Why not?"
>
> "Well, you and Carleton have been picturing Mexico as a socialist paradise. I do not know too much about the country yet, but when I see the homeless boys, orphaned by all the rebellions, begging and picking the pockets by day, and tearing down billboards after nine o'clock at night when the second night show has begun, sleeping on the sidewalks with nothing but the billboards to lie on, and perhaps a flea-covered little dog to wrap in their torn shirts to keep them warm, I can hardly think of Mexico as either socialist or a paradise."[42]

As with the rest of Wolfe's memoirs, the dialogue is a more than a bit heavy-handed, but the situation is believable. According to Wolfe's account, Haberman relieved him of his teaching position soon after, though he was able to get his job back when he explained the situation directly to José Vasconcelos. Maybe so. Either way, rather than write pro-Mexico articles in English, Bertram Wolfe became a co-founder of *El Machete*. The political differences between Haberman and Wolfe are neatly captured in an April 1924 article by Wolfe, "Take the Road to The Left," for *The Liberator*:

> May 1, 1923. May Day in Mexico! One Hundred percent general strike. Not a car running. Not a paper printed. Not a phone bell rung. A huge demonstration of the Mexican Federation of Labor—a long parade that winds in and out of the principal avenues, bearing innumerable placards and signs. The legends they bear seek to recall everything calculated to interest or inspire a revolutionary proletariat.
>
> Everything—and yet… not one placard, not one sign, that so much as mentions the fact that in a country that covers one-sixth of the earth's surface, the

[42] Bertram Wolfe, *A Life in Two Centuries: An Autobiography*, 280-81.

> workers have assaulted an outpost of world capitalism, have taken it and are holding it for the rest of us.
>
> "Great isn't it?" says Roberto Haberman, one of the prominent leaders of the Federation, to me, and I cannot resist the reply:
>
> "So many flags and signs, and not one that mentions Russia!"
>
> His smile changes to a scowl and his face flushes with anger. "We're through with Russia," he snorts. "We'll fight that—country and those—Communists. We're through with Russia." International Worker's day—and the leaders of the official labor movement are boycotting the worlds' only workers' republic."[43]

Wolfe wrote these words as a member of the Mexican Communist Party's executive committee. Although his work in this position was decidedly anti-CROM, it was not anti-regime. In late 1923, when Adolfo de la Huerta was preparing his military revolt, he made an offer of financial support to the Communist Party in exchange for their support, a proposal many in the members of the party found appealing on an anti-CROM basis. It was Bertram Wolfe who convinced the party of supporting the Obregón and Calles against de la Huerta. The article quoted above, "Take the Road to the Left," is an account of the Mexican Communist Party's "critical support," for the government, blaming the revolt on the government's failure to live up to its revolutionary ideals:

> "The Communist Party of Mexico threw all its force on the side of the government while the rebellion lasted. Now that it is ending, the Party issues a manifesto calling the attention of the workers to the errors of the government that made counter-revolution possible: the disarming of the peasantry of Vera Cruz, the disarming of the peasantry of Yucatan; the permitting of men like Guadalupe Sanchez and Enrique Estrada to remain in command of army divisions; the failure to shatter the bourgeois army and set up an army of the proletariat and peasantry…"[44]

[43] Bertram Wolfe, "Take the Road to the Left," *The Liberator* 7, no. 4 (Apr. 1924), 21.

[44] Ibid., 23.

Despite these political differences, Haberman seems to have kept a kind of friendship going with Wolfe. His friendship with Carleton Beals and his involvement in matters of Jewish migration make it seem like he was to some extent part of the social circle of radical (and mostly Jewish) expatriates that gathered around the Toor-Weinberger household in 1923-24, which included Anita Brenner. Although I have no evidence for it, I would wager that Haberman's position at the Education Ministry had something to do with introducing Frances Toor to Manuel Gamio and with securing a government subsidy for *Mexican Folkways*. Haberman was also most likely involved in putting together the August 1924 issue of *The Nation* where Anita Brenner's "The Jews in Mexico" as well as articles by Bertram Wolfe and José Vasconcelos. The special issue on Mexico, which celebrated the occasion of Calles ascendance to the presidency was most likely a product of Haberman's relationship with another journalist interested in Latin American affairs, Ernest Gruening.

Ernest Gruening was the host of the Mexico City gathering of old radicals including Charles Erwin, John Dos Passos, Bob Haberman, and Anita Brenner, who in her journal imagined herself witnessing the scene from the other end of the telescope. Ernest Gruening was born in 1887, the son of a successful German Jewish Boston-based surgeon, Emil. When Ernest was nineteen years old, his father died and left him a substantial inheritance that more or less exempted him and his four siblings from having to work for a living. Most likely due, at least in part, to this privilege, Ernest Gruening's personality was characterized by an inflated sense of his own talents and insights combined with a short attention span; his career, by a series of grandiose projects which he rarely brought into completion.

After barely getting through Harvard, Gruening went to medical school, but dropped out to pursue a career in journalism, where, before the War, he served as editor for several newspapers, including the *Boston American* and the *Boston Herald*. By his own account, his passion for journalism had less to do with a love of letters and more with a deeply felt desire to influence public opinion. In the 1910s, Ernest and his siblings were all involved in progressive advocacy, to which they could devote themselves fully and disinterestedly due to their lack of financial concerns. His sister Rose, for instance, used her inheritance to establish a settlement house in New York City. Another sister, Martha, was a sponsor and highly active member of the NAACP—in 1919 she collaborated with W.E.B. Du Bois on a powerful article on the East St. Louis race riots. Ernest was somewhat more conservative than his sisters. Through the 1910s, he knew he was interested in progressive reform. He wanted to follow his calling as a leader of public opinion but remained noncommittal and indecisive about his own political views. Early on he was particularly concerned with the issue of birth control, which at the time was closely linked with eugenicist impulses. He was also, like his sister Martha, a member and sponsor of the NAACP. His advocacy was always less geared to improving social conditions and more to influencing public perception. In 1915 he was involved in a campaign to censor offensive films, particularly D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*, though he soon changed his mind about the matter and became a lifelong opponent of all censorship. As editor for the *Boston Herald,* he led a successful campaign to get the crime reporters to not mention the race when describing the perpetrators of criminal acts.

The historian Robert David Johnson, whose 1998 biography of Gruening seems to be always barely holding back from turning against its subject, describes Gruening's post-war disillusion:

> "Earlier, along with many progressives, Gruening had welcomed Wilson's arguments that the United States could play an active international role without

> functioning as a traditional imperialist power. Now, however, the editor realized that he and Wilson had tapped into different elements of the American dissenting heritage. While the president supported reforming the structure of international relations, he never envisioned that the United States would facilitate immediate self-determination for all countries, as his support for the League of Nations mandates in Africa and Asia as well as the decision to intervene in Haiti itself revealed. Gruening had been blinded by his earlier uncritical admiration for Wilson; the revelation that the president not only had not lived up to Gruening's interpretation of his idealistic pronouncements but had violated them in such an egregious manner provoked a sense of personal betrayal. Throughout the 1910s, Gruening had searched for an issue to call his own, ranging from municipal reform to birth control to his World War I crusades. Now, his quest satisfied, he turned his attention to the Caribbean Basin."[45]

In 1921, Gruening was hired as managing editor for *The Nation* by Oswald Garrison Villard, who had spent the previous decade or so turning the magazine into the country's leading anti-imperialist and anti-militarist publication. During his stint in *The Nation*, Gruening's chose the American occupation of Haiti as his pet cause and commissioned a series of articles alleging widespread brutality in Haiti and comparing it to the Belgian Congo and British rule in India and Egypt.

Gruening's further involvement with the Haitian cause, which went beyond journalism but fell short of committed political participation, is a good illustration of the author's grandiose but irresponsible political idealism. In 1922, he invited leading members of the Haitian resistance movement Union Patriotique to the U.S. for a meeting he had supposedly set up with Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes, but the Haitians were disappointed when Hughes failed to show up. Soon after, Gruening was invited to travel to Haiti and participate as a kind of public relations consultant for the Union Patriotique, advising them on how to engage with a visiting U.S. Senate committee charged with assessing conditions under U.S. occupation. Gruening got the Haitians to

[45] Robert David Johnson, *Ernest Gruening and the American Dissenting Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 37. My account of Gruening's life in these pages is based on this biography.

organize a rally to welcome the U.S. senators upon arrival. The slogans he suggested—"Don't make Haiti America's Congo" and "Shall Haiti Be Your Ireland?"—were awkwardly worded and seemingly more concerned with the morality of American imperialism than with Haiti's own national aspirations. The visiting committee was not happy with the display. During his time in Haiti, Gruening also tried his hand at freelance diplomacy. Characteristically convinced that he could end the occupation on his own, Gruening met several times with the head of the occupation government, President Sudré Dartiguenave, and was able to convince him to not publicly oppose demands for the abolition of martial law and the withdrawal of U.S. marines. As it turned out, the reason Dartiguenave made these concessions was because Gruening had somehow led him to believe he was negotiating in official capacity on behalf of the U.S. government. When he realized Gruening was little more than a journalist and diplomatic adventurer, Dartiguenave reversed himself and ended all negotiations.

Upon his return to the United States, Gruening was not invited to testify at the senate hearings that followed the committee's visit to Haiti. Nevertheless, he reached out to Senator Medill McCormick, a friend of Oswald Garrison Villard's, and asked to be allowed to testify. Gruening's biographer recounts the episode:

> "The Illinois senator granted this rather unusual request, on the condition that the testimony focus on the state of affairs in Haiti as he had seen them. Gruening admitted that while he 'naturally' had a 'certain sympathy for the people' of Hispaniola, partly owing to the 'instinctive feeling that one is apt to have for the underdog,' the critical issue for him remained not the intervention's effect on the average Haitian but 'whether the United States is going to be an Old-World imperialism' and adopt the very policies that it had entered World War I to defeat. In this sense he had moved beyond Wilsonianism, which declined to define the United States as an anti-imperialist power and embraced a more radical conception of the American past."[46]

[46] Ibid., 40-41.

Gruening's post-Wilsonian disillusion had led him to anti-imperialism. After years of casting about for a political cause to call his own, he had finally made his choice: raising awareness about the corrosive effects of Empire upon his country's ideals. Gruening's activism had led him to neglect his duties at *The Nation*, and in 1922, Villard had no choice but to fire him. It was a friendly parting, however, since Gruening, having no need for an income, was convinced that his time at the magazine had served the purpose of raising his profile as a leading anti-imperialist activist, and he would now have more time to devote himself to his true calling, which he described as the "constructive muckraking of imperialism."[1]

This was the point when Gruening switched his focus from Haiti to Mexico. His biographer does not get into what led him specifically to Mexico, stating simply that Gruening "soon stumbled onto an opportunity to integrate his economic self-interest with his ideological agenda, securing commitments to contribute freelance articles on Mexico to *The Nation*, *Century*, *Current History*, and *Collier's Weekly*."[2] The time when this happened—early 1923—the publications involved, and the suddenness and specificity of Gruening's decision to write about Mexico suggest that the opportunity Gruening "stumbled" into was created by Bob Haberman, as part of the same search for pro-Mexico writers that led him to Carleton Beals and Bertram Wolfe. Whether this was the case, the publishers of *The Century* also paid Gruening an advance to write a book that the author described, with his usual exaggeration, as "*the* book on the Mexican Revolution."[3]

In order to research his book, Gruening moved to Mexico, bringing his family along. When he arrived, he immediately fell in with the social circle that often gathered around the Toor-

[1] Ibid., 45.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

Weinberger household and quickly gained access to the highest echelons of Mexico's revolutionary elite, becoming a frequent guest of Obregón, Calles, De la Huerta, and Vasconcelos. His contacts in government and among the expatriate intelligentsia offered a first-class introduction to the country and made sure he saw all the sights and learned all there was to learn. Gruening greatly enjoyed his time in Mexico and was so overwhelmed with the mysteries of its politics and the richness of its history and culture, that he decided he would have to stay in the country and extend his research indefinitely. Gruening became an ardent supporter of the Mexican Revolution and was particularly enthralled by what he saw in Yucatán, which he called "the most extraordinary little utopia," when he met Governor Felipe Carrillo Puerto, he praised him as "the one superlative person in all Mexico."[4]

But Gruening's enthusiasms were always fickle. Late in 1923, when Mexico gained diplomatic recognition from the United States, he felt dismayed. He had somehow come to the conclusion that the exciting developments made by the Mexican Revolution had something to do with the distance the conflict had put between Mexico and the United States. He believed that a closer relationship between the two countries would be ruinous for the Revolution. Gruening was even more disappointed when he learned of the military revolt led by Adolfo de la Huerta. The Revolution seemed bent on destroying itself. Gruening felt betrayed. How could de la Huerta—a man with whom Gruening had dined—unleash a conflict that led to the death of Mexico's greatest revolutionary, Felipe Carrillo Puerto?

Following these disappointments, Gruening put his book project on hold and returned to the United States. In 1924, Gruening's old boss, Oswald Garrison Villard invited his ex-managing editor to participate as director of public relations for the presidential campaign of Progressive

[4] Ibid., 48.

Party candidate Robert M. La Follette. Senator La Follette's micromanaging tendencies did not leave Gruening much room for maneuver. His main contribution came late in the race, when the campaign, which had been unable to garner much support from the voting public, was desperate for ideas. On Gruening's suggestion, La Follette's messaging during the last few weeks of the campaign emphasized criticism of U.S. interventionism in Latin America.

In late October 1924, Mexico's president-elect, Plutarco Elías Calles invited Gruening to come to Mexico City and attend his inauguration. Gruening accepted enthusiastically and left the country without even waiting for La Follette's defeat at the polls. President Calles's friendly overture was enough to revive Gruening's enthusiasm for the Mexican Revolution and to get him back to work on his book. For this second trip, he was even granted exclusive access to the Secretaría de Gobierno archives, a privilege enjoyed by no other journalist at the time. Still, research proceeded slowly. Gruening was, as usual, distracted by a whole array of problems and projects. He was in and out of Mexico between 1924 and 1927. Hoping to speed up his progress, in the Summer of 1926, he hired Anita Brenner as his research assistant. The following letter Gruening wrote from France to Anita in Mexico City gives a sense of Anita's research duties:

> Dear Miss Brenner,
>
> I have your letter of May 22 enclosing the filled out specimen form. It strikes me as excellent complete, and in every way satisfactory. One question or series of questions which I should like to have you ask when it is possible, and which could be recorded under 'observaciones' would be what the revolution means to them if anything. Such questions would of course have to be asked by you personally, because it would be impossible to get at the essence of the answers if they were filtered through another person. Nor could such questions follow any set formula. It could probably be productive only in cases where a measure of confidence has been established. The only invariable precept would be not to have the questions be leading questions, as you would then get answers that would not reflect a true state of mind. The object of this questioning would be to find out, if possible, if these people have any definite consciousness of what this thing called 'revolution' is; whether they think it has meant something in their lives and what; or if they feel that it holds out anything for them in the way of hope. In Russia of

> course every urban dweller at least knows all about the revolution. In Mexico the point to determine if possible, and as far as possible, how far and how wide any consciousness has reached. My guess would be that such questioning would be unsuccessful in many cases but that here and there you would get an illuminating conversation of which both sides should then be set down. The responses would be interesting against the background of the facts in the form. Needless to say such questioning should not try to prove anything. It should be wholly objective, but it should try to bring out what relation the person questioned feels he or she has to society, to his or her surroundings, and to the political and social changes that are officially proclaimed as taking place…
>
> The question of going to Yucatan or of using your time for your own work is entirely a matter of your own conscience and I am perfectly satisfied to leave it that way. Let me know what I owe you for any special expenditures such as printing and I will send you a cheque for it but please keep such expenses as low as possible…[5]

Anita Brenner's vocation as a Mexicanist, her perspective on the Mexican Revolution and the "cultural renaissance" that followed, was mediated by the particular group of individuals discussed in this chapter: Frances Toor, Carleton Beals, Bertram Wolfe, Roberto Haberman, and Ernest Gruening. These individuals were all somewhat older than Anita—ten or twenty years older. Their encounter with Mexico and its Revolution was determined by having lived through a historical experience that could be described, without exaggeration, as the overthrow of bourgeois civilization. Their lives were marked by the collapse of the social and political imagination that in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century had given rise to both Social Democracy and Progressivism. Their work as chroniclers, translators, and publicists of the Mexican Revolution and the Mexican Renaissance was their response to this crisis, their attempt to make sense of the transition from capitalism as they knew it to what Lenin called "a higher system"—the uncharted horizon of the twentieth century. Although Anita was too young to share the experience of historical rupture suffered by the generation that preceded her—which she viewed

[5] Ernest Gruening to Anita Brenner, Jun. 14, 1926, AB 65.8.

"through the other end of the telescope"—her involvement in the Mexican Renaissance was shaped by the aspirations and anxieties her elders derived from that crisis—what they learned from it, as well as what they failed to learn.

Chapter Three

"...I will confess
I love this cultured hell that tests my youth."

Claude McKay, "America," (1921).

As we saw in Chapter Two, the men and women who guided Anita Brenner in her vocation as a chronicler and interpreter of Mexico's cultural renaissance were, each in their own way, refugees from the recent past. Something akin to the world's end had taken place between 1914 and 1919. As Theodor Adorno put it in his essay, "Those Twenties," "the world ha[d] survived its own downfall."[1] So when they arrived in Mexico in the late 1910s and early 1920s, characters like Roberto Haberman, Frances Toor, Carleton Beals, Ernest Gruening, Bertram, and Ella Wolfe, were searching for new beginnings. In war, revolution and counterrevolution, a generation's political commitments and expectations fell by the wayside. International social democracy collapsed, and American progressive reformers fell into a state of disorientation and disillusion. What defeated and disappointed radicals and reformers found in Mexico was even more appealing than a triumphant revolution; it was a whole new kind of politics that allowed them to turn away from the defeat and disillusion of the recent past: What they found was a cultural revolution.

In his article "Art and Revolution in Mexico," which appeared next to Anita Brenner's "The Jews in Mexico" in the August 27, 1924 issue of *The Nation*, Bertram Wolfe hints at the existence of a kind of "dual" revolution. There was on the one hand, a "real" Revolution—chaotic, opportunistic, and incomplete—and on the other, a virtual, phantasmagoric revolution, made up images and words:

[1] Theodor W. Adorno, "Those Twenties," *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 44.

> "The Mexican revolution is a very patchy and unsystematic affair. Like most institutional changes in a world of conflicting forces it lacks the unity of a picture, the logic of a rational system, or the structural consistency of a poem. Government in the interest of worker and peasant in two or three states—notably in Yucatan and Veracruz; fragmentary attempts at the installation of political democracy; sporadic distribution of ejidos, or bits of large estates, to landless peasants; a government without unity, made up of a curious intermixture of liberals and conservatives; a political power representing not a single class but an uncertain balance of power between the partially awakened workers and peasants on the one hand and the influence of foreign capital, especially that of American interests, on the other—such is the unsystematic reality of the moment in Mexico.
>
> Only in the work of the philosopher, the artist, and the poet have the effects of the revolution assumed system and unity. The new content and form of art and poetry, perhaps because artist and poet always seek unity in composition and consistency in structure, seem to be the most complete, the most logical, the most 'revolutionary' of the by-products of the Mexican revolution."[2]

Wolfe seems to be talking about something more than the difference between reality and propaganda. In 1924, Wolfe was living with one foot in the hard realities of practical labor politics and the other in the artistic and intellectual milieu of the Mexican Renaissance. In the paragraph above, he seems to be reflecting on how distant these two worlds were from each other. The image-world of the cultural renaissance did not serve a particular political party or follow a particular political line. It had been made possible by the Revolution, but as it developed, this "new content and form of art and poetry" was following priorities all its own. The logic of the cultural revolution was conditioned by things such as the Vasconcelian pedagogical crusade and the revolutionary regime's renewed efforts to integrate the country's indigenous population. But beyond this, it was also determined by factors beyond the Mexican Revolution, such as the decline of European cultural authority, the post-war avant-garde's search for ways to merge art and everyday life, and the emergence of a U.S.-centered, industrially produced mass culture. The image-world of the Mexican Renaissance was shaped by formal dynamics immanent in painting's

[2] Bertram D. Wolfe, "Art and Revolution in Mexico," *The Nation* 119 (Aug. 27, 1924).

historical development, just as it was driven by the individual ambitions and idiosyncrasies of the artists involved.

This chapter follows the path Anita Brenner charted for herself as she delved into this image-world. The first section begins by describing the urban space as it was inhabited by Anita, emphasizing the way this space was remade and remodeled by José Vasconcelos' education reform. In this section I take a look at Anita's anthropology coursework at the National University and use this as a point of departure for a reflection on the political genealogy and historical self-consciousness of Manuel Gamio and José Vasconcelos' cultural revolution, concluding with an account of the impasse this cultural revolution reached in 1924, around the time Anita Brenner first approached it. Part two introduces Jean Charlot and José Clemente Orozco, Anita's two closest relations among the revolutionary painters. I stop to describe these two painter's relationships with Anita and with each other, their motivations and anxieties as artists, and the way the impasse of 1924 affected their prospects as working artists. The third section continues this story, narrating Anita's first steps as a chronicler and promoter of Mexican Art, including her work to help José Clemente Orozco when his career seemed to have reached a dead end.

3.1. Campus Life

Between the Fall of 1923 and the Summer of 1927, Anita Brenner observed Mexico's post-revolutionary reconstruction from the privileged vantage point of Mexico City, the political and intellectual high ground that served as the central workshop and laboratory for the country's cultural renaissance. After moving out of the sleeping quarters assigned to her as a Presbyterian school English teacher, she moved in with a roommate, Lucy Perry Knox, into an apartment

located on the corner of Marsella and Versalles streets, less than two blocks away from Manuel Gamio's home just off Avenida Chapultepec, and four blocks away from the Toor-Weinberger household. These habitations were just about thirty minutes on foot or a short trolly ride from the city's ancient central quadrangle, around which the palaces—chapels, convents, monasteries, and mansions—that for several decades before the Revolution had already started being remade into secular, republican spaces of public enlightenment.

In those years, these spaces were once again being rebaptized and reconstructed to better suit the expansion of their earlier mandate: the step from liberal public enlightenment to revolutionary mass education. A few blocks northeast of the Zócalo was the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria, at the time the birthplace of the mural movement. The old Jesuit College of San Idelfonso had been re-founded in 1867 as a secular school, and later integrated into the National University system, which was founded by Justo Sierra in 1908, just before the Revolution, as a liberal renewal of the colonial Real y Pontificia Universidad de México. In 1920, the building that housed the National University's graduate school, the Escuela Nacional de Altos Estudios, was re-inaugurated by Sierra's student José Vasconcelos as the central administrative offices—the *rectoría*—of the revamped University, now a centerpiece of Vasconcelos' educational reform. The revolutionized university, where Anita was enrolled, was not radically different from its predecessor. Vasconcelos was faithful to his mentor's vision, not looking to alter it, but only to expand it by merging it with the city's professional schools—secular institutions of the liberal old regime: *Ingeniería*, *Derecho*, *Medicina*, *Odontología*, *Ciencias Químicas*, *Filosofía* y *Letras*. Vasconcelos' original contribution was not the University, but the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP), the revolutionary Ministry of Education, whose headquarters were located in the same neighborhood. In 1921, the SEP took over a building erected three hundred years before as a

Dominican convent. Starting in the 1850s, this building had been partially demolished, rebuilt, and remodeled for a variety of secular purposes, most recently a teachers' college. Since teaching teachers how to teach was one of the main purposes of the new education ministry, the symbolism was appropriate enough. At the time of Anita's arrival in Mexico, Diego Rivera and his assistants Jean Charlot and Xavier Guerrero were putting the finishing touches on this building's walls.[3]

The Escuela Nacional Preparatoria, the *rectoría*, and the SEP building were all occasional destinations in Anita's daily comings and goings. So was the National Library, where Anita conducted research at the time when its collections were still at the time housed in the old Templo de San Agustín. The Young Men's Hebrew Association YMHA, where Anita conducted some of her B'nai B'rith-related work, was on Tacuba street just a few blocks away from the Alameda Central, the National Theater—left unfinished since before the Revolution—and the fashionable strip of Avenida Madero whose establishments, famously the House of Tiles, were daily meeting places where bohemian imports such as Anita Brenner mingled with domestic artists and intellectuals.

The city was much smaller then, but the way it was inhabited by Anita and the bohemian expatriates she associated with made it even smaller. As Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo has suggested, foreign participants of the cosmopolitan cultural effervescence of those years lacked curiosity about the city they inhabited. In their view, it lacked the otherness and the authenticity that made the countryside an object of fascination: "Mexico City was not Mexico. That lesson was learned in European modernist disenchantment, both in the late nineteenth century German sociological thought of Oswald Spengler and George Simmel, and in pioneering U.S. anthropological studies

[3] About Vasconcelos' construction spree of 1921-1924 see Claude Fell, *José Vasconcelos, Los Años del Águila: Educación, Cultura, e Iberoamericanismo en el México Postrevolucionario* (Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma de Mexico, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, 1989).

of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, community vs. mass society."[4] Indeed, the world that was experienced by reformers and radicals as having ended with the War and the revolutionary crisis of the late 1910s was the world in which emancipatory social imagination lay in *Gesselschaft*. The world of Adam Smith and Karl Marx: liberal bourgeois civil society—industrial society with its impersonal social relations. Throughout the nineteenth century, this kind of society had been an object of ambivalence. From the romantic sense of Faustian tragedy circa 1800 to the decadent scientism of social Darwinism circa 1899, its critics bounced back and forth between impatience with the combined and uneven development of *Gesselschaft* and nostalgia for the imagined spiritual comforts of *Gemeinschaft*. But there was a recrudescence to this ambivalence after the First World War—an extreme splitting between one-sided technocratic and primitivist impulses. The Europeans and Americans arriving in Mexico in the 1920s were often seeking refuge from the urban and industrial terrors of mass society. There was much anxious talk at the time about the arrival of a new "machine age." The expatriates tended to be seekers of the idyllic isolation and the personal, unmediated, authentic social ties of traditional rural communities—whether real or imaginary. Mexico City's unevenly applied layers of *Gesellschaft* seemed too much like an underdeveloped version of that which they were trying to leave behind.

The way Anita Brenner inhabited the City reveals another facet of the expatriate disavowal of Mexico's urban life. Those who sought to study Mexico's post-revolutionary cultural rebirth inhabited the city as a kind of university campus. Mexico City's cultural and political centralization, which made the provinces seem always marginal, remote, and backward, was an established fact long before these students arrived with their anti-urban prejudice. The Mexican

[4] Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, *I Speak of the City: Mexico City at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 150.

Revolution had been taken up by Mexico's own intellectuals as an opportunity to pay closer attention to these margins—to study them and integrate them into the national self-consciousness. It thus made perfect sense that those natives of *Gesselschaft* who had arrived in Mexico City seeking to understand a country's pristine *Gemeinschaft*, would fixate on the provinces as their object of study while inhabiting the city itself as a combination of laboratory, workshop, library, lecture hall, and dormitory. Students rarely focus on their own campus as an object of research. Although their standpoint shapes their perspective, it tends to remain a blind spot.

As a student in Mexico, Anita seems to have viewed coursework proper as a secondary matter. This was partly due to the fact that, although her family was comfortably upper middle class, her father tried to give her as little money as possible.[5] His greatest source of pride was that he had worked his way up from destitution not once but three times in his lifetime, as a Latvian Jewish immigrant arriving in the Chicago, as an American settling in Aguascalientes, and as a refugee fleeing from the Mexican Revolution, settling in San Antonio. He thus insisted that Anita learn to do the same. In addition to her work for B'nai B'rith and *Mexican Folkways*, Anita worked as a typist and translator for Manuel Gamio, and starting in 1926, as a research assistant for Ernest Gruening's Mexican opus. She consulted archives, summarized books, clipped newspapers, distributed surveys, and thanks to Gruening's connections and letters of introduction, interviewed official sand requested government files and figures generally not available to the public.[6]

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[5] Over the years, Anita's relationship with her father, Isidore Brenner, was marked by turmoil. Aside from strict austerity with which he raised his children, in these years Isidore was also having an affair with one of the Mexican clerks at his San Antonio store. The record of these family troubles is scant, likely because Anita's daughter and biographer, Susannah Glusker pruned the archive from such potentially embarrassing details before selling it to the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at UT Austin.

[6] Manuel Gamio, a Columbia University PhD, knew English, but seems to have avoided speaking and writing it when he could. Gruening had almost no Spanish. Anita, who was equally comfortable in both languages, could come as a great help for provincial intellectuals with such international ambitions.

One University course that, based on her copious lecture notes, Anita does seem to have taken seriously, was the Curso de Etnografía Mexicana, taught by Dr. Nicolás León. It met Tuesdays at the Museo Nacional de Arqueología, Etnografía, e Historia—the same museum to which, as we saw in Chapter One, Diego Rivera dragged Vladimir Mayakovski straight from the train station. Dr. Nicolás León was by then an old man, a relic of old Porfirian erudition, a medical doctor, amateur anthropologist, an avid book collector and connoisseur of Mexico's pre-Hispanic and colonial times.[7] The lectures were divided into two sequences. The first, "Cuestiones generales concernientes a los indios de México," included units such as "Principales productos naturales del suelo mexicano que satisfacían las necesidades de sus habitantes en la época colonial," and "Distribución geográfica de los indios actuales." The second sequence, "Tribus indias de México consideradas en particular," included sections such as "Familia Tarascana o Michoacana," "Familia Maya o Quicheana," and "Olmecas, Xilancas, Chichimecas y demás tribus primitivas hasta hoy no clasificadas."[8]

Anthropology as a modern, professional discipline was still at a very early stage of its development. The course's bibliography—which Anita seems to have jotted down during lecture and later typed up for herself, as she did with many of her notes—consisted primarily of texts from colonial sources, sixteenth to eighteenth century (Figs. 3.1 and 3.2).

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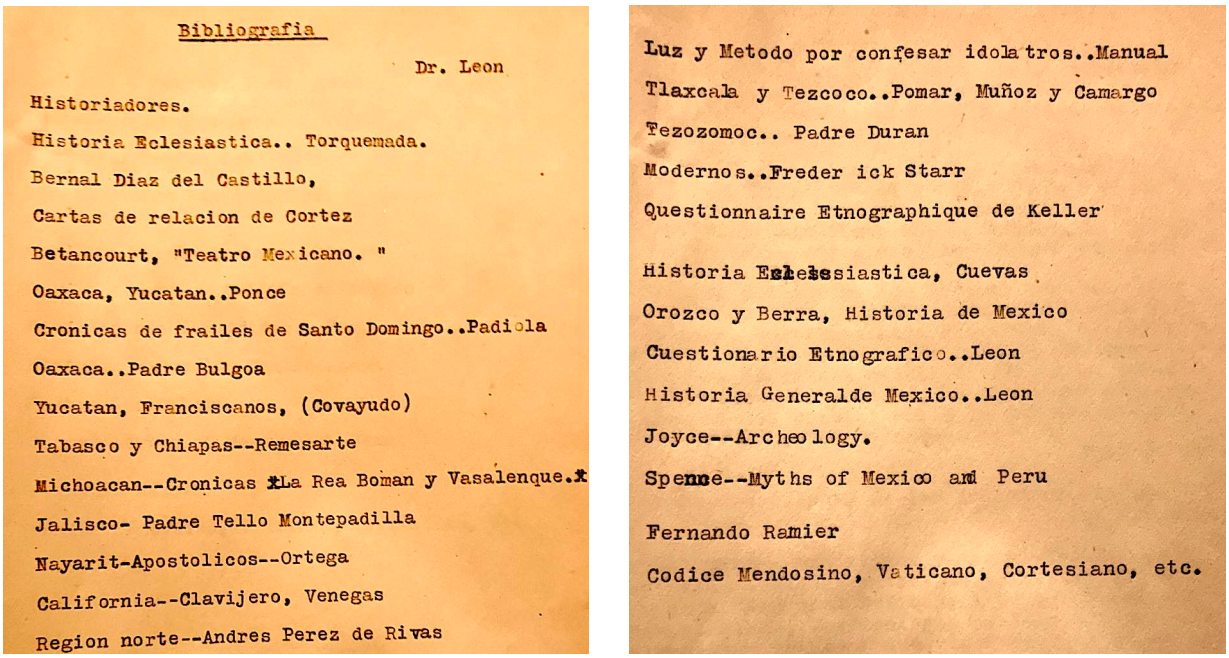
[7] See Nicolás León, Joaquín García Icazbalceta, and Ignacio Bernal, *Correspondencia de Nicolás León con Joaquín García Icazbalceta* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Antropológicas, 1982); Mechtild Rutsch, *Entre el campo y el gabinete: nacionales y extranjeros en la profesionalización de la antropología mexicana (1877-1920)* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Antropológicas, 2007).

[8] Facultad de Altos Estudios, "Programa del Curso de Etnografía Mexicana, Año 1924," Box 10, Folder 3, Anita Brenner Papers, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas Library.



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Spence--Myths of Mexico and Peru

Fernando Ramier

Codice Mendosino, Vaticano, Cortesiano, etc.

Figs. 3.1 and 3.2: Anita Brenner, Bibliografía Dr. León. AB 11.1.

Most of the entries list the region inhabited by an indigenous group— (e.g. Oaxaca, Jalisco, California)—and the author of a source on said group—(Padre Bulgoa, Padre Tello Montepadilla, Clavijero, Vengas, respectively). But one that sticks out is by Frederick Starr, not only because he is the only source in English, but also because his object of study, "modern" Indians, seem to have inhabited, not a region in space, but a region in time.

As a founding member of the University of the anthropology department at the University of Chicago, Frederick Starr was a key figure in the professionalization of the discipline. As one of the first American anthropologists dedicated to Mexico, Starr still represented many of the tendencies of nineteenth century "amateur" anthropology. By all accounts, he was a true character, a great speaker and a difficult colleague. On the one hand, he was provincial in his belief in the superiority of the white race and Anglo culture, he was cosmopolitan as a traveler, merchant, erudite connoisseur and ambivalent admirer of Mexican, Japanese, Chinese, Native American, and

Korean cultures. His Mexican research was characterized by anatomical fascination. Not only was he a measurer of skulls; he was also a systematic collector of images of deformed bodies.[9] His archive, which can be found at the University of Chicago's special collections, includes an intriguing long correspondence dealing with a young Mexican boy he "adopted" and brought to Chicago to live with him—without regard for the boy's family's demands for an explanation.

Starr profiled himself as an intermediary between American academia and various foreign cultures. He lectured large audiences on the Mexican Revolution, and Japanese Art. While on the one hand, he arranged for the transportation of human "specimens" from Mexico and Japan to U.S. World's Fairs, on the other he translated and arranged for the publishing of contemporary Mexican works of scholarship and literature into English. These translations included works from geographers like Antonio García Cubas, historians like Joaquín García Icazbalceta and Alfredo Chavero, as well as journalists and novelists such as Irineo Paz, Victoriano Salado Álvarez, Emilio Rabaza, and Rafael Delgado. His correspondence with the novelist Federico Gamboa is particularly interesting. Seeing that Starr was so industrious as a promoter of Mexican letters in the United States, in 1904 Gamboa, who confessed to Starr that he was determined to "make money with my books in the U.S," asked Starr to translate his popular novel, *Santa*. As the saying goes, "ven burro y se les ofrece viaje."[10]

In 1914 Starr recalled how in 1899 he was 'invited' to write one of the many English-language propaganda books that told of the Porfirio Díaz government's achievements in Mexico, an offer which Starr turned down. His papers are, however, full of evidence of the help he received

[9] Photographic collection of deformities, Frederick Starr Papers, The Hannah Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, Box 39, Section 3, The University of Chicago Library (FS 39.3).

[10] Federico Gamboa to Frederic Starr, August 15, 1904, FS 2.7.

from national cabinet members, governors, and archbishops in collecting pre-Hispanic antiquities as well as skull measurements of Mexican Indians and reproductions of their facial features.

In the 1920s, this version of anthropology was overtaken by the new, professionalized version of the discipline that flourished at the University of Chicago and Columbia University, under the leadership of Franz Boas in the U.S., and in Mexico, of his student Manuel Gamio. Anita Brenner would go on to study anthropology at Columbia under Franz Boas, was already an adherent of the discipline's modernizing attitudes. In a 1924 notebook, Anita criticizes the Eurocentrism and lack of empiricism of another one of the discipline's transitional figures, Lucien Levy-Bruhl. Born in 1857, Levy-Bruhl was a French philosopher of the Comtean positivist school, whose friendship with Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss led him, late in his career, in the direction of anthropology. His 1920s works on "primitive mentality" posited that the "irrational" or "mystical" quality of "primitive" cultures was a product of "collective representations." That is to say, "primitive" subjectivity may have appeared irrational, but it was not defective. On the contrary, it was a product of the social lifeworld that produced it—the mind's way of knowing the world and knowing itself was a socially conditioned outgrowth of culture.[11]

Anita seems to have been reading him impatiently. In her notes, she writes: "Levy-Bruhl—seems to base theory or progress on behavioristic psychology. His 'primitive mind' evidently belongs to all those he classes as 'primitives' and therefore clarifies nothing… the 'primitive mind' of Levy-Bruhl is mythic; irrational and illogical," she underlines, "<u>from a European point of view</u>."[12] Anita Brenner seems at this point to have already been influenced by Franz Boas' rejection

[11] Lucien Lévy-Bruhl and Lilian A. Clare, *How Natives Think (Les fonctions mentales dans les societés inferieures) (*Mansfeld Centre: Martino Fine Books, 2015). See also, Frederick Keck, *Lucien Lévy-Bruhl: Entre philosophie et anthropologie: contradiction et participation* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2008).

[12] Anita Brenner, 1924 Notebook, AB 10.5 (Brenner's underlining).

of racially determined cultural evolution—a perspective she likely inherited from Boas' student, Manuel Gamio. Despite Anita's criticisms, Levy-Bruhl's views were not too far from Boas'. The French philosopher's view of "primitive" mentality was essentially culturally relativistic. It seems like what Anita was reacting to was not the theory itself, but the grouping together of cultures as "primitive." She was not alone. The critique of cultural evolutionism, which had still been radical at the turn of the century, when Franz Boas first made it, was becoming increasingly common sense in the 1920s. After the political cataclysm of the 1910s, the previous century's normative liberal-bourgeois ideal was no longer being taken for granted. Even Levy-Bruhl himself (or his English translator), felt like the title of *Les fonctions mentales dans les societés inferieures*, published in 1910, was a bit too judgmental. When the book appeared in English in 1926, the title had been updated to the less nineteenth century-sounding *How Natives Think*.

The "European"—or to put it in historical, rather than geographical terms—the bourgeois point of view that until recently could speak of "*societés inférieures*" appeared to Anita as remote and dogmatic as medieval scholasticism. It is sometimes said that Anita Brenner coined the term "Renaissance" in relation to 1920s Mexico.[13] Indeed, she relied on it more than other chroniclers of the period. Dr. Atl and José Juan Tablada had already used it earlier in the decade. Still, the historical analogy was really so self-evident that it required no coinage. It went something like this: Here was a nation (a race) that has shaken off (European) dogma and embraced its own living, breathing (Indian) humanity. Its revolutionary politics, Latin and hot-blooded, were as full of public pomp and intrigue as sixteenth century Florence, and just like the Medici, its political leaders were great patrons of the arts. Thanks to this patronage, a generation of radical humanists

[13] For instance, in Rick A. López, "Anita Brenner and the Jewish Roots of Mexico's Post-Revolutionary National Identity," in *Open Borders to a Revolution: Culture, Politics, and Migration,* eds. Jaime Marroquín Arredondo, Adela Pineda Franco, and Magdalena Mieri (Washington, D.C., Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press, 2013).

(socialists, anti-imperialists, *indigenistas*) had set about reacquainting the public (the masses) with the antique sources of their own greatness (Toltec, Maya, Aztec), as well as dignifying vernacular forms of expression (folk arts, ex-votos, *pulquería* walls), that the bourgeois (Europeanized) scholastics of progress had underestimated.

Anita knew that the notion of the Mexican Renaissance was little more than a neat metaphor, but the modernist impulse to brush aside historical canons in order to appreciate the new truths of contemporary life was something that came naturally to her. In addition to the folktales and songs Anita collected as an amateur anthropologist, she also accumulated sensationalist newspaper clippings whose vernacular eloquence would have been difficult to recognize for either proponents of bourgeois progress or seekers of pristine native tradition. Two examples below:

> SEIS VÍCTIMAS DE SU MALDAD
>
> Únicamente para El Universal
>
> Monterrey, N.L., Agosto 17—Ignacio Vacazagua es un curandero Yaqui que desde hace algún tiempo venía ejerciendo, sin título, en esta ciudad, la profesión de médico. Vacazagua es un tipo original: de edad de aproximadamente cincuenta años. Además de los hechos relatados, según la Urdiales el yaqui Vacazagua es un nuevo Barba Azúl que ha dado muerte a cuatro mujeres, y cuenta con seis hijos residentes en Sonora. Se hace toda una novela alrededor de este médico brujo. EL CORRESPONSAL. [14]

> RITOS DIABÓLICOS Y SUPERSTICIONES EXTRAÑAS EN LA FRONTERA NORTE
>
> …Hace algún tiempo, de cierto lugar de Jalisco llegó a esta población un individuo apellidado Tejeda, quien en su bagaje traía una estampa del Santo Niño de Atocha y la cual, expuesta por su dueño en una humilde morada de la barriada del "Polvorín," adquirió pronto tal fama como milagrosa, que todo el norte sonorense y el Sur de Arizona fueron sus ardientes tributarios. Velas, flores, retablos de cera, de plata y de oro, amén de ofrendas en efectivo, cerdos gordos y gallinas ponedoras, eran recibidos sin cesar por el popular infante en traje y con cayado de peregrino.
>
> La policía acabó por fijarse en que entre la gruesa corriente de romeros (en su mayoría gente humilde y creyente, de buena fe) comenzaron a figurar algunos

[14] "Seis víctimas de su maldad," *El Universal*, August 17, 1924, newspaper clipping, AB 16.3.

> de sospechosa catadura: se les observó estrechamente, se vigiló a Tejeda y pronto quedó en limpio que el oratorio del Polvorín se había convertido en un bien organizado centro distribuidor de marihuana, en donde la "Juanita" era adquirida para su envío a las minerías de la región… Tejeda, a quien la gente buena y sencilla acabó por llamar con todo respeto el "Ministro del Santo Niño" fue aprehendido a raíz de aquel descubrimiento y preso continúa todavía.[15]

Beyond their ephemeral existence as tabloid entertainments, these sorts of vignettes survive as surrealist ready-mades. The kind of thing whose oblique charm would come to be easily recognized by those born later, in the depths of the twentieth century, but whose potential aesthetic value was at the time grasped only among the avant-garde. They are documents of both progress and backwardness, halfway between literacy and illiteracy, between folk Christianity and mass culture, between rural and urban life. They are empirical evidence of combined and uneven development, favoring no political argument in particular. Useless to conservatives, progressives, or revolutionaries, they resonate instead with the kind of romanticism of parapraxis which in those days was being elaborated by writers such as André Breton and Louis Aragón into the literature of Surrealism.

> "But there exists a black kingdom which the eyes of man avoid because its landscape fails signally to flatter them. This darkness, which he imagines he can dispense with in describing the light, is error with its unknown characteristics, error which demands that a person contemplate it for its own sake before rewarding him with the evidence about fugitive reality that it alone could give. Surely it must be realized that the face of error and the face of truth cannot fail to have identical features?"[16]

When Anita was collecting these clippings, she had most likely never heard of Surrealism, which was only starting to come together as a movement in the mid-1920s. But perhaps all anyone

[15] "Ritos Diabólicos y Supersticiones Extranets en la Frontera Norte," *El Universal* (date clipped out), AB 16.3.

[16] Louis Aragon, *Paris Peasant*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (London: Jonathan Cape, 1971).

really needs in order to share the movement's insights is to have come of age after 1914, as Anita Brenner had.

Unlike Anita or the Surrealists, the Mexican Revolution's authorities of cultural uplift were too solemnly caught up with the practical matters to indulge in surrealistic contemplations of error's eloquence. Manuel Gamio and José Vasconcelos, the two major ideologues of the cultural revolution of the 1920s, were nineteenth century men faced with twentieth century realities. Their intellectually eclectic and endlessly contradictory programs, projects, and policies associated with their names were attempts to achieve nineteenth century goals at a rhythm dictated by the twentieth. In his essay, "Stereophonic Scientific Modernisms: Social Science between Mexico and the United States, 1880s-1930s," Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo argues that, despite their efforts to chart a new course, their generation was not able to break with old habits of thought:

> "By 1910 a new intellectual group, as preoccupied with national needs as their predecessors, had emerged to challenge the old assumptions of positivism. This group redefined the old empiricism and positivist racial and social theories; it reoriented those trends toward new nationalistic goals through innovative readings of western science and philosophy. Its members were trained within positivist public education by mainstream *científicos*, yet, without rejecting the scientific consensus, they twisted it in innovative ways. They tried out such thinkers as Henri Bergson and Leon Bourgeois and such ideologies as social Catholicism, Marxism, and American pragmatism to explain national phenomena and to act on them. But the scientific and intellectual essentials of the new group, who became the main social thinkers of the 1910s and 1920s, including Manuel Gamio, Wistano Orozco, Molina Enriquez, José Vasconcelos, Antonio and Alfonso Caso—belonged to the late nineteenth century. The 1910 revolution further enlightened their imagination, but there were clear limits on what was thinkable. Race, miscegenation, and nationalism remained their basic goals."[17]

The cultural caudillos of *indigenismo* and *mestizaje* were faced with an unavoidable task: to civilize the Mexican nation, as Vasconcelos imagined it, or to nationalize Mexican civilization,

[17] Mauricio Tenorio Trillo, "Stereophonic Scientific Modernisms: Social Science between Mexico and the United States: 1880s-1930s, *The Journal of American History* 86, no. 3 (Dec.1999), 1168.

as Gamio did. Whichever way it was conceived, the task was not unique to the Mexican Revolution; it was a political operation that became urgently necessary whenever and wherever the working masses awakened to political life, a process described by Eric Hobsbawm as follows:

> "Quite new, or old but dramatically transformed social groups, environments, and contexts called for devices to ensure and express social cohesion and identity and to structure social relations. At the same time a changing society made the traditional forms of ruling by states and social or political hierarchies more difficult or even impracticable. This required method of ruling or establishing bonds of loyalty. In the nature of things, the consequent invention of 'political' traditions was more conscious and deliberate, since it was largely undertaken by institutions with political purposes in mind. Yet we may as well note immediately that conscious invention succeeded mainly in proportion to its success in broadcasting on a wavelength to which the public was ready to tune in."[18]

According to Hobsbawm, the work of educating the masses to implant a sense of national identity and encourage social cohesion took place "with particular assiduity in the thirty or forty years before the First World War."[19] There was the French Third Republic's use of public education to make "peasants into Frenchmen." There was unified Germany's Bismarckian *Kulturkampf*, and the Italian Risorgimento's nationalization of the Renaissance as an Italy-centered phenomenon. Japan had its own monolithically top-down version in the Meiji Restoration. In the United States the process dominated post-Civil War politics. In every one of its many flavors, U.S. pre-War Progressivism was all about "expressing social cohesion and identity," "establishing bonds of loyalty," and "structuring social relations" in a society whose traditional bonds of authority were being vaporized by the industrial revolution. Before the War, the nationalization of the masses took its time, often advancing in a gradual, piecemeal fashion that allowed for missteps and retreats. But history shifted gears in the 1910s and in the case of Mexico,

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[18] Eric Hobsbawm, "Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914," in *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge University Press, 1983), 263-64.

[19] Ibid.

a latecomer to the concert of nations (which now followed a Wilsonian score), the nineteenth-century task of making peasants into citizens and redefining national identity in terms of racial and cultural essences had to be fast-tracked.

This rush to catch up, accelerated by the experience of total war and the demise of the international bourgeois order as hitherto known, imbued the nation-making campaigns of Gamio and Vasconcelos with a kind of breathless impatience and an overzealous grandiosity. This impatience is poignantly expressed in a lecture prepared by Manuel Gamio in Spanish and which he asked Anita Brenner to translate so he could present it at Columbia University: "Estado Actual de las Investigaciones Antropológicas en México y Sugestiones Sobre su Desarrollo Futuro":

> "En efecto, examínense las actividades de todas órdenes que ha desarrollado la civilización en este Continente y se verá que las ciencias sociales y—principalmente la antropología, no han producido los resultados positivos que deberían derivarse de sus postulados y conclusiones teóricas. En otras palabras, la maquinaria, los edificios, las herramientas, todo esto es cada vez más perfecto porque la física, la química, la electricidad, amplían sin cesar sus esferas de investigación y aplicación. En cambio, la maquinaria humana se desarrolla defectuosamente porque las ciencias sociales evolucionan con lentitud, y además como ya dijimos, no se hace su aplicación práctica. Expongamos un conmovedor ejemplo: en este país hay trescientos mil indígenas, en México ocho o diez millones, en Guatemala un millón y en las Américas en conjunto setenta millones. Pues bien, estos seres humanos viven una vida defectuosa y primitiva, retrasada en varios siglos, no obstante que estamos en el siglo de la navegación aérea, la telegrafía inalámbrica y la teoría de Einstein."[20]

José Vasconcelos' pedagogical crusade was just as outsized in its ambitions. Beyond building schools and training teachers, Vasconcelos conceived of his educational reform as a cultural revolution that would awaken, not only a new kind of national civic virtue, but a whole

[20] Manuel Gamio, "Estado actual de las investigaciones antropológicas en México y sugestiones sobre su desarrollo futuro," AB 10.6.

new artistic spirit that that could counter Anglo-American Protestant materialism. His early 1920s mass recruitment of schoolteachers often deployed the language of military mobilization:

> "…me dirijo especialmente a los maestros jóvenes y cultos, a los escritores, a los poetas, a los artistas, particularmente a los que aún no tienen treinta años y ya se han habituado a pasar oscuro de la ciudad, repartido entre una oficina donde se simula el trabajo y unas cuantas horas de holganza o de vicios que la mentira convencional llama placeres, y les pregunto: ¿qué harían si un peligro social, como la aparición de un tirano, o un peligro nacional, requiriese su denuedo? Me responderían que tomarían las armas; púes bien, se. Trata de una lucha mucho más noble que la triste necesidad de ir a matar hombres; se trata de ir a salvar hombres; no de apagar la vida, sino de hacerla más luminosa. No seréis mensajeros de la muerte, sino sembradores de alegría."[21]

Political and economic realities did not allow the programs of reform envisioned by Gamio and Vasconcelos to ever remotely reach their full fruition. And yet, the expansiveness and radicalism with which they were conceived turned out to be so well-attuned to their historical moment that they shaped academic disciplines, political rhetorics, and state institutions for years to come.[22] They also set the stage for Mexican art to play a central role in twentieth-century cultural history. By means of paychecks and commissions, these revolutionary bureaucrats assembled a motley array of untested talents into something like an avant-garde art movement. Gamio's Teotihuacan project employed several artists as illustrators. He hired Adolfo Best-Maugard, a leading proponent, at the time, of art education at rural schools, meant to rescue the naïve genius

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[21] From a speech in Cuernavaca published in *Excélsior* on February 12, 1921, quoted in Claude Fell, *José Vasconcelos, Los años del águila: educación, cultura, e iberoamericanismo en el México postrevolucionario* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1989), 84.

[22] The ethno-nationalism of Gamio's Teotihuacán Project was made up of two stories, ancient and contemporary, layered one atop another, ahistorically simultaneous. This ideology lives on in Mexico City's National Museum of Anthropology, which consists of an archaeological reconstruction of ancient cultural authenticity on the first floor and an ethnographic idealization of current "non-Western" Mexican existence on the second floor. See Fernando Escalante Gonzalbo, *Estampas de Liliput: bosquejos para una sociología de México (*Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2010).

of young Indians.[23] He also hired Francisco Goitia, a Barcelona-trained self-proclaimed anchorite whose art blended skillful Courbet-like realism with a kind of idiosyncratic religious expressionism.[24] Vasconcelos famously jump-started the Mexican school of mural painting when he hired Diego Rivera, Roberto Montenegro, Fernando Leal, Jean Charlot, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and José Clemente Orozco to decorate the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria. That origin story need not be elaborated here, except to say that by the time Anita Brenner arrived in Mexico, the initial phase of the movement defined by Vasconcelos' patronage was already at an end.

In 1923 the SEP got its largest budget yet, and Vasconcelos reached the height of his power, leading his missionary literacy campaign, opening schools, launching a publishing operation, and hiring everyone available to staff these new institutions. But political developments had him on the defensive. His budgetary largesse became a target of public criticism, and he viewed the likely heir to Álvaro Obregón's presidency, Plutarco Elías Calles, not as a fellow revolutionary, but as a thug and a demagogue whose alliance with Luis N. Morones and the CROM spelled disaster for the Revolution. Vasconcelos blamed the CROM for the student unrest that had led to a strike at the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria, during which the muralist' work—particularly José Clemente Orozco's, was severely vandalized. This may have been the case, but the students hardly needed prodding from the CROM to engage in vandalism, since the frescoes were nearly universally rejected by the tax-paying public who expected something prettier. "Such works have been carried

[23] About Adolfo Best-Maugard, see Karen Cordero Reiman, "The Best Maugard drawing method: a common ground for modern Mexicanist aesthetics," *Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts,* 26 (2010) 44-79.

[24] Jean Charlot and Anita Brenner were both full of admiration, for Goitia's work but even more for the lengths to which he took his eccentric self-mortification and seclusion—which seem to have been the result of severe mental illness. Goitia's character is well-captured by his gleeful confession, recorded in Anita's journals: "La vida de los miserables me encanta!" One thread of Anita Brenner's story in these years which I was unable to fit into this dissertation was her attempts to promote Goitia's work in the United States, a prospect that the painter was simply not very interested in pursuing.

to a conclusion," wrote one leading critic, "not in noble exercise of freedom but owing to the hermetic and despotic dictatorship of a small literary group in power, an imposition that weighs like a stone on the spirit of the whole nation."[25]

In a fatalistic mood and already irritated by the painters' attempt to organize as a collective bargaining unit (the famous Sindicato de Obreros Técnicos, Pintores y Escultores, which was more a soapbox for Siqueiros tan a real organization), the Education Minister canceled the Project unceremoniously. When the military rebellion of broke out, Vasconcelos was hoping for Adolfo de la Huerta to oust Obregón, but was once again disappointed. When in mid-1924, Calles officially ascended to the presidential throne, the CROM called for a "direct action" campaign to purge remaining de la Huertistas from public life, Vasconcelos finally decided to resign from his post and abandon the country.[26]

With Vasconcelos gone, the artists were on their own, scrambling for work. The Vasconcelian cultural revolution was short lived. A different phase of Mexico's cultural revolution was beginning, more mercenary than missionary and more promotional than participatory. Vasconcelos' Educación Pública and Gamio's *indigenista* policy continued under the supervision of José M. Puig Cassauranc and the John Dewey acolyte, Moisés Sáenz, with fewer illusions, reduced funding, and a new utilitarian attitude of austere pragmatism. Severed from its original leadership and its institutional mooring, it would have been reasonable to think, 1925 that the Renaissance phenomenon had arrived at a dead end. But as it turned out, its moment in the spotlight

[25] Nemesio García Naranjo, "Imposiciones estéticas," *El Universal*, July 16, 1924, Quoted in Jean Charlot, *The Mexican Mural Renaissance*, 1920-1925 (New Haven: Yale University Press), 282.

[26] This was not Vasconcelos' final act in Mexico. He returned in 1929 to run for the presidency. In the 1930s, his excellent memoirs of the Revolution, full of venom for the muralist movement, became best-sellers and classics of twentieth century Mexican letters.

was just about to begin, thanks in part to the work of figures like Frances Toor, Ernest Gruening, and Anita Brenner.

Anita's contribution in this regard is particularly impressive. Having arrived in Mexico in 1923 knowing next to nothing about art, by 1927 when she moved to New York City, she had already completed the first draft of her book *Idols Behind Altars*, which served as many Americans' first introduction to the Mexican Renaissance. This great feat of learning and synthesis was made possible, at least to some extent, by Anita's most influential mentor, the French polymath of the Mexican Renaissance, Jean Charlot.

3.2. Two Painters

Born in Paris, Jean Charlot was twenty-three years old in 1921 when he sailed from the Old World to the New, with his mother in tow. His father had been a socialist of the left-wing minority who opposed the War in 1914 and an admirer of the Russian Revolution. But having been as a child closer to his mother, Jean grew up to become a devout Catholic. During the War, Jean ascended to the rank of artillery lieutenant, serving first on the Western Front and then briefly, after the War, during the French occupation of Germany. Once he was discharged, he studied at the Ecole de Beaux Arts in Paris, where he participated in the Gilde de Notre Dame, a small collective of young artists committed to the idea that a revival of folk and applied arts could breathe new life into Christianity. His family's business died during the cataclysm, and his father followed soon after. Perhaps hoping to escape the shame of destitution among petit-bourgeois peers, Jean

and Mme. Charlot sought refuge with relatives who lived in Mexico. Jean fell in love with the country immediately.[27]

Arriving at the height of the Vasconcelian crusade, the young artist found endless opportunities to apply his skills—unfortunately, none of them gainful. Jean was a masterful draftsman, "skilled in expressive distortion," as Bertram Wolfe put it in his brief, perceptive description of the kindhearted and talented young reactionary, "he loads each work with the cerebral burden of some aesthetic investigation, succeeding every so often in solving one of his self-imposed problems with startling skill."[28] He soon found work as an archaeological illustrator, but his passion for Mexican history and culture went deeper. He delved into archives and travelled to provinces to survey and document local varieties of folk art, which he wrote about in a patient and precise Spanish prose for publications such as *Forma* and *Revista de Revistas*—he even picked up some Nahuatl. A little over a year after arriving in Mexico, he found a spot among the Preparatoria decorators. First, he served as an assistant to Diego Rivera while he was working on his auditorium encaustic, the putative "first mural" of the Mexican mural movement—*La Creación*. Then he got his own wall, where he helped the rest of the painters iron out the kinks of fresco technique while at work on his strikingly intricate allegorical composition on the Conquest, *Masacre en el Templo Mayor*.

[27] Although he was a key figure in the muralist movement, Jean Charlot has not received the level of biographical attention of some of his Mexican peers. One monographic treatment of his work is by Stefan Baciu, *Jean Charlot, estridentista silencioso* (Mexico City: Editorial El Café de Nadie, 1981).

[28] Bertram D. Wolfe, *The Fabulous Life of Diego Rivera* (New York: Stein and Day, 1963), 158.

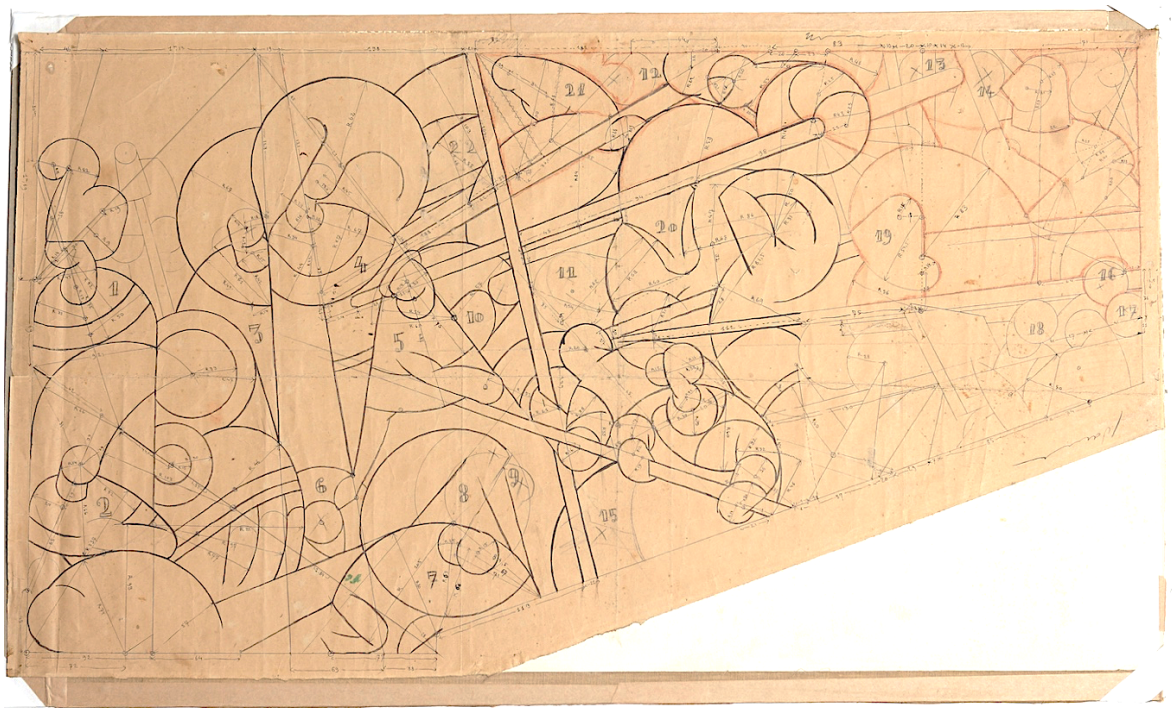

Fig. 3.3: Jean Charlot, *Masacre en El Templo Mayor* (Geometric Diagram) 1922.
Pencil, sanguine, and ink. Jean Charlot Collection, Honolulu, Hawaii.

Masacre en el Templo Mayor depicts the mass murder of Aztec elites in Tenochtitlan during the feast of Toxcatl, committed by Spaniards under the command of Pedro de Alvarado, who was put in charge of the occupation while Hernán Cortés was away from the city. This mural is what Bertram Wolfe probably had in mind when he wrote about Charlot's cerebrally burdensome aesthetic investigations and self-imposed problems. There is nothing spontaneous or accidental here. All of it has been tortuously thought through to achieve an impressive, almost too neat match between form and content. The composition is inspired by two panels from Paolo Uccello's mid-fifteenth century triptych, *The Battle of San Romano*, with their crowded lateral view of the battle all pressed flat onto a single narrow spatial plane. But while Uccello used the knights' broken lances strewn on the ground to create the illusion of pictorial depth, making picture into a window, Charlot uses the lances to flatten the image. This is not a window, but a wall, and there is no ground here but the stairway itself. The lances are depicted as bright red lines, with

almost no shading or modeling. The lances are being thrust, not by the conquistadors themselves, but by the picture frame's geometry. The Spaniards have taken the high ground, at the top of the stairway, whose incline the lances follow as if propelled by the force of gravity.

Charlot depicts the historical episode, not as an accidental atrocity or an unjust act of merely human cruelty, but as a necessary, inevitable, and tragic fate. The Aztecs appear confused and surprised in their arrogance. Taken off guard, overly ornamented, and misshapen by fear, they are all too human. The conquistadors have no faces. They are not made of flesh, but of metallic cones and cylinders, reminiscent of depictions of soldiers during the First World War by Charlot's countryman and contemporary, Fernand Léger. The necessary tragedy of the Conquest, which gave birth to the old Mexico at the dawn of the bourgeois era, mirrors the necessary tragedy at the end of the bourgeois era, from which the new Mexico is emerging. The means by which the old Renaissance art depicted pictorial depth—the lances—are the same means by which the new Renaissance renounces the old illusionism. To the extent that the image sympathizes with the Aztecs, it is because of their human fragility. They represent the cultural wealth of an *ancién regime* as it is crushed by history's ineluctable machinery. The picture reflects Jean Charlot's own attitude toward historical change, that of a conservative resigned to live in revolutionary times.

Indeed, Charlot's artistic exertions were tied up with a kind of masochistic, self-effacing asceticism. He was tirelessly studious and creative, a conservative devoted to serving an adopted revolutionary homeland for scant material rewards. Among the muralists, Charlot's draftsmanship, his art historical erudition, and his technical versatility were second only to Diego Rivera's, but his labors and his appetites, his drives and sublimations, were as if arrayed in precisely the opposite configuration. While Diego felt entitled to consume all of Mexico's cultural wealth and digest it in order to yield ever more monumental creations for all to gaze upon in wonderment, Charlot

conducted himself as if he wished to go unnoticed—to disappear into the beauty and virtue that surrounded him.

In his biography of Diego Rivera, Bertram Wolfe expresses a sense of bewilderment at the contradiction between Charlot's religious devotion and his ability to "work in amity with this Jacobin crew"[29] of revolutionary artists. Wolfe was a non-practicing Jew, a seasoned labor organizer, and a member of not one but two Communist parties. He was, to say the least, a man of worldly pursuits. His profane outlook took for granted that politics is war, so he must have found Charlot's Christian attitude of tolerance and renunciation somewhat perverse. In his essay on Petrarch as a philosopher of the Renaissance, Paul Oskar Kristeller describes the fourteenth-century polymath's aim-inhibited fascination with the profane: "Much of his thought consists of tendencies and aspirations rather than developed ideas or doctrines, and it is inextricably linked with his learning and reading, his tastes and feelings." Kristeller then quotes Petrarch himself: "The highest part of my heart is with Christ… When it comes to thinking or speaking of religion, that is, of the highest truth, or true happiness and eternal salvation, I certainly am not a Ciceronian or Platonist, but a Christian."[30] This was more or less the attitude that carried Charlot through Mexico's far humbler twentieth-century Renaissance. He shared in the intellectual and political enthusiasms of his time, but his Christianity kept it all at arm's length. Charlot shared this attitude with the great majority of revolutionary Mexico's millions, who could be driven by events to become Communists, *agraristas*, or *cromistas*, but remained at bottom *cristianos*. Perhaps it was this shared cultural identity and lived experience that allowed this French Catholic to write so

[29] Ibid.

[30] Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Eight Philosophers of the Italian Renaissance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964), 6.

authoritatively about Mexico without indulging in the ideological projection so common among his Mexican Jacobin and U.S. progressive peers.

Jean Charlot's exquisitely sublimated tangle of neurotic symptoms was immediately appealing to Anita, who met him in 1924 and found him perfectly dreamy. Tall and lean, his sad-eyed, fine-featured handsomeness could have gotten him typecast by a movie studio as a "tortured poet" or "European professor"—a first act foil for the romantic leads' meet-cute in a Depression era screwball comedy. Anita pursued him aggressively and the painter gave in, falling for Anita to the best of his ability. Soon enough he had dreamed up a highly idealized chivalric romance, but insisted that he could not truly correspond her because of a vow of chastity of putatively religious origin, which Anita described in her diary: "His religion forbids physical relations out of wedlock, which are a necessity to him, and would be of tremendous value to both—but more especially to him who is tight and taut and at the strident point—but marriage impossible, because of mutual bad tempers and consequent impossibility of divorce—religion again."[31]Jean seems to not have been too good at observing his vow, adding fuel to the fire of contrition that powered his artistic practice. In one letter to Anita Jean declares, "I'm very much ashamed to send you my 'writings' because you write so much better than me. I like it also, because it makes me feel humble toward you."[32] Some time later, when Jean had just returned from a trip out of the city, Anita wrote in her diary, "I went to see Jean, he said he has been first too sick, then too ashamed to come over… He says he can only be very humble to me and has no rights except to do things for me. All of which is embarrassing and purely ridiculous. Left high and dry on a pedestal! Bah!"[33]

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[31] Anita Brenner, Journal, December 9, 1925, AB 120.5.

[32] Jean Charlot to Anita Brenner, n.d., AB 58.3.

[33] Anita Brenner, Journal, August 18, 1926, AB 120.6.

Jean Charlot's artistic ambition was as if submerged under an excess of admiration; admiration for Anita, admiration for his colleagues, for Mexico, for deep-rooted colonial Christianity that had shaped its culture, and for the Indians, whether they were pagans resting in ancient tombs or pulque-drunk Christians passed out on the curb. Among his revolutionary muralist colleagues, the one Charlot admired the most was José Clemente Orozco. In 1922-23, when the two painters were employed as Preparatoria muralists, Orozco was already in his forties. A newspaper cartoonist by trade, he had already spent the previous decade trying to gain recognition for his 'serious' art in both Mexico and the United States, but to little avail. On both sides of the border, the political situation was less than propitious. His style would have fit right in with that of distant contemporaries such as George Grosz and Otto Dix—but unlike many of his Mexican colleagues, he did not have the means to make it to Europe until it was too late. His uncouth sense of humor, helplessly unpolished manners, and pugnacious attitude toward everyone and everything were, without a doubt, major contributing factors to this lack of professional success. He spent much of the war decade in Mexico City, drawing and painting, not revolutionary scenes, but portraits of schoolgirls and prostitutes and brothel scenes, always a bit sentimental, a bit macabre, and a bit salacious. His 1913 one-man show in Mexico City was a failure, as were his attempts to sell his work in New York and San Francisco. Nevertheless, he persisted, single-mindedly convinced of his work's gradually developing greatness, driven by a furious demon he made no attempt to hide away, choosing instead to elevate it to a unique sensibility for the bewildering and the grotesque. A story recounted by Charlot tells of the time Orozco evacuated the city alongside his friend and mentor Gerardo Murillo, aka Dr. Atl, following a Carrancista column fleeing the city as it was occupied by Villa and Zapata. Stationed in Orizaba, the Jalisco-born but culturally *chilango* painter was put on mess-hall duty. When the time came to sound the

tocsin for a meal, he would call out, "¡Basura! ¡Basura!," aping the sing-song of the capital's garbage collectors. Surely this was an expression of homesick Mexico City patriotism. Chaotic and self-destructive as it could be, the anarchy of spirit expressed by Orozco's constant, cackling self-amusement was something Charlot could only admire and never hope to attain.

Unlike Diego Rivera, Siqueiros, or Best-Maugard, Orozco did not get to visit Europe to learn about the revolution in painting that had reverberated across all the arts in the decade before the War. Nevertheless, in the early 1920s, he seems to have been doing what he could to keep himself informed of the latest developments. The art critic Walter Pach remembered Orozco as "the most assiduous visitor"[34] to the lectures he gave at the National University's 1922 Escuela de Verano. Although there are no sources on the specific content of those lectures, a letter to Pach from the Summer School's director, Pedro Henríquez Ureña, gives a sense of the course's subject matter:

> "First of all, I am glad to tell you that I have obtained that your remuneration be changed from 12 pesos a day to 15 pesos. The number of classes can be as you wish, that is to say, not daily but three times a week… The subject of the three or four months course may be whichever you wish, that is to say, Modern Art beginning in the early Renaissance or else Modern Art from some recent date; you may take up only painting or you may include sculpture and even architecture if you wish. The course for the Summer School is on Modern Art, not because I thought you would not like to give Spanish Art, but because my idea was to introduce a little variety by announcing a course on Modern Art (which of course, may put a good deal of emphasis on Spanish Art) instead of one of two courses on Spanish art which we had originally announced…"[35]

Less than a year after Pach's Mexico City courses, José Clemente Orozco wrote him to thank him for his lectures, in addition to introducing the art critic to the Mexican writer José Juan

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[34] Walter Pach, *Queer Thing, Painting* (New York: Read Books, 2007), 285.

[35] Pedro Hénriquez Ureña to Walter Pach, May 31, 1922, Walter Pach Papers, Box 3, Folder 2, Archives of American Art. (WP 3.2).

Tablada, who was living in New York City, and in recent years had been one of Orozco's few supporters among the Mexican intelligentsia:

> "Muy estimado Sr. Pach, tengo el gusto y el honor de presentarle a mi mejor y más querido amigo el poeta Don José Juan Tablada, portador de esta. Es para mi muy satisfactorio ponerlo en contacto con él porque de esta manera podrá ud. Conocer a uno de nuestros más altos artistas de la palabra. Para nosotros los mexicanos es un maestro respetado e indiscutible cuyo espíritu es ya parte integrante del Alma Patria. Largo y difícil sería, ciertamente, explicar a ud. la obra inmensa del Sr. Tablada y menos en el cortísimo espacio de una carta, pero si ud. es tan afortunado que pudiera tratarlo y hacer amistad con el, tendría una de las más grandes satisfacciones de su vida.
>
> Ya le he contado al Sr. Tablada de las magníficas conferencias que ud. nos dio. Y de las cuales guardamos buenos recuerdos los que tuvimos la fortuna de escucharlos. Realmente nos fueron muy útiles pues nos expuso ud. con notable exactitud y claridad muchos aspectos del arte de hoy y aprendimos infinidad de cosas que ignorábamos. Desearíamos que volviera ud. a nuestro país y sería afectuosamente recibido."[36]

It was likely in Walter Pach's 1922 course that Orozco first became acquainted with the modernist historical dynamic that led from Manet to Picasso, which had led painting away from the representation of literary subject matter toward a focus on the elements and processes of picture-making. In 1923 Orozco expressed his adoption of the modernist perspective:

> "A painting should not be a commentary but the fact itself, not a reflection but the source of light, not an interpretation but the very thing to be interpreted. It should not imply any theory or anecdote, story or history, of any kind. It should not take sides on religious, political, or social happenings: it should consist of absolutely nothing but the plastic fact in its particular, concrete, and rigorously precise statement; it should provoke in the onlooker neither pity nor admiration for the objects, animals, or personages that are part of the theme…"[37]

Orozco, like anyone else who has ever tried to teach themselves to draw, knew from experience that "objects, animals, and personages," must be transformed in the draftsman's mind

[36] José Clemente Orozco to Walter Pach, February 21, 1923, WP 2.41.
[37] Quoted in Jean Charlot, *Mexican Painting* (New York: Parkstone Press, 2018), 132. The author dates this statement in 1923 in the body of the text but does not cite the source.

into spheres, cylinders, cones, and other polyhedrons if they are to be made manifest on a flat surface. The point of prewar modernism was that this process was sufficient subject matter on its own. Pictures must recognize themselves as pictures and lay themselves bare as such. Orozco agreed with this general program, but like the best of his contemporaries he did not let the program get in the way of the primordial drive that leads to the vices of drawing and painting: the compulsion to capture the macabre, sentimental, ridiculous stuff of daydreams—to please oneself by capturing internal imagery with increasing skill, and if possible, to gain enough mastery so that these pictures may be recognized by others. "There is no aesthetic refraction without something being refracted; no imagination without something imagined,"[38] wrote Theodor Adorno. In its pursuit of pictorial autonomy, modernist painting liberated shapes and colors from the need to represent stories from Ovid or the Bible. Literary baggage was at best a distraction, and at worst an appeal to authority. What Orozco recognized was that the insights of modernism could themselves become distractions and appeals to authority, leading to the repression of imagination rather than its mastery.

What Orozco strived for was a mastery of craft that did not come easily to him. In the early days of the movement, Diego Rivera leaned into a kind of ham-fisted Botticelli anatomy seemingly calculated to impress Mexico's provincial public taste. Diego's facility with the human figure must have filled Orozco with envy. He tried to imitate it but was simply not that good at drawing. His attempts at heroic musculature were mocked by Salvador Novo as something out of an anatomical chart. Disappointed and frustrated, Orozco did not stop, but pressed on with his search for the kind of picture for which he ought to be known. This was the single-minded obstinacy that Charlot admired so much in Orozco: "The Italianate rash from which he suffered a while, his dipping into

[38] Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Rolf Tiedeman (London: Athlone Press, 1997), 31.

cubism, show his irritation with being different from the herd. A failure as a plagiarist, he now resignedly explores his own untrod jungle, blasts his own road."[39] The envy, frustration, disappointment of this process cannot be understood as a mere means to an end. They were not suffered for the sake of an aesthetic or political objective. Rather, the process of trial-and-error was an end in itself. In one of several articles Jean Charlot wrote about his friend José Clemente Orozco, he quotes the painter's explanation of this phenomenon: "'Art is before all GRACE. Where GRACE is not, there is no art. GRACE cannot be conjured by so-called cubistic recipes.' The core of this saying," Charlot concludes, "is a belief in old-fashioned inspiration to be mastered only by spiritual experience…"[40]

Although Orozco had a way with words, he wrote little—probably because he was too busy painting. His prickly, minimalist *Autobiografía*, whose brevity stands as a taunting criticism of his fellow muralist's thousands of pages of self-mythologizing, presents a brief but sincerely fond picture of Jean Charlot.

> "Charlot, con su ecuanimidad y su cultura, atemperó muchas veces nuestros exabruptos juveniles y con su visión clara iluminó frecuentemente nuestros problemas. Íbamos con él a visitar el salón del Museo de Arqueología, donde se exhiben las grandes esculturas aztecas, las cuales lo impresionaron profundamente y hablamos por largas horas acerca de aquel arte tremendo que llega hasta nosotros y nos sobrepasa, proyectándose más allá del presente."[41]

Indeed, after only a couple of years in Mexico, the French painter was quietly becoming one of the country's experts in pre-Conquest antiquity. He certainly knew more about these things than most of his Mexican revolutionary colleagues. Some part of him must have been cracking the

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[39] Jean Charlot, *The Mexican Mural Renaissance: 1920-25* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 221.

[40] Jean Charlot, "José Clemente Orozco," *Magazine of Art: A National Magazine Relating the Arts to Contemporary Life* 40, no. 7 (Nov. 1947), 261.

[41] José Clemente Orozco, *Autobiografía* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era), 62.

whip, because in those years Jean seems to have been painting twelve hours a day and studying the other twelve, with little expectation of rest or reward. Mme. Charlot never approved of his Jewish *petit-amie*, but Jean was devoted to her regardless. He shared his knowledge and insights with Anita, and Anita tried to stir her talented *novio's* inhibited ambition by trying to teach him her own furious drive to be widely read and recognized. He served as her guide in research expeditions to places like the remote village of Chalma, known to surrounding villages as a place of pilgrimage, and to students of Mexican culture as a fascinating example of religious syncretism. Together, Anita and Jean planned a monograph on José Guadalupe Posada, whose work was just then in the process of being appropriated by the Renaissance. They also embarked on a campaign to condemn the destruction of the Preparatoria's murals and demand that the painters be allowed to continue their work. Since Vasconcelos' opponents had argued that the murals were an embarrassment for the country in the eyes of foreign visitors, the fact that the petition was signed by foreign supporters of the movement was particularly appropriate:

> "Moved by a spontaneous feeling of indignation, the signers wish to register an active protest against the vandalism of a group of students at the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria who recently mutilated with malice the frescoes painted by Señores José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros. As we are all foreigners, it seems at first that we should not intrude in Mexican affairs… Though deeply rooted in National culture, the arts, painting, music, and literature, of a country become the patrimony of the world at large, which judges, possesses, and assimilates them, regardless of what nation begot them. Damaging the paintings of the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria injures our cultural assets as well as your own… Among cultured people, today's art topic is the school of Mexican painting, one of the most admired things to come from Mexico… Because we care for the future of Mexico, we need to censure with all the more harshness such mutilations, given that the guilty students will become the intellectuals, engineers, lawyers and doctors of Mexico in years to come, and will have much to say as to its destiny."[42]

[42] This text was meant to be included as an appendix to Jean Charlot's *Mexican Mural Renaissance* but was cut out before the book's first printing. It is available at the Jean Charlot Foundation's website, accessed April 9, 202. https://jeancharlot.org/english-texts/mmr_appendix-3.html

In addition to the letter, whose drafting was likely the work of Carleton Beals, Anita was put in charge of circulating a flyer (Fig. 4)

Fig. 3.4 Headline of Flier distributed by Anita Brenner and Carleton Beals in 1924. Reproduced in Jean Charlot, *An Artist on Art: Collected Essays of Jean Charlot*, (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1972), 195.

3.3. Grift and Mastery

After the "Jews in Mexico" piece for The Nation in late 1924, Anita continued to write and publish non-stop. In 1925, much of her work consisted of short pieces for the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, over thirty of them, most of them on the situation of Jewish migrants in Mexico, such as the ones discussed in Chapter One. It was also in this year that she first started publishing work on Mexico and art. There was the short piece, "The Petate: A National Symbol," in the first issue of *Mexican Folkways*, and a piece in Spanish for *Revista de Revistas*, "Edward Weston nos muestra nuevas modalidades de su talento." That October, she also published her first major statement about Mexican art in the Brooklyn-based journal, *The Arts*, titled "A Mexican Renascence."

For such an early piece, "A Mexican Renascence" already reads like a blueprint for every future account of the origins of the muralist movement meant for audiences unfamiliar with Mexican history, including Anita Brenner's own *Idols Behind Altars*.

The account is divided into six parts. The first is a swift survey of pre-Hispanic Mesoamerican peoples and their artistic practices, emphasizing the rich diversity of traditions and forms. The section concludes on a statement straight from Gamio's gospel:

> "Maya, Aztec, Zapotec, Totonacan, Tarascan—all these peoples, or the remainders of them, still exist, forming over three-fourths of the population of Mexico. However, they no longer build temples nor carve monoliths. They are still artists, but their work, while beautiful is, like themselves, generally far below the pre-Hispanic standard. This is not their fault."[43]

The second section speeds past three hundred years of Spanish Empire and collapses it into the nineteenth century. It contains a series of descriptive vignettes on Colonial architecture—cathedrals, monasteries, and convents, in addition to a brief gloss on the San Carlos Academy of Art. This summation of Spanish contributions to Mexico's artistic wealth likely benefitted from Jean Charlot's erudition in such matters. But all of this barely registers, since it comes after the section's opening paragraph—a striking denunciation of European crimes against native culture:

> "The Spanish conquerors were neither archaeologists nor magnanimous art critics. Hence, they destroyed as much as they could of what they found. Idols were broken and buried by thousands, temples were defaced and sometimes transformed into churches or forcibly abandoned. The current of native tradition was abruptly damned. "[44]

The article barely differentiates between the colonial period and the post-independence period. The Porfirian era is presented as a recrudescence of medievalism: "Under Diaz the landowner grew to feudal state and the landworker dropped below the status of a serf."[45] An inattentive American reader, perhaps vaguely aware of the Conquest and the Black Legend of its

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[43] Anita Brenner, "Mexican Renascence," *The Arts* 7, no. 3 (Oct. 1925), 130.

[44] Ibid., 134.

[45] Ibid., 137.

cruelty, could easily come away with the idea that the Revolution was an Indian struggle against Spanish colonialism. And indeed, the opening of the article's following section introduces the revolutionary painters as champions of indigenous authenticity:

> "These painters turned to the Indian, first for matter and then also for manner. Nationalism straddles rampant upon their energetic brushes. They reveal a physical sense of the beauty of things, an appreciation of those things as passionate as revulsion from imposed foreign art and its imposters."[46]

As Anita knew, most of the painters were neither indigenous nor *indigenista*. They were modernists, many of them trained in Europe, an assortment of radicals and aesthetes brought together by Vasconcelos' decidedly non-*indigenista* cultural project. But what Anita was trying to do was to bring together the disparate phenomena of Mexico's post-revolutionary cultural effervescence and synthesize them into a "Renaissance" story of radical reform, spiritual rebirth, and racial authenticity that would appeal to disillusioned U.S. radicals and progressives. The parts aren't all compatible with each other, but Anita does the best she can to fit them all together:

> "Just as the creating emotion of the pre-conquest natives welled from adoration of the gods: just as the Italian painters worked from within the wonder and humility of their faith: so, the Mexican revolutionist artists give themselves into a new religion of the people. It is a religion that is not communism, although most of the painters call themselves communists; nor yet socialism, nor syndicalism, but Mexicanism. A nation of the people, of the worker, of the peasant—this is the idea, but it is an idea fired into passion. The peasant, the real Mexican, is for them not a man, nor yet an intellectual concept, nor a doctrine, but emotionally a religion. If Fra Angelico when he painted the Christ did so upon his knees, Rivera paints the rebel Zapata with a pistol in his own belt."[47]

Having laid out a historical narrative, the remaining three sections of the article consist of a breathless descriptive enumeration of Renaissance figures and phenomena: condensed commentary on Diego Rivera's transition from French cubism to Mexican nationalism, on the

[46] Ibid., 138.

[47] Ibid., 138-39.

sculptor Manuel Martinez Pintao's relationship with the Italian Renaissance, on Carlos Mérida's flattening of the picture plane, and all these artists' Totonacan, Tarascan, Aztec, and Maya inspirations. Anita elaborates on the aesthetic interest of popular artforms such as ex-votos, *pulquería* wall paintings, and illustrated popular ballads. All of this is loosely tied together, not by means of logic, but by a series of imaginative juxtapositions centered around the central theme of indigenous authenticity:

> "This is the seething moment in what Ernest Gruening terms "the Mexican caldron." Into the caldron goes the Indian passion for the soil, his urge toward beauty and his genius for its realization; his power of adoration and his capacity for faith; his individual serenity, his personal humility, the physical quiescence and his national arrogance. Into the caldron goes the medieval chivalry, the emotion, the dramatic instability, the finesse that is of the gesture of the Don. Goes the faith, the vividness, of the Spanish Jew: the persistence and agility of the modern Jewish immigrant. The courtesy of the Aztec priest observing stoically the desecration of his altar, and the courage of the Spanish priest destroying the pagan god in the very faces of its worshippers. The patience of the peasant, starving four hundred years on his own land; and the ferocity of that peasant wresting back that lost land. The simplicity of the laborer demanding a determined place in growing western industry. Out of this caldron must come a nation."[48]

These elements were all already part of the developing cultural imaginary of the Revolution by the time Anita Brenner arrived in Mexico. But this imaginative synthesis, with its particular emphases, fetishes, and fabulations so well-calibrated to appeal to post-War countercultural sensibilities, was her own original contribution.

Around the time Anita was submitting "A Mexican Renascence" for publication, Jean Charlot was getting started at his new, post-Vasconcelian, job in Yucatan, far away from Anita. He had been hired as a full-time archaeological illustrator for the Carnegie Institution's Chichen Itza project. The project was led by Sylvanus Griswold Morley, an archaeologist who had already

[48] Ibid., 139-40.

been researching Maya civilization for over a decade, making important contributions to epigraphy of Maya hieroglyphic writing. American archaeologists first grew fascinated with the prospect of an "ancient Egypt" in the New World since 1893, when molds of structures at Labna and Uxmal were displayed at the Chicago Columbian exposition.[49] Morley's proposal to research Chichen Itza had been approved by the Carnegie Institution as far back as 1914, but his timing had turned out to be perfectly off. The decade of broken diplomatic relations that started with Victoriano Huerta's coup and Woodrow Wilson's brief occupation of Veracruz interrupted scientific collaboration between the two countries. It was not until Manuel Gamio intervened in 1923—a year of cautious reconciliation—that Morley was finally able to secure a concession for his excavation, under the strict revolutionary nationalist condition that all objects disinterred by the American archaeologists would become property of the Mexican government and that none would be removed from the premises without authorization from Mexican officials. Between 1925 and 1930, Jean Charlot spent most of his days on site, producing schematic line drawings and watercolor illustrations documenting bas reliefs and recreating faded archaic wall paintings.

[49] See Guillermo Palacios, "Los Bostonians, Yucatán y los primeros rumbos de la arqueología americanista estadounidense, 1875-1894", *Historia Mexicana* 62, no. 1 (2012); "El cónsul Thompson, los 'Bostonians' y la formación de la galaxia Chichén, 1893-1904", *Historia Mexicana* 65, no. 1 (2015); "El dragado del cenote sagrado de Chichén Itzá 1904-c. 1914", *Historia Mexicana* 67, no. 2 (2017).

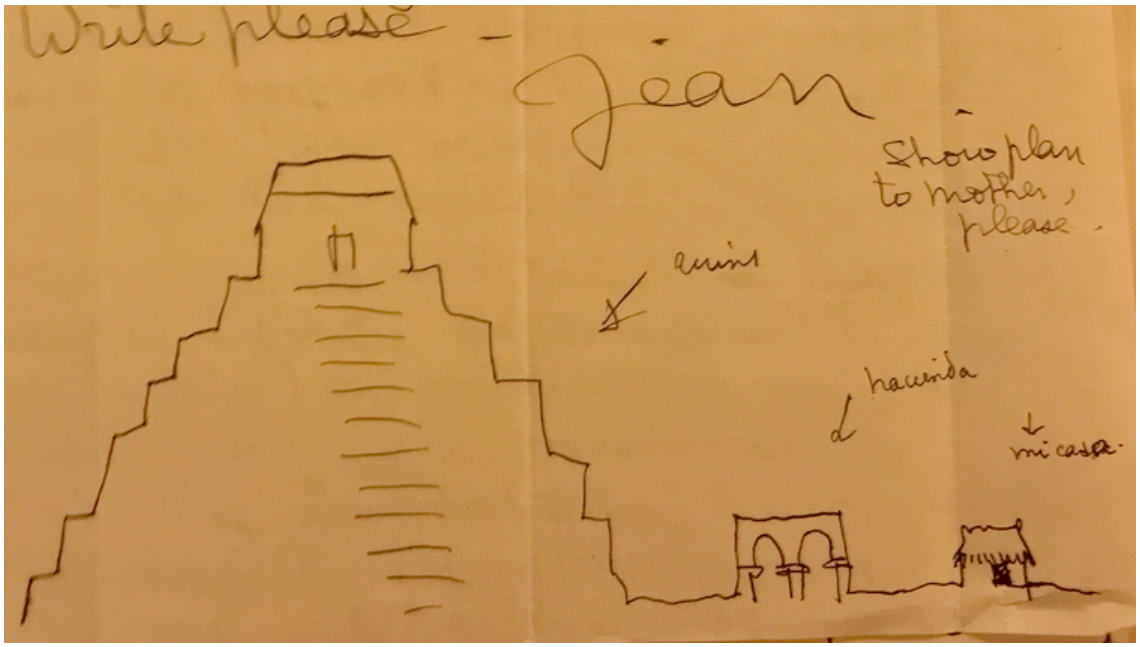

Fig. 3.5: Jean Charlot, "Plan" of Chichen Itza excavation environs.
From letter to Anita Brenner, n.d. Ab 58.3.

> Very dear Anita, ya llegué sin equivocarme ni de puerto ni estación—a lot of things to tell you but now I am very tired. Anyhow, beautiful ruins, beautiful frescoes. Mi casa and the people so nice that they would enjoy even our jokes. ¿Porqué no escribiste para tener carta tuya a mi llegada? I'll try later to send you interesting stuff pa tu profesión. Write please—Jean (Show plan to mother please)."[50]

From his dormitory cabin by the ruins,[51] Jean wrote many letters to Anita, full of charming doodles (Figs. 4 and 5) and often with the same complaint: "No he recibido nada tuyo todavía," "Nothing from you ni de nadie," "Como que nunca escribes."[52] Jean had chosen to go to join the Chichen Itza excavation in part because he hoped that the change of scenery would improve his condition of chronic melancholia, but tropical isolation seems to have made it worse.

[50] Jean Charlot to Anita Brenner, n.d, AB 58.3.

[51] Which for one season he shared with a future influential Mayanist scholar Eric Thompson.

[52] Jean Charlot to Anita Brenner, n.d, AB 58.3.

Fig. 3.6 Jean Charlot, Cartoon self-portrait from letter to Anita Brenner, n.d., A.B. 58.3. Charlot depicts himself painting the structure known as "El Castillo" amid the wilderness alongside a lion, a rhino, and several other species not to be found anywhere in the Americas. Two buzzards fly overhead, perhaps awaiting the painter's demise. Note the monkey on the lower left addressing the artist, "hermano!"

Anita did write to Jean, just not as often as he wrote to her. Jean had run away from the Mexico City scene just as it was starting to get more attention from the kind of American visitors, such as the Hubert Herring of the Committee on Cultural Relations with Latin America, who in the late 1920s would play a leading role in publicizing the Mexican Renaissance in the United States. Meanwhile, Anita, who in these years discovered her talent for networking, was putting herself at the center of the scene, making herself into a link between Mexico's artistic upstarts and Americans looking for the next big thing. Two diary entries from 1926 record her first forays as a diplomat introducing what she called "notables" to the Renaissance scene.

April 11:

> "Just got back from a tea—fregadera at Diego's for a brunch of Protestant ministers and other righteous notables who came down to see for themselves. Bob Haberman, Frank [Tannenbaum] and Frances [Toor] have them in tow! Make speeches to them and bore them to death showing them art. Diego is terribly sick and couldn't receive them, as Frances explained Diego and Edward [Weston] his art and I fled because Frank showed symptoms of insisting on me mouthing, also."[53]

April 16:

> "Beautiful sentimental ending to a confused, brilliant day. Juan Navarro makes young love to me and I kiss him good night. It was a reception we gave, our first semi-pretentious affair. Wild success. House full of notables, smoking and talking. All elements, from art to Charleston. Diego, sitting in one corner and explaining Mexico to admiring gringos—Hubert Herring and others like him; Frank Tannenbaum in one corner, paternally blessing our heads; Salomón de la Selva with a pale stare and two brothers, Salvador Novo examining books and offering awkward gallantries. I think he is reforming his preferences and now has more use for females, among them Lupe [Marín], beautiful in electric blue with her dark skin and large Deep gray eyes and black close-cropped hair. Duboise, A.P. correspondent, & Mrs., Carlos Mérida and Mrs., Carleton, Frances, Federico, some pretty girls, López, devoted and slightly bewildered; Edward [Weston], Silva, Tatanacho, a Miss Moore with floating honey hair and brown eyes; a Miss Brown, a Mr. Steele (Pierce Oil)—Juan Navarro, Tamayo, lean, sensual, shy; many others, some of whom I don't know and. Any whom I don't remember."[54]

It was not just Jean Charlot that was absent, but most of the muralist school. Diego Rivera, whose genius for grift was as at least as great as his artistic genius, had managed to become the movement's international representative at the expense of his colleagues. Back in 1924, when the work of his fellow muralists was vandalized at the Preparatoria, his "Creación" mural had been under lock and key in the auditorium, out of the rabble's reach. When José Vasconcelos dismissed the painters shortly before his resignation as minister of education, Diego Rivera refused to join in protest with his comrades of the Sindicato de Obreros Técnicos, Pintores y Escultores. Instead, he

[53] Anita Brenner, Journal, April 11, 1926, AB 120.5.

[54] Anita Brenner, Journal, April 16, 1926, AB 120.5.

quit the organization and came to a separate agreement with the new education minister, Jose M. Puig Cassauranc that allowed him to finish his work at the SEP building and the National Agriculture School of Chapingo in Texcoco. Having lost their patronage in Mexico City, the group around David Alfaro Siqueiros, which included Xavier Guerrero and Amado de la Cueva, moved to Guadalajara to work on commissions by the state governor and art collector José Guadalupe Zuno. José Clemente Orozco stayed in Mexico City, where his friend, the writer Julio Torri—a SEP administrator, made sure to keep him in the payroll after the painters' purge. Torri gave Orozco a job doing layout and design for the SEP publishing house, and in those days, Orozco also received a commission from Francisco Sergio Iturbe, a non-government fresco at the House of Tiles. This somewhat kitschy symbolist allegory, displaying the kind of stiffly rendered heroic musculature Novo accurately mocked, was titled *Omnisciencia*. It represented the style Orozco would soon abandon in favor of the kind of work that made him famous.

Before leaving for Chichen Itza, Jean Charlot had introduced Anita Brenner to José Clemente Orozco, and a warm friendship developed between the two. In her diaries he appears as an eccentric yet loveable figure (Fig. 6), bursting with outrageous humor and unexpected insights:

> "Came home to get some work done, interrupted by José Clemente, who brought some old newspaper clippings in which he is called many vile names: short-sighted, sentimental, psychological, romantic, informed cartoonist, critic, reformer, impotent, lascivious, frustrated, can't draw, etc. etc. Everything that he is not. Each critic admirably gives his own portrait. Session of raucous laughter as usual."[55]

[55] Anita Brenner, Journal, August 17, 1926, AB 120.6.

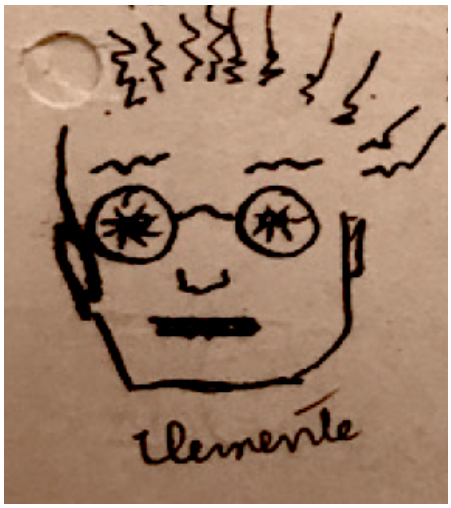

Fig. 3.7: Anita Brenner, "Clemente," sketch from 1925 journal, A.B. 120.5.

> "Had a wonderful black mole at lunch at Orozco's. He lives like Cézanne. Simple house, 'can't bear anything on the walls'—garden, vegetables, and flowers. Two small sons. It is an impression to see him carry the infant… I am really deeply interested in Orozco, whose work is just beginning. He has rid himself of the torture, and in the two first of the series of scenes of the revolution—bought by a fictitious American—he came to a fusion of the grandiosity of his frescos and the intimate curtness of his drawings. I am trying to persuade him to do enough for an exhibition. He rather fears the effect. I told him Goya was an antecedent. 'But Goya is superficial. He draws carefully. He hasn't my monstrosity—nor the reality'… He speaks of striving for less motion and emotion now, is a thing of 'good health.' Certainly these things are masterly. He has begun using abstract planes, semi architecturally incorporated, to splendid effect in both fresco & small stuff."[56]

Anita Brenner does not get enough credit for the indispensable part she played in Orozco's artistic career. Having already participated in the campaign condemning Vasconcelos' dismissal of the muralists, Anita took it upon herself to intercede before the authorities so that Orozco may be allowed to complete his work at the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria. In the Fall of 1926, she wrote to the dean of the National University, Alfonso Pruneda, with whom she had previously been in contact regarding plans for a University-sponsored folk-art exhibition:

> "Tengo a bien solicitar de Ud., audiencia para el viernes 17 del presente, para mostrarle algo de lo ya reunido para la obra de la Universidad Nacional que

[56] Anita Brenner, Journal, September 19, 1926, AB 120.6.

> dignamente se ha servido patrocinar. Deseo además llamar su atención para la obra de José Clemente Orozco quien es como Ud. sabe, uno de los grandes pinceles de que México se puede enorgullecer sobre todo la obra que actualmente está desarrollando es de un valor profundo pues significa para mi y para todos los que la quieren ver, la verdadera estética de la revolución. He visto sus proyectos para la planta baja, que es casi lo único que falta; y aquellos planes ante las circunstancias me han movido a llevar una protesta ante Ud., que es seguramente dado su buen juicio en estas materias se hará también suya. Repito que sería un atentado contra la honra de México, permitir que por causas obscuras y seguramente remediables se corté esta obra en su apogeo emocional y técnico."[57]

It was upon his return to the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria in 1926 that Orozco came into his own as a muralist and painted some of his most iconic images: *The Revolutionary Trinity, The Trench,* and *The Destruction of the Old Order*. Jean Charlot writes eloquently about his dear friend Orozco's moment of truth:

> "He tore down the damaged panels of the ground floor, both because of their ruinous condition and because the neo-classical flavor of the musculature did not satisfy him anymore... He worked against extreme odds, in the often aggressive turmoil of student pranks, plodding painfully toward an individual technique, hampered by a salary far below his family's living standard, with the menace of a second suspension of the work hanging threateningly over his head."[58]

[57] Anita Brenner to Alfonso Pruneda, September 15, 1926, AB 68.9.

[58] Jean Charlot, *The Mexican Mural Renaissance: 1920-25* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 224.

Fig. 3.8: José Clemente Orozco, *Razas Aborígenes*.
1926, Mural panel at San Ildefonso College, Mexico City, Mexico.

Orozco's 1926 murals, particularly *The Trench*, are so well-known that it is easy to forget just how completely original they were—how different they are from the folkish exotica and the political didacticism of his peers. They went on to become part of a national iconography, but there is little about them that is specifically Mexican. The allegorical content in panels such as *La Destrucción del Viejo Orden* and *La Maternidad* is simplistic, almost perfunctory. What matters here are the figures. They strain and struggle and writhe in agony. They do not inhabit a glorious pre-Hispanic past, and they do not enjoy the future fruits of progress, but march upon a war-torn landscape good only for killing and dying. It is not their identity that matters here; it is not who they have been that counts, but what they are now becoming. The figures depicted in the panel titled *Razas Aborígenes*, may have once been workers or peasants, Zapotec, Maya, or *mestizo*, but

whatever they were, they are now uprooted and stripped bare by the cataclysm. Whatever region in space they may call home, the region in time they inhabit is "today." This is the universalism of Orozco's nationalist murals. Regardless of nation, race, or culture, the twentieth century's nation-birthing battles were counting their casualties by the tens of thousands; *aquí y en China*, as the saying goes.

In addition to helping Orozco get a chance to finish his work at the Preparatoria, Anita also got him started on his series of ink drawings titled "Horrores de la Revolución." Inspired by José Juan Tablada's remark that Orozco was Mexico's Goya, Anita invented a "fictitious American" patron interested in commissioning a series of illustrations on this theme. Payment for these drawings came out of Anita's own pocket. According to Anna Indych, "while Brenner intended to mask her patronage in fear that Orozco would not accept money from her, the well-intended ruse turned out to be rather transparent. She in essence *was* the gringa client…"[59]

Meanwhile, across the Gulf of Mexico, Jean Charlot kept writing to Anita: "¿Qué pasa? Why don't you write me about your health? The friends of Lowell [Houser] wrote him about you and that you eat only oranges and that your room is cold…"[60] The Carnegie excavation was becoming something of a fashionable scene for enthusiasts of racial and social science, both Mexican and American. Sylvanus Morley was a gracious host and something of an entertainer. Aside from the occasional banquet and cocktail party, to break up the monotony of archaeological work he would sometimes get his team to put on costumes and perform amateur theatrical representations of Maya mythology.

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[59] Anna Indych, "Made for the USA: Orozco's Horrores de la Revolución," *Investigaciones Estéticas* 23, no. 79 (2001), 155.

[60] Jean Charlot to Anita Brenner, n.d, AB 58.3.

> "Aquí hay tanta gente que uno no se puede aislar. Acaban de llegar Palacios, Reygadas, Mariscal, etc… Muy criticones y Morley muy humilde con ellos. Quiere Morley que en honor de Reygadas representemos otra vez al theatrito. Esto consiste en embadurnarnos de ocre colorado y ponernos plumas. Yo traté de explicar a Morley que ellos lo tomarán como denigrando a México, pero el cree que se van a encantar de ver eso… Acaba de salir un Chac Mool muy bonito…"[61]

As a Roman Catholic, he identified with the locals and tolerated his American Protestant and Mexican anti-clerical colleagues, letting his contempt come out in jokes and anecdotes meant to amuse Anita: "Apuntes etnológicos: que Morley pasaba a Mérida con sus pantaloncitos y dijo un indio al otro, "¿Porqué está así? Y dice el otro: Es que va a hacer su primera comunión."[62] He was losing his patience with the *yanqui* archaeologists—he was French after all—but he was even more annoyed at the Mexicans who accommodated the cultured Americans' characteristic desire to gawk in wonderment at racial otherness. At one point, Diego Rivera visited the dig and spoke to Morley's team about the glories of Mexico's indigenous culture, such as the authentic, syncretic Sanctuary of Chalma. "Diego cuenta cosas risibles y admirables," Jean reported to Anita scoffingly, "que so pretexto de seminario se educan en el curato los 32 (número sagrado) hijos de Quetzalcoatl, que los baños rituales, que las ofrendas a Huitzilopochtli, que etc… Y me dice, '¿Verdad Juan?' y yo contesto, 'Cómo no, Diego.' Y todos se quedan boca abierta. Diego es el payaso del folk-lore."[63]

In his writings about Mexican art, Jean Charlot occasionally mentions José Clemente Orozco's skepticism about Mexico's indigenous rebranding. To the detriment of his own artistic career, Orozco was never a follower of intellectual fashions. His political sensibility was that of a latter-day nineteenth century anarchist: rationalist, egalitarian, and distrustful of all paternalism.

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[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid.

He could thus not abide by the anachronism of the kind of nationalism that sought to bring about progress while holding on to the indigenous past, and he did not trust the state's self-appointed duty to right historical wrongs by means of social engineering. In his *Autobiografía*, the painter rants venomously against the fashionable *indigenismo* that gained currency among both artists and revolutionaries in the 1920s:

> "Para lograr la unidad, la paz y el progreso bastaría, tal vez con acabar por siempre con la cuestión racial. Ya no volver a hablar de indios, españoles, y mestizos. Relegar a los estudios puramente especulativos la conquista y volver a colocar esta en el lugar que le corresponde, que no es otro que el siglo XVI. Tratar al indio no como 'indio,' sino como hombre, igual a todos los hombres, como trataríamos a los andaluces y a los vascos. Si hay un Departamento de Asuntos Indígenas ¿por qué no uno de asuntos mestizos o criollos? El de Asuntos Indígenas suena a Departamento de Pobres Diablos, Departamento de Infelices, menores de edad que jamás pueden hacer nada por si mismos y que necesitan que gente de otras razas piense por ellos y los provea graciosamente de cuanto les hace falta con el pretexto de los tres siglos de explotación colonial, magnífico truco para la holganza con el lema de "hay que darle razón al indio aunque no la tenga," como a los locos del manicomio se les da por su lado para que no se enfurezcan, aunque los indios no tengan nada de loco… Pero este panorama tan bonito está estropeado por los indigenistas. Según ellos, la conquista no debió haber sido como fue. En lugar de mandar capitanes crueles y ambiciosos, España debió de haber enviado numerosa delegación de etnólogos, antropólogos, arqueólogos, ingenieros civiles, cirujanos, dentistas, veterinarios, médicos, maestros rurales, agrónomos, enfermeras de la Cruz Roja, filósofos, filólogos, biólogos, críticos de arte, pintores murales, eruditos en la historia… Respetar a la religión del indígena y dejar en su lugar a Huitzilopochtli."[64]

Anita was also starting to grow skeptical of her milieu's fashionably radical ideals. Sometimes she felt insecure and worried about not being radical enough. In one diary entry she seems to have been trying to shake off doubts of these sort, which had been brought about by talking to Diego Rivera, a master of the subtle art of undermining anyone's self-confidence by means of friendly conversation. One of Anita's artist friends, the Guadalajara-born cartoonist and

[64] José Clemente Orozco, *Autobiografía* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era), 75.

painter Carlos Orozco Romero, reminded her to always take Diego's revolutionary talk with a grain of salt:

> "Carlos [Orozco Romero] gave me back the idea of work out of aimless confusion Diego brings on. Anything—anything, you don't have to be a genius… Why be a socialist que son puras mentiras—He says—'El que tiene mas saliva traga mas pinole. Siempre sera asi.' John Dewey here lecturing philosophy and education, but God knows I'm confused enough."[65]

In an entry from the following year, she watches skeptically as an American tourist gazes admiringly at the larger-than-life genius while he paints on the scaffolding and finds herself somewhat disillusioned with his tricks and seductions, his tireless efforts to be admired:

> "Reception constantly in progress at the andamios—mostly middle-aged American women with intellectual leanings and artistic yearnings who come for inspiration at the feet of the Master, since that is all they can get and since he is very amiable about giving it. They go into spasms of ecstasy and say things like this: 'Oh I come here for music! This, to watch him paint, is my concert…' Gas, twitter, tush, tush. Sometimes other people come with news of 'our party' this or that, and our party can be anything from the Anti-Imperialist League to a new school of poetry. Diego says he loves all the world, but doesn't give a damn about anybody, to which I answer to the first 'No sea tan hablador Diegote,' and to the second, that I know it. He doesn't like irreverence, and that is why I indulge. They are all afraid to interrupt his trance while painting, but they do it anyway. I am not, because I know it is no trance. It is all worked out mentally beforehand and the execution is pure craft… Diego's obra has a lot of value, mostly social. Diego himself is admirable but never loveable. He says the first thing is to look out for one's own interests and that there is no such thing as bad faith and good faith. Pragmatism in friendship, mentally erected because deep down he is so sentimental that if he ever put out he'd slide, and he's out to please. I used to be afraid of him. I wonder why?"[66]

Perhaps Anita's skepticism had something to do with her wanting to distinguish herself from the gullible American tourist with her dilettantish "intellectual leanings and artistic yearnings." How different were they from each other, really? Both of them looked to the Mexican Renaissance as a way to rise above the spiritual poverty of middle-class Americanism. Maybe the

[65] Anita Brenner, Journal, July 9, 1926, AB 120.6.

[66] Anita Brenner, Journal, April 7, 1927, AB 120.6.

only thing that separated Anita from Diego's bourgeois admirers was Anita was an insider in the scene. From her involvement with *Mexican Folkways*, to her apprenticeship with Carleton Beals, to her courses at the National University, her relationship with Jean Charlot, and support of José Clemente Orozco; In a very brief time, Anita was becoming an expert in Mexico's cultural renaissance. She had learned enough to have developed a powerful introductory narrative synthesis bringing together the moment's disparate artistic and political ideas, and she had also learned enough to know that they were not to be taken too seriously.

Around the time Anita got to meet them, the artists of the Mexican Renaissance found themselves at the crossroads. After Vasconcelos' departure, state patronage declined and there was not enough of a market in the country for modernist or 'revolutionary' art. The movement needed an international audience. A few months before the scene depicted in the diary entry above, Diego Rivera had been present at the Comintern-sponsored Congress Against Imperialism in Brussels, where he was one of the representatives of the Liga Anti-imperialista de las Américas (LADLA). That Fall, he would also make a pilgrimage to the Soviet Union, where he was invited for the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the Russian Revolution. But this was not the way the wind was blowing. As we shall see in the following chapters, the future audience of Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and the rest consisted, not of revolutionaries, but of the kind of gullible tourists and bourgeois, "middle-aged American women with their intellectual leanings and artistic yearning

Chapter Four

> The day-dreamer herself knew nothing about any connection which her pleasant stories might have with the phantasies of beating. If a possibility of this kind had been pointed out to her at the time, she would certainly have rejected the idea energetically. The phantasies of beating were to her the personification of everything she considered ugly, prohibited and depraved, whereas the "nice stories" stood to her for beauty and pleasure.
>
> Anna Freud, "The relation of beating phantasies to a day-dream," (1923)

As we saw in Chapter Three, Anita Brenner's made two important contributions to the Mexican Renaissance at a time when the political conditions that first made this cultural and artistic effervescence possible seemed to be coming to an end. Following Plutarco Elías Calles ascendance to the presidency, José Vasconcelos, the leading figure of the Mexican Revolution's ambitious cultural and pedagogical agenda, shut down the muralist project which he had initiated and then resigned from his position as Minister of Education. In 1925-26, Anita Brenner facilitated the movement's next phase in two major ways. First, with some help from Jean Charlot, she developed a historical narrative that synthesized the disparate political and artistic ideas of the Mexican Renaissance and packaged them for an English-speaking audience unfamiliar with Mexico. Second, she helped José Clemente Orozco at a time when his artistic career seemed to be at a dead end. She made possible some of Orozco's most important work by campaigning for him to be allowed to complete his Preparatoria murals, including the iconic panel, *The Trench*, and also by commissioning the series of drawings titled "Horrores de la Revolución."

Anita's involvement in the Mexican Renaissance took place at a time of disillusion, when progressive and revolutionary hopes had been dashed by war and counterrevolution. As we saw in Chapter Two, the group of expatriates that introduced Anita to her vocation as a chronicler and interpreter of the Mexican Renaissance consisted of defeated radicals and disappointed reformers

looking for something like a new beginning. Although Anita was genuinely committed and tirelessly industrious in her efforts to promote avowedly revolutionary art and culture, from early on she developed a degree of political skepticism, and a noncommittal distance from the ideas she wrote about. As she put it in a journal entry, paraphrasing Diego Rivera: "He says the first thing is to look out for one's own interests and that there is no such thing as bad faith and good faith."[1] And yet, despite the fact the original moment of cultural revolution of the early 1920s had passed, and despite the increasingly mercenary attitude of its leading figure, Diego Rivera, the international audience for Mexico's revolutionary art and culture grew by leaps and bounds in the second half of the 1920s.

This chapter continues Anita Brenner's story while exploring the political conditions and psychological tendencies that led to the Mexican Renaissance's enduring appeal. It is divided into four parts. The first part, "Stabilization," consists of a zoomed-out, panoramic political narrative tying together several interrelated phenomena of the mid-1920s: The Soviet Union's retreat into a policy of "Communism in One Country," the international Communist movement's engagement with the cause of anti-imperialism, and the growing influence of a post-Wilsonian, progressive pacifist sentiment. This section also highlights the connections between the emergence of the Liga Anti-Imperialista de las Américas (LADLA), American intervention in Nicaragua, the U.S. State

[1] It was not just in politics, but also in painting that Diego Rivera learned to disregard the difference between good and bad faith. Diego Rivera abandoned cubism right around 1917-19. In his 2013 book on Picasso, TJ Clark claims that cubism reaching a dead end with the War marks an epochal shift in the essential purpose of picture-making: "Put very broadly, my subject so far has been what happened to pictorial art in Europe as it found—or after it found—that the pursuit of truth could no longer be its driving force. The crisis came quickly. For Cezanne and Pisarro around 1900, to take two great instances, the truth of seeing remained an unquestioned if always elusive goal… They were inheritors of a project stretching back to Giotto. Twenty years later, that project was dead. No doubt artists in the 1920s and 1930s (and later) persisted in making strong truth-claims for their work; but the nature of the truth they laid claim to was now disputed and often so obscure—so lacking in anchorage in the experience of the eye—that the concept itself seemed more a rhetorical leftover, unconnected with the detail or structure of pictorial practice." T.J. Clark, *Picasso and Truth: From Cubism to Guernica* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

Department's attempts to frame Mexico as a hemispheric Communist threat, which appeared at a time to signal the possibility of U.S. intervention in Mexico.

The second part "Living Primitives," zooms back into Anita Brenner's story. It consists of a close reading of a draft of a draft of a 1927 proposal submitted to the publisher Albert Boni for the book she was writing in Mexico, whose prospective titles were "Mexican Renascence" and "Living Primitives," but which went on to become *Idols Behind Altars*. The section highlights the rhetorical strategies Anita was developing to sell a product for which she sensed there was an audience in the United States, but which had not been sold before: the Mexican Renaissance.

The third part, "Two Photographers," introduces Edward Weston and Tina Modotti, the two American photographers that Anita Brenner hired to illustrate her book-in-progress. This chapter takes Weston and Modotti's artistic activities and political engagements in Mexico as a narrative point of departure for a somewhat rhapsodic discussion interweaving several issues and themes: the coming of the Cristero Revolt, the secularization of social life and the loosening of sexual mores in the late nineteenth and twentieth century. With the aid of texts by Christopher Lasch, Simone de Beauvoir, Victor Serge, and Elena Poniatowska, this section reflects on the gendered dynamics of the experience of psychological alienation among artists and intellectuals in the 1920s, focusing on Tina Modotti's development as an artist and her political commitment as a member of the Mexican Communist Party.

The fourth part, "In Chichen Itza," follows Anita Brenner during her 1927 trip to Yucatán to visit Jean Charlot at the Carnegie Institution's Chichen Itza project. In addition to continuing the story of Anita and Jean's relationship, it takes up themes from earlier in the chapter for a brief discussion on the role of philanthropic foundations such as the Carnegie Institution in the emerging U.S. dominated international order.

4.1. Stabilization

In the Summer of 1924, six months after Lenin's death, Joseph Stalin, General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), made an official declaration of the Revolution's defeat. The international revolutionary crisis precipitated by the outbreak of the War had passed.

> "There is no doubt that capitalism has succeeded in extricating itself from the slough of the postwar crisis. The stabilization of the currency in a number of countries, the growth of world trade, and the broadening of production in individual countries, the export and investment of capital in countries of Europe and Asia—all this speaks of success in the "constructive work" of capital… There is no doubt also that in the center of Europe, in Germany, the period of revolutionary upsurge has already ended."[2]

After seven years of barely holding on to power through the devastations of foreign intervention, civil war, and revolt within their own ranks, Soviet leadership longed for peaceful reconstruction. And for a brief moment around 1924, it seemed possible that some kind of stability was actually at hand. The New Economic Policy (NEP), which re-opened private investment and markets in agriculture, lifted the country from the depths of wartime famine, and made it possible for state-controlled manufacturing and mining to return to pre-1914 productivity levels. But as the Party's economic planners knew, this growth could only be sustained if international trade was reestablished. The "Second Period" was thus a time when the Soviet Union desperately tried to normalize its diplomatic relations with the "stabilized" capitalist world.

For that brief moment, the international situation seemed propitious. In 1924, American arbitration had ended the French occupation of German territory. The agreements of London made possible the enactment of the Dawes Plan, which had been prepared by experts to facilitate the

[2] E.H. Carr, *Socialism in One Country, 1924-26* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1958), 287.

payment of reparations. Germany, a pariah since the war, joined the League of Nations. Although Communist Parties did not cease to weaken through the decade, a wave of progressive pacifist sentiment washed over European politics in the middle of the 1920s—potentially promising a friendlier relationship between the Soviet Union and the capitalist world. The general spirit of conciliation was represented above all by the Locarno treaties of 1923-24, which settled territorial disputes between France and Germany, and set up the League of Nations as arbiter of any further Western European territorial conflict. More importantly for the Soviets, the first Labour Party government was elected in Britain, and one of the first political acts of Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald was to grant diplomatic recognition to the Soviet Union and begin negotiations to normalize Anglo-Soviet terms of trade.

The moment was fleeting, however. Soon enough the possibility of reconciliation became once again remote. By the end of 1924, Labour was voted out of office, partly thanks to the infamous "Zinoviev letter," a forged document which represented the Communist International as a dangerous revolutionary organization instigating social upheaval. Despite Zinoviev's protestations to the contrary, the incoming Tory government refused to ratify the Anglo-Soviet treaty, and stopping short of officially breaking relations, ceased all dealings with the Soviets. As its relationship with Britain worsened in 1925-26, the Soviet sense of encirclement grew into a fear of imminent hostile intervention—specifically a fear that Marshal Pilsudski's fiercely nationalistic Poland may gain British support for a rematch after its 1920 defeat in the hands of Leon Trotsky's Red Army. Thus, in the mid-1920s, the Bolsheviks were desperate for peace. As Georgy Chicherin put it in a speech before the 1925 All-Union Congress of Soviets: "The basic content of our foreign policy, its primary assumption, is its profound anxiety for peace… The

working masses want peace, and not only the working masses in our nation, but through the whole world."[3]

During its "Second Period" the Comintern's propaganda took a pacifist, anti-militarist turn. The alliance with the Chinese nationalist Kuomingtang imbued the international movement with a previously absent anti-colonial spirit. The precedent for an international Communist organization focused on the colonial question was set by the peripatetic Indian Communist, M.N. Roy, who after founding the Mexican Communist Party, in the early 1920s set up a headquarters for Comintern-affiliated anti-colonial efforts in Paris. But Roy did not get very far. More successful were the efforts of the German "red millionaire" Willi Münzenberg. Münzenberg's public relations machine, the Berlin-based International Red Aid (IAH), was affiliated to the Comintern but financially independent from it. It could thus organize publicity campaigns and front organizations without being dragged down by Moscow's ever more centralized chain of command. From the early 1920s, the key to the IAH's success was its ability to court non-communist public opinion by mobilizing "fellow-travelers" in support of causes appealing to a progressive intelligentsia outside the ranks of the movement. To name two successful campaigns of this sort: It was thanks to the IAH that Sergei Eisenstein's Battleship Potemkin was released internationally despite efforts by several governments to censor it as a piece of subversive agit-prop. It was also thanks to the IAH that the defense of Sacco and Vanzetti became an international *cause célèbre*. In the mid-1920s, the IAH launched a series of public relations campaigns to raise awareness of the plight of colonial peoples, such as the "Hands off China" campaign and the "Committee against the cruelties in Syria." A central coordinating body for these kinds of efforts was soon established: the international League Against Colonial Oppression, directed by prestigious figures such as Erwin

[3] Ibid., 251.

Piscator and Henri Barbusse, which fashioned itself as an "information service" meant to "promote among the widest circles an understanding of the nature of colonial policy and its effects on oppressed peoples."[4]

This kind of philanthropy-adjacent public opinion awareness-raising had never been the intended political terrain of the socialist left, and it was certainly not what the Communist International was originally meant to do. To the extent they were successful, the IAH's efforts were following the lead of pacifist and anti-imperialist publicity that in Europe characterized the "spirit of Locarno" in the mid-1920s.

Before the War, the critique of imperialism in the United States had been led by socialists. But after the movement was crushed during Wilson's Terror, it came to be dominated by Progressives disillusioned with "Wilsonian idealism." Starting in the early 1920s, a cacophony of often formerly pro-War voices, developed a transnational network of pacifist civil society organizations, often with little in common politically beyond a moral condemnation of American intervention abroad. Women's organizations were at the forefront, such as Jane Addams' Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), who advocated for a constitutional amendment to strip the war power from the federal government. The NAACP's Pan African Congresses, held throughout the 1920s, took important steps to bring together anti-colonialism, black self-determination, and the struggle against Jim Crow into the same progressive pacifist discourse. Beyond such notable contributions, there was an archipelago of less consequential organizations. The National Council for the Prevention of War was a twenty-one-member coalition of peace organizations including, among others, the War Resisters' League,

[4] Frederik Petersson, "'We are Neither Visionaries Nor Utopian Dreamers': Willi Münzenberg, the League against Imperialism, and the Comintern, 1925-1933" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Abo Akademi University, 2013).

campaigning behind the general pledge "never to take part in war in any form," the Fellowship for Reconciliation, and the specifically single-issue Committee on Militarism in Education.[5]

These voices had little influence on either the Republican or Democratic parties and were thus galvanized briefly by Robert La Follette's Progressive Party campaign. Partly due to the influence of Ernest Gruening, La Follette's campaign platform included criticism of the influence of large financial institutions on foreign policy. The "loans for supervision" practices of Dollar Diplomacy were in particular singled out as the way in which American financial interests pushed the federal government to impinge on the rightful sovereignty of weaker nations.[6] Ernest Gruening's 1925 speech before a Senate subcommittee on foreign loans is exemplary of the critical perspective of post-Wilsonian progressive anti-imperialism:

> "Seven and a half years ago we went into war to make the world safe for democracy. We went to war for the right of all those who submit to authority to have a voice in their own government, for the rights and liberties of small nations… At the very time that this nation was going into this World War, preparing to send its sons overseas by the millions and to lavish its treasure and that of generations still unborn for this purpose, the administration then in office, unknown to the vast majority of the American people, was engaged in militaristic conquest. It was engaged, under cover of strict military censorship, in overthrowing by force of arms the century-old liberties of other independent nations in this hemisphere. At the very moment when it was raising the cry of liberty and democracy against militarism and autocracy, it was practicing militarism and autocracy on weaker nations to the south of us… the countries of which I speak, Latin American Republics in the Caribbean, in Central America, and some in South America, have become vassal nations, vassal to the banking interests of Wall Street and its industrial allies [?]. In the service of these banking interests, the United States Navy and Marine Corps and the diligent services of the Department of State have been available alike under Democratic and Republican rule. There has been no difference whatever in the eagerness of either of these old parties to serve their financial

[5] On progressive anti-imperialist philanthropy in the mid-1920s, see Emily S. Rosenberg, *Financial Missionaries to the World: The Politics and Culture of Dollar Diplomacy, 1900-1930* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), esp. 122-150.

[6] The singling out of international finance as the key factor in capitalism responsible for subverting national autonomy abroad and corrupting democratic governance at home is one of several commonalities between radicalized Wilsonian internationalism and the contemporary early development of European Fascism as an anti-communist, anti-imperialist protest movement.

> masters. These are not empty generalizations. I shall prove to this committee with a wealth of detail, the shameful record of conquest to which Democratic and Republican administrations alike have been committed in this country…."[7]

At the time he gave this speech, Gruening had already become a dedicated advocate of the Mexican Revolutionary government led by his good friend, Plutarco Elías Calles. As we saw in Chapter Two, at this point he had already begun work on his book *Mexico and its Heritage*, for which he would soon recruit Anita Brenner as a research assistant. Although Calles close relationship with Gruening was probably based on the ease with which the journalist's allegiance could be earned by means of flattery, their political affinity went beyond just anti-interventionism. Despite the stylistic difference between Calles' godless machismo and Gruening's priggish sanctimony, both of them inherited the U.S. Progressive vision of social life as a system of opposing group interests requiring management by complex political machinery carefully calibrated and supervised by expert technicians. Indeed, the Calles administration was characterized by the way it shifted the revolutionary political machine's management from revolutionary caudillos to conscientious professionals like Alberto Pani and Manuel Gomez Morín.

The agenda set by Calles for his administration's first year was to stabilize a political terrain still defined by a chronic condition of low-intensity civil war across its regions. The administration's efforts to bring about political stability and institutional modernity had to satisfy the political demands of the Revolution--at least to some extent. So as soon as he sat upon the throne, Calles moved forward with a major legislative project to lay out rules and regulations for Article 27 of the 1917 Constitution. Article 27 outlined the agrarian reform demanded by the

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[7] *Foreign Loans: Hearings Pursuant to S. Con., Res. 22 Feb. 25 & 26, 1925 before the Senate Comm. on Foreign Relations*, 69th Cong. (1925) (Statement of Dr. Ernest Gruening, Writer, Rockport, Mass. United States).

peasant armies of the revolution and declared all land, water, and mineral rights to be the property of the Mexican people and was universally viewed as the key revolutionary element of the new Mexican Constitution. Calles' goal was not expropriation. On the contrary, a major challenge for Calles in 1925 was to honor the Constitution's claims of national sovereignty without antagonizing the oil companies and the U.S. State Department. As José Luis Ramos put it so concisely, the challenge was "passing oil legislation based on article 27 in a way that would set the terms of sovereignty in post-revolutionary US-Mexico relations without the perennial threat of invasion… Calles argued that an oil law was a matter of sovereignty and that legislation had to be made in Mexico rather than imposed by the U.S."[8] The resulting *Ley Orgánica* of December 1925 and *Ley Reglamentaria* of March 1926 required oil companies to apply for concessions to exploit Mexican subsoil. Those granted concessions were obligated to comply with federal laws regulating the oil industry, particularly with those regarding taxation. The revenue was sorely needed.

As legislation moved forward, State Secretary Frank B. Kellogg found himself under mounting pressure to do something about it. Mexico was at the time the largest producer of crude petroleum outside the United States, and at the height of this boom, over sixty percent of the nearly two hundred million barrels of oil produced in Mexico were extracted by American firms. Soon after the signing of the 1917 Constitution, lobbying organizations such as the Association of Producers of Petroleum in Mexico and the National Association for the Protection of American Rights in Mexico State Department to defend their property rights against potential threat from revolutionary policy. For this purpose, they relied on State Department officers such as Henry P. Fletcher, Matthew E. Hanna, and James R. Sheffield. As U.S. Ambassador in Mexico, Sheffield agreed with

[8] Jose Luis Ramos, "Diplomacy, Social Politics, and United States-Mexico Relations After the Mexican Revolution, 1919-1930" (Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of Chicago, 2014).

the oil companies in intransigent opposition to Article 27 retroactivity—that is, the Mexican government's demand that foreign companies apply for concessions even if they had been in business before the Constitution's drafting.

Ambassador Sheffield spent 1925 and 1926 more or less openly advocating for U.S. military intervention in Mexico. At first, these appeals relied on the old racist rationale familiar from the Roosevelt or Taft administrations: Mexico's innate savagery inevitably inclined them to violence, banditry, and the breaching of contracts, which entitled the United States and other such civilized nations to treat their people and their governments as always dependent and potentially delinquent. But Sheffield's racist attitudes were falling out of favor in Washington, as was the idea that the U.S. had a right to intervene solely on the basis of protecting the property of U.S. citizens. Sheffield thus switched to a defensive argument: that national security, international business, and Western Civilization itself were under threat from international revolution. Under the ambassador's guidance, the State Department's Division of Mexican Affairs assembled a dossier titled "Radical and Socialistic Influences in Mexico," which portrayed Calles as a leader of international Bolshevism seeking to incite revolution southward across the Americas. About the 1917 Constitution, the dossier claimed that "the 309 articles contain such extraordinary provisions to harass employers that many of them probably will have to go out of business." Of President Calles, the dossier suggested ominously that, "In fact, it has been stated of him that he is a much redder Bolshevist than Lenin ever was and that he claims to have communistic ideas that are, from the communistic point of view, a great improvement over anything Lenin advocated in his reddest days."[9]

[9] James J. Horn, "U.S. Diplomacy and 'The Specter of Bolshevism" in Mexico (1924-1927)," *The Americas* 32, no. 1 (Jul. 1975).

State Secretary Kellogg does not seem to have paid much credence to Sheffield's tall tales, at least not until the fading specter of international revolution made a sudden apparition. In mid 1926, Civil war erupted in Nicaragua, apparently aided and abetted by the allegedly communistic regime of Plutarco Elías Calles. Back in 1924 the Mexican government and its national trade union federation, the CROM initiated friendly relations with the newly elected coalition government of Conservative Party affiliated President Carlos Solórzano and Liberal Party Vice President Juan B. Sacasa. In January 1925 Conservative Party leader Emiliano Chamorro led a coup against them—expecting his regime to gain recognition from the United States. Sacasa-led-Liberals found refuge in Mexico, and with Chamorro unable to secure recognition, the exiled Nicaraguan Liberals asked the Mexican government for support in taking back their country by means of insurrection. The Nicaraguans pledged that if their revolution was successful they would follow Mexico's revolutionary leadership, adopting in their constitution "the principles of international defense and nationalization of the sister Mexican Republic, following a social and political program like that developed by Mexico."[10] Mexico provided advisors, arms, and munitions to liberal expeditionary forces led by General José María Moncada, upon whose arrival on May 2, Liberal generals such as Anastasio Somoza García, Francisco Parajón, Francisco Sequeira, and Augusto César Sandino joined in arms to overthrow the Conservative Party regime.

So, while Ambassador Sheffield hoped the Nicaraguan crisis would become a justification for intervening in "Bolshevist" Mexico, Secretary Kellogg finally embraced the idea that Mexico had gone Communist as justification for Nicaraguan intervention. Thus, on 13 January 1927, Kellogg addressed the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on the question of "Bolshevist Aims and

[10] Richard V. Salisbury, "Mexico, the United States, and the 1926-1927 Nicaraguan Crisis" *Hispanic American Historical Review* 66, no. 2 (1986).

Policies in Mexico and Latin America," hoping to convince them that Mexico was acting on the behest of the Third International:

> "The Bolshevist leaders have had very definite ideas with respect to the role which Mexico and Latin America are to play in their general program of world revolution. They have set up as one of their fundamental tasks the destruction of what they term American imperialism as a necessary prerequisite to the successful development of the international revolutionary movement in the New World…. The propagation of Communistic ideas and principles in the various countries of Latin America is considered secondary to the carrying on of propaganda against the aims and policies of the United States…. Communists in the United States have been repeatedly instructed to devote special attention to the struggle against "American imperialism" in Latin America and to the organization of resistance to the United States."[11]

Although there was no basis for the claim that the Mexican government's "Bolshevist aims," the claim that Communists in the U.S. were leading an anti-imperialist campaign in Latin America was based on an authentic document: a report on "anti-imperialist work" delivered at the 1925 National Convention of the Workers' Party of America, which Kellogg quoted extensively:

> "Our party was largely instrumental in the establishment of the All-America Anti-Imperialist League, which although organized only a few months ago and still in its initial stages, has aroused a real response in Latin America, despite the miserably small funds which we were able to put into this work. The All-America Anti-Imperialist League has a special secretariat located in Mexico City, under whose supervision the monthly Spanish language organ of the league, which has now published five issues is edited, as well as special manifestoes, leaflets, &c. Our party has contributed toward defraying the expenses of the monthly magazine El Libertador and toward other expenses of the Mexico City secretariat, but lack of funds has made it impossible to give adequate support in this respect…. A regular section of the All-America Anti-Imperialist League has been formed in Cuba, with Julio Astornio [sic] Mella as secretary, and is extremely active, holding mass meetings, lectures, &c., Labor, peasant, and student organizations in Costa Rica, Panama, Salvador and Peru have affiliated with the league, but no regular sections have been formed in these countries as yet. Contacts have been established with

[11] Frank B. Kellogg, "Bolshevik Aims and Policies in Mexico and Latin America," Statement Left by the Secretary of State with the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations (Washington, Jan. 12, 1927), *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1927, Volume I* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1927).

> some of the foremost intellectuals of Latin America, who are supporting the league and writing for its monthly organ."[12]

As Secretary Kellogg claimed, the Comintern had indeed charged the Workers' Party of America (WPA)[13] with the responsibility of leading the continent-spanning efforts of the All-America Anti-Imperialist League, better known by its Spanish name Liga Anti-imperialista de las Americas (LADLA). But as Kellogg's statement to the senate states, the true center of the organization was in Mexico City. LADLA was a "united front" organization meant to reach beyond the labor movement and appeal to non-communists, particularly among the educated middle classes and among intellectuals interested in supporting progressive causes. According to Frederik Petersson's deeply researched work on the transnational network of Willi Münzenberg's Workers' International Relief (IAH), it was the German expatriate Alfonso Goldschmidt, an old ally of Münzenberg's, who assumed the role of IAH's "intermediary in Mexico." [14] Somewhat like Bob Haberman, Goldschmidt lived in Mexico City where he worked as a lecturer at the National University and gained access to a broad academic network. Starting in 1921, he assisted in the work to establish Münzenbergian committees and front organizations, such as LADLA.

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[12] Ibid.

[13] There were two Comintern-affiliated communist parties in the United States at the time. An "underground" party founded at the height of Wilson's Terror, and the legal Workers' Party of America, the (WPA). By the time Kellogg presented Congress with evidence of their continental ambitions, their moment had already passed. After experiencing some success in the labor movement and taking leading roles in the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party, Moscow prohibited the WPA from joining their new allies in the La Follette presidential campaign, which meant losing the alliances they had just formed. See Jacob Zumoff, *The Communist International and US Communism, 1919-1929*, Historical Materialism Book Series, vol. 82 (Boston: Brill, 2014).

[14] Petersson, "'We are Neither Visionaries nor Utopian Dreamers.'"

Among the non-communist participants in its propaganda efforts were Victor Raúl Haya de la Torre, Isidro Fabela, and José Vasconcelos.[15]

Kellogg's case against Mexico was, ironically, based on the existence of a small anti-imperialist organization—an organization whose existence was, also ironically, the result, not of the expansion, but of the contraction of international Communism.

Nevertheless, newspapers across the United States published Kellogg's speech in full the day after he presented it before Congress. In the weeks that followed, the *Washington Post* became a major proponent of the "Bolshevik Mexico" story, claiming that "The Mexican government is aided by the advice and counsel of Soviet agents who are specially trained to carry on the subtle war against republican government."[16] The *New York Times* wrote of a Mexican "red wedge" being driven through the heart of the continent.[17] Papers in the William Randolph Hearst chain singled out Ernest Gruening for attack, claiming that Calles had paid him to build bridges between Mexico, and other supposedly subversive forces such as Senator LaFollette, and the British Labour Party. Fearing that Kellogg's speech was a sign of impending intervention, Calles prepared as best he could for war, transferring troops to Tampico under the command of General Lazaro Cárdenas, who it is said, was instructed to set fire to U.S.-owned oil fields in case of invasion. Gruening,

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[15] Goldschmidt is an interesting figure that I could not figure out how to include in this dissertation. There is not much information available about his activities in the 1920s. He seems to have originally arrived in Mexico escaping the German Socialist government's persecution of Communists around 1919. He was part of the Toor-Weinberger-Wolfe scene, and Anita mentions him in her journals. At one point he was involved with the production of a documentary film about Mexico for the German studio UFA. Anita Brenner wrote an unpublished review of his 1925 book *Mexiko*, which included illustrations by Diego Rivera. The book was never translated into English or Spanish, so either Anita could read German (something that doesn't come up anywhere else), or there was a translation manuscript somewhere that was never published. Based on her review, it seems like Goldschmidt's impressionistic, rhapsodic style may have been an important influence on *Idols Behind Altars*. In the 1930s Goldschmidt abandoned politics and spent the rest of his life as a sociology professor at the Universidad de Nacional.

[16] Quoted in Horn, "U.S. Diplomacy and 'The Specter of Bolshevism," 41.

[17] Ibid.

always careful that his actions appear before the public as philanthropic in motivation, immediately sued Hearst Communications for libel.

Revolution in retreat, Empire hesitant, and the way forward uncertain; as we will see in the rest of this chapter and throughout the next, these were the political circumstances that led the world to cast its spotlight on Mexico's cultural Renaissance.

4.2. "Living Primitives"

With her employer and the rest of the world thus occupied, Anita Brenner spent most of her time during the fourth and final year of her Mexican undergraduate education—Fall 1926 to Summer 1927—assembling materials and writing chapter drafts for her own book about the Mexican Renaissance. Sometime in 1927, Anita submitted a book proposal to Albert Boni, the co-founder, along with Horace Liveright, of Boni & Liveright, pathbreaking publishers of T.S. Eliot, Eugene O'Neill, Isadora Duncan, Hilda Doolittle, as well as the Modern Library series. In 1923, Boni had split from Liveright and started Albert and Charles Boni, Inc., which continued publishing edgy modernists like Marcel Proust and D.H. Lawrence, but moved toward more political content, such as works by W.E.B. Dubois and Leon Trotsky.

A draft for the pitch begins: "Provisional titles for book: MEXICAN RENASCENCE. Or, LIVING PRIMITIVES." At age twenty-one, Anita was not yet much of a scholar. Although she was writing about Mexican art, she knew not to present her work as a proper historical treatment: "It is not precisely a history of Mexican art but rather an exposition of certain elements of Mexican art which relate to themes prominent now in European and American thought upon the general subject of art." The pose Brenner strikes is not that of a social scientist or journalist, but that of a member of an international avant-garde. The avant-garde, however, was no longer what it used to

be before the war. It no longer stood in opposition to established taste, as it had well into the 1910s, but was becoming, instead a kind of "research and development" appendage of the culture industry.[18] Anita's invocation of "themes prominent now in European and American thought," she reminds the publisher that he would not want to miss out on the next trend.

The posture is aggressively cosmopolitan. "First, the viewpoint taken is not specifically nationalistic, but rather that this treasure of the south is to be considered an American contribution to world culture. Certain important elements serve to stress the difference between Europe and America and may serve as a clue to those interested in the creation of American art more to the north." This is her bold provocation: that Mexico has something to teach the United States about Americanism, about differentiating the New World from the old. Mexico could lead the rest of the hemisphere in inventing a new kind of post-European art.[19]

Anita's boldness is always admirable, but the claims she lays out as the book's premises are not wholly convincing. "One of the elements is the position of art in Mexico as an integral part of the life of the people," she writes, "This is a condition true in Italy at the time of the Renaissance, and true in part of popular crafts in oriental countries," and so on, stumbling over too many gerunds and sub-clauses as she goes on:

> "Because of this position it is impossible to divorce any phase of Mexican art from Mexican life, emotion, belief, tradition. Each is understood in terms of the other. Even the aesthetic qualities of the finished product are determined by those factors. It is furthermore inadequate and possibly incoherent to present one phase of plastic art in Mexico by except by limiting and defining it according to other phases of plastic art, since they all grow out of the same traditional complexes, supplementing and complementing each other both plastically and functionally in

[18] I first came across the formulation of the avant-garde as the culture industry's research and development department in Malte Hagener's excellent book, *The Emergence of Film Culture: Knowledge Production, Institution Building, and the Fate of the Avant-Garde in Europe, 1919-1945* (Amsterdam: Berghahn Books, 2014).

[19] Anita Brenner, "Provisional titles for book: MEXICAN RENASCENCE. Or, LIVING PRIMITIVES," AB 3.8, 1.

> the life of the people. Incidentally, for people interested in Mexico per se, this viewpoint will clarify phenomena which baffle most sociologists, since Mexico cannot be understood except in terms of its own expression, being, as beyond a doubt it is and as has sometimes been realized, a nation made up in great majority of actively creative artists."[20]

That final claim, "a nation made up of actively creative artists" was a commonplace among her cohort of foreign admirers of Mexico's "Renaissance." Writing it down, Anita seems to suddenly sense how outlandish this claim may sound outside this specific subculture, and seems to try and stop herself from completing the sentence: "…being, as beyond a doubt it is and has sometimes been realized…"[21] It was a notion inherited from Manuel Gamio and Vasconcelos' pedagogical revaluation of folk art, but embraced with particular enthusiasm by the expatriates, who seem to have sometimes experienced Mexico as a gigantic Montparnasse or Greenwich Village: a whole nation dislocated, lumpenized; caught up in a permanent state of anti-bourgeois rebellion and creative self-discovery. Anita's recurring theme, with its invocation of cyclical time was well chosen at a time when history seemed to have passed a point of no return: "Philosophically: "the idea of constant rebirth which is in the continuity of Mexican artistic tradition."[22]

> "As an example of the smaller themes likely to correlate with subjects predominantly in the mind of artists and critics elsewhere today, the tradition of mural painting may be cited, and its re-occurrence in terms intelligible to artists anywhere today, within the mural movement headed by Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco. The importance of this rebirth may be suggested by the fact that alone in Mexico has mural painting occurred in modern times…"[23]

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[20] Ibid., 2.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid., 3.

This last claim was not literally true, but it was necessary for the brand she was developing: muralism. The idea was to synthesize the inchoate discourse around fresco painting on public buildings in the 1920s, project it onto the past, and present it in digestible form for a U.S audience. As we saw in Chapter Three, it was a narrative she had already rehearsed in her article for *The Arts*.

> "This book is at present being revised. In order, however, to give an idea of the general plan a synopsis of chapters is submitted, and to give an impression of the method of carrying out the plan two chapters are included. Further reference can be made to an article published in THE ARTS, September, 1925, of which in some sense the book is amplification. This number of the magazine is included with the material submitted."[24]
>
> Chapter One. Threads of Tradition. The fundamentals of the country, its physical contour and qualities; the materials and forms of its art as determined by the environment; the emotions and traditions operating in their selection, for example the portrayal of hands and skulls, which runs through Mexican art from three thousand years ago.
>
> Chapter Two. Ancient Americans. A survey of the most important prehispanic civilizations of north America. Maya, Toltec, Aztec, Zapotec, Totonac, and Tarascan, with an exposition of the qualities of each people and the characteristics of their art. Example, the Aztec the closed synthetic and abstract, very near to modern sculpture, and Tarascan primitive realistic.
>
> Chapter Three. New Spain. The conquest of Mexico and the influx of new traditions and art styles on the old. The change of religion and the influence on art which as before, is closely identified with religion. The method of conquest determining a "splitting" of art tradition into official art of the conquerors and popular art, though both are done by native artists. The influence of Indian on Spanish art.[25]

The narrative introduces a concept likely to be unfamiliar to the lay English reader—syncretism—into the tried-and-true moral framework of the Black Legend. At a time when the condemnation of colonialism became for the first time a mainstream view among the educated

[24] Ibid., 4.

[25] Ibid.

middle and upper classes in the U.S., the barbaric attempt by the conquering Spanish to suppress a whole civilization's spiritual and artistic expression was a particularly timely topic. The essentially conservative notion of resistance by means of cultural continuity could then appear as a radical opposition to the reigning conditions of historical rupture and discontinuity. The chapter list goes on:

> Chapter Four. Manuel Martínez Pintao. The continuity of tradition as exemplified in a modern sculptor.
>
> Chapter Five. Idols Behind Altars. The continuity of ancient religious tradition in Mexican religious art.
>
> Chapter Six. Native Possessions. The continuity of ancient secular tradition in Mexican popular art. (Toys, masks, whistles, etc.)
>
> Chapter Seven. Painted Miracles. The fusion of ancient and Spanish tradition and art to make unique and native popular religious art.
>
> Chapter Eight. Memories of the Future. The fusion of ancient and Spanish secular tradition and art to make a native secular mural art and a native secular art of ballads and songs. The songs of Mexico and their relation to the painting and their nature determined by tradition. Painting and songs both reflection of the past and of the moment, determining the future.
>
> Chapter Nine. Posada, Prophet of the Revolution. An Illustrator of popular ballads. His position as "concentrator" of popular tradition and translator into personal and universal terms, like Daumier.
>
> Chapter Ten. Three Primitives. (Carlos Mérida, Abraham Ángel, Carmen Fonserrada) The first examples of art grown out of the new desire to construct an art of the land, to reassert the old values and attempt to recapture the old unity of art tradition, with the emotional tinge of a kind of new religion, partly the effort to throw off the official "imposition" of values intimately only European, partly an assertion of love of the soil and of people the color of it. The germs of the artistic creed out of which the mural movement grew.[26]

This kind of heavy-handed blood and soil language was becoming common currency in the 1920s. Brenner's writing about Mexico is full of this kind of "jargon of authenticity," as

[26] Ibid., 5.

Theodor Adorno called it, where “individual words are loaded at the expense of the sentence, its propositional force, and the thought content.”[27] “Words like, "being"--which was Adorno's main target--"life," "soil," “unity,” “intimacy,” “tradition,” and Brenner’s favorite, “emotion.” “The jargon makes it seem that without this surplus of the speaker the speech would already be inauthentic…”[28] The jargon's bluffing assertion of self-evident authenticity is meant to short-circuit any critical engagement.

> Chapter Eleven. The Syndicate of Painters and Sculptors. The conscious attempt in group to achieve “the revolution,” that is, the plastic parallel of the actual revolution, a reassertion of the Mexican self. The linking of this to the tradition of “art of the people” in murals.
>
> Chapter Twelve. José Clemente Orozco. The dynamic factor and plastic parallel of the physical revolution.
>
> Chapter Thirteen. David Alfaro, Siqueiros [sic]. Experimentor with Mexican murals in modern architectonic terms.
>
> Chapter Fourteen. Diego Rivera. The synthesis of preceding efforts and idealization of national moods and traditions.
>
> Chapter Fifteen. Francisco Goitia. The realist. The attempt to picture exactly the physical and spiritual nature of the people.
>
> Chapter Sixteen. Jean Charlot. The fusion of outside elements to and the effort to get new images for the physical and spiritual of America, in Mexico.
>
> Chapter Seventeen. Diverse Groups. Máximo Pacheco, and [illegible] young painter and sculptor grown up in the mural school. Manuel Rodríguez Lozano, Castellanos, and others. Lozano experimenter with [illegible] in the schools, and his own personal contribution. Roberto Montenegro changed from European aesthetics to Mexican under the influence of the new school. Tamayo, Guerrero, and others, contributors to [illegible] aesthetics. Assimilated

[27] Theodor W. Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, trans. Frederic Will (London: Routledge, 2003), 24.

[28] Brenner, “Provisional titles for book…” 4.

> foreigners: Higgins, assistant to Rivera, Houser, Jackson, come to play and remain to paint.[29]

It was a terribly ambitious narrative arch: beginning in prehistory and ending with profiles of Anita's artist friends and acquaintances. All of them, except perhaps for Diego Rivera, were still more or less unknown to an international audience. It is a truly inspired idea, difficult perhaps, to recognize in retrospect: to sell a modernist art movement by selling a whole civilization. The precedent here was *Mexican Folkways*, so following this precedent, Anita made sure play up the role of the book's illustrations:

> "Finally, the plastic documents presented, are in themselves of interest, first because of their undoubted integrity and value, second because they are almost unknown. Most of the illustrations presented are material absolutely new, having been "discovered" in exploration through Mexico into the oldest colonial missions as well as the craft-centers of the Indians, by the author and the two photographers, Edward Weston and Tina Modotti, the quality of whose craftsmanship is evident in the photographic material."[30]

4.3. Two Photographers

Chicago-born, California-based photographer Edward Weston and Italian-American actress Tina Modotti arrived in Mexico in 1923. The two had met in Los Angeles, introduced by Tina's lover at the time, an artist who went by the name Roubaix "Robo" l'Abrie Richey, and had a brief affair. When Robo decided to move to Mexico, Tina came along, and Edward hoping to continue seeing Tina, soon followed. A few weeks after they arrived, Robo fell ill and died, so Tina moved in with Edward, and decided to learn photography by becoming his apprentice and live-in studio assistant. The two photographers exhibited together in Guadalajara, where Governor

[29] Ibid., 3.

[30] Ibid., 4.

Zuno bought several of their prints. In Mexico City, they became fixtures of the hard-partying social scene that often gathered at Diego Rivera and Guadalupe Marín's home at 12 Mixcalco Street. The work these two American photographers produced in those years would eventually be recognized alongside the muralists as part of the Mexican modernist canon. But at the time, there was no market for their work, and the two eked out a living by taking portraits of friends, acquaintances, or whoever would pay.

In 1926, the couple spent several months on the road taking pictures for Anita's book project, sometimes accompanied by Edward's teenaged son, Brett, they visited picturesque sites in Oaxaca, Puebla, Guanajuato, Michoacán, and Jalisco. Of the devout city of Puebla, Edward Weston remarked that there must be "as many churches as in a great city like Chicago—the least of them more beautiful than Chicago's best. All, except a Methodist Church, --a crude, cold invasion from the North."[31] In Michoacán they toured Morelia, Pátzcuaro, Tupátaro, Uruapan, among other localities, photographing handmade pottery, *artesanía,* landscapes, Indians, churches, vegetation, statuary, etc.

But the post-revolutionary peace that made such travels possible was still fragile. In July, just before Edward and Tina departed on one of these field trips, the government published the thirty-three articles of the "Ley Calles," which among other measures, ruled that clergy must apply for permission in order to practice their profession, and limited the number of active Catholic priests two a maximum of one per six thousand people. In response, Mexico's episcopal committee announced that it would cease all religious services and close

[31] Edward Weston, *The Daybooks of Edward Weston, Two Volumes in One, I. Mexico, II. California* (New York: Aperture, 1973), 165.

all churches by the end of the month. While stopping at Pátzcuaro, Michoacán, Edward Weston witnessed some of the tension that in a few months' time, was about to explode into civil war:

> "I was possessed by a great uneasiness while in Patzcuaro, in view of the government order to officially end Mass in the Catholic Church. One felt the tenseness of the situation affecting the whole community. The severity of the situation affecting the whole community. The severity of the ruling might result in civil war. I recall one morning, --4:30 it was and pitch dark. I was awakened by a delirious clangor of bells, --more than protest, I thought, --an insinuated rebellion. Then came Sunday, August 1st—when no bells rang—a heavy silence, more alarming than the foreboding bells, threatened the city…. No longer did Tina, for favors, have to kiss the greasy hands of lecherous priests—but I insisted more seriously than heretofore that Brett join me in doffing my hat to every church door, --for now the attitude toward strangers, --possible government spies, or at least unsympathetic aliens, --made our situation precarious. We were marked. If we entered a church some fanatical old hag would follow, or a crowd of sullen faces would eye our activities. A source of importance to our work, the sacristy, was closed, locked and sealed by the government. With the going of the padres, permission to work In a church was not easy to obtain, for no one cared to—or would not—assume responsibility, --so often we went around in maddening circles…. As I review our travel and adventure from the vantage ground of my comfortable desk, I think this: that if a woman had not been in our party, especially Tina, with her tact and sympathy for the Indians, a woman which made the group seem less aggressive, Brett and I would never have finished the work..."[32]

The sharpening conflict between the Church and the regime was becoming, in those days, an additional factor worsening U.S.-Mexico relations. In Washington, D.C., the Knights of Columbus staged a mass meeting where keynote speaker, Democratic representative John J. Boylan of New York, called for President Coolidge and the State Department to withdraw recognition from Mexico until the harassment of the Church stopped. At the Knights' annual meeting Supreme Council meeting in Philadelphia, a resolution was adopted to lobby for the lifting of the arms embargo prohibiting shipments of arms to Mexican non-government forces. The Bishop of San Antonio declared that "there is no blinking the fact that Mr. Calles, and Morones

[32] Ibid., 174.

and Tejeda and his other confreres are aiming to war against God and Christ, all their protests to the contrary notwithstanding." He argued that it was contradictory for the United States to refuse to recognize Soviet Russia but maintain diplomatic relations with—as he put it— "Soviet Mexico."[33] At that moment this was an exaggeration, but by the time the Cristiada reached its peak, the Mexican Revolution's anti-clericalism would indeed be comparable with the war the Bolsheviks waged on the Eastern Orthodox Church during the Russian Civil War a few years earlier.

Whether in the Volga Basin or the Highlands of Jalisco, the persecution of the clergy—Eastern Orthodox or Roman Catholic—the harassment of the faithful and looting of churches—were not signs of vanguardism but of political backwardness. From the perspective of pre-War Marxian Social Democracy, such conflict was a political remnant of provincial Jacobinism and anarchism, historically overcome by scientific socialism. From the post-1919 perspective of twentieth century nationalist developmentalism—the perspective of Mexican anti-clericalism as well as Stalinism—it represented an attempt to catch up with metropolitan secularism by means of terror. From the perspective of those waging it in the heat of the moment, this terror was a wartime measure against reactionary elements—internal antagonists of progress that had to be pacified. From any one of these angles, the persecution of the Church was an unfinished task left over from the previous century. It was the Enlightenment in the periphery straining to banish superstition and catch up with the metropole; the revolt of the Third Estate against arbitrary privilege; the violent reshaping of social life in the secular image of the urban middle class.

[33] Mollie C. Davis, "American Religious and Religiose Reaction to Mexico's Church-State Conflict, 1926-1927: Background to the Morrow Mission," *Journal of Church and State* 13, no. 1 (Winter, 1971).

Alan Knight's description of the sociological makeup of Mexican anticlericalism in the 1920s could apply to France in 1789 just as well as Mexico in 1926 (or 1860) "Doctrinaire anticlericalism of the modern period, which targeted the Church as an institution and Catholicism as an ideational system, tended to be a big city or small town affair, and its chief protagonists were often professionals, white collar workers, shopkeepers, artisans, and the like."[34] That is, it represented the self-conscious mobilization against traditional authority by the agents of modern civil society: Schoolteachers, army officers, artisans, carpenters, merchants, mechanics, the butcher, the baker, mutualist societies, masonic lodges, incipient political parties.

There was a gendered dynamic to this. As Knight points out, "anticlericals tended to be men, while women were more prominent in the Catholic cause... The image of the gullible woman, conned (maybe molested) by devious priests, was commonplace… Macho revolutionaries like Calles and Gabriel Gavira inveighed against addled *beatas* such as those who inhabited Jalisco, the 'henhouse of the Republic.'"[35]

[34] Alan Knight, "The Mentality and Modus Operandi of Revolutionary Anticlericalism," in Matthew Butler, ed., *Faith and Impiety in Revolutionary Mexico* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 34.

[35] Ibid.

Fig. 4.1: Edward Weston, *Guadalajara, Barranca de los Oblatos: Rocky Trail*.
1925, Platinum palladium print.
The Palmer Museum of Art, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA.

With or without war against the Church, there was no stopping the secularization of social life. The great wave of industrialization and proletarianization that lasted from the 1880s to the Great War uprooted populations that only a generation before had belonged to rural, religious communities. Across many nations, the traditional moral and religious underpinnings of social life were being displaced. As women joined the industrial working class, they were displaced from their traditional role in the patriarchal structures of family and Church. Explaining the enthusiastic participation of women on the side of the Church during the Cristiada, Alan Knight speculates,

"The Church provided women a public role denied them by the patriarchal state; links to the *cura* offered prestige and time-honored social identity…"[36]

In the United States and elsewhere, proletarianization meant urbanization and secularization. The exploding number of unattached, unsupervised, working women in cities around the world changed the nature of urban leisure. Brothels and saloons were replaced by nightclubs, amusement parks, and cinemas. The underground world of illicit commercialized sex aimed exclusively at male consumers was replaced by open spaces of commercial recreation designed to encourage mixed company and erotic encounters. This new mass consumer society in the making was the profane realm of disorder Progressive Era crusaders of social hygiene strived to curtail by means of Prohibition. As the barrier between public life and the private domestic sphere of the family was brought down by working class women, an avant-garde of middle-class women followed. They enrolled in colleges and universities, pursued professional careers, and began to live unmarried, on their own. The more adventurous among them explored the heterosocial urban environments of working-class nightlife.[37] By the mid-1920s, in places like New York City, Chicago, and Berlin, the middle-class "new woman" as a mass phenomenon was more or less a *fait-accompli*. In Mexico, expeditions by middle-class women into working-class nightlife were a still somewhat avant-garde territory charted by bohemians such as Tina Modotti and Anita Brenner. Anita records one of these expeditions in her diary: "[Bojidar] Vidas and I

[36] Ibid., 35.

[37] I take this narrative of the role of working-class women in shaping urban space from the excellent book by John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

went to the 'Salón México'; which is very elegant and decorated with paintings of nudes and much batik-effect. Here dance the chaffeurs, 'gatas,' and prostitutes, etc."[38]

The emancipatory character of women's growing presence outside the family in social and political life cannot be denied. But new freedoms always lead to new dissatisfactions, unfulfilled longings, and unsuspected anxieties. Until recently, the talents and intellectual gifts of women like Anita Brenner could only be expressed within the narrow but well-defined sphere of the family's patriarchal order. In his essay on Jane Addams' feminism, "Woman as Alien," Christopher Lasch describes the intolerably subaltern function such talents and gifts fulfilled in the patriarchal family's *ancien regime*.

> "The association of moral and aesthetic refinement with femeninity was more than an expression of the sentimental myth of women's purity. It seems at one time to have served a more immediate and practical purpose. Artistic and intellectual accomplishments in a young woman, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, were regarded as indispensable to her success in the marriage market, toward from which girlhood all her energies were supposed to be devoted. The feminists suspected, and with good reason, that not only the genteel ideal of culture but the whole system of genteel social intercourse had as its essential function the auctioning off of young girls to the most eligible bidders…"[39]

Highlighting the protest against this condition as expressed in the correspondence between Jane Addams and Inez Gillmore, Lasch empathizes:

> "The practical effect of all this, for young girls of intellectual interests and serious disposition, was to make the society of their contemporaries almost intolerable. The lowest common denominator of the feminist revolt was simply a revulsion, formed early in life, against the silliness of the life which a girl was expected to lead and which most girls apparently did lead."[40]

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[38] Anita Brenner, Journal, June 25, 1927, AB 120.8.

[39] Christopher Lasch, "Woman as Alien," in *The New Radicalism in America, 1889-1963: The Intellectual as a Social Type* (New York, Knopf, 1965), 65.

[40] Ibid., 67.

This was without a doubt a familiar experience for Anita. In diary entries from the Summer of 1926, she comments condescendingly on the 'funny little souls' of two young American friends of her roommate Lucy, who were staying with them at the time. She seems to have privately referred to these women as "the virgins."

On June 28 she writes:

> "Have been some diverted by watching their funny little souls. Such wistful, pathetic, rather silly, funny little American souls! They would like to know about music & art. They are mostly afraid of things. Such funny twisted thin little things!"[41]

Then on July 5:

> "A strange peace in the house. Peace with a tinge of uneasiness. Still rain, rain. Day after day of it. León flooded. Oaxaca full of washouts. The virgins ill-humored because they can't wear their sport dresses and are ruining many pairs of shoes. They have such funny little souls. Like dried peanuts in their crisp shells. Always making small noises. Always wanting something. All shut in, they can't see. Gay, cheerful—so optimistic—Optimistic about meeting a cute man soon. Trousseaus and bridge & so forth."[42]

Brittle, lacking in substance or autonomy—unanchored, at risk of being washed away by the rain; the image repeats like a psychological defense, perhaps a projective disavowal of a lack of substance she feared within herself. Two decades later Simone de Beauvoir explained the relationship between this sense of internal emptiness and self-alienation as the locus of what she viewed as a specifically modern condition. Increasingly emancipated from their traditional social role, but still relegated to unequal status, women were faced with an identity crisis. Did freeing oneself from patriarchal constraints lead to nothing more than second class personhood?

> "Man's truth is in the houses he builds, the forests he clears, the patients he cures. Not being able to accomplish herself in projects and aims, woman attempts to grasp herself in the immanence of her person. Parodying Sieyes words, Marie Bashkirtseff wrote: 'Who am I? Nothing. What would I like to be? All." It is

[41] Anita Brenner, Journal, June 28, 1926, AB 120.8.

[42] Anita Brenner, Journal, July 5, 1926, AB 120.8.

because they are nothing that many women fiercely limit their interests to their self alone, that their self becomes hypertrophied so as to be confounded with All..."[43]

De Beauvoir remarks on the desire for regression to infantile omnipotence that often accompanies the narcissistic preoccupation of the deracinated:

> "They are nostalgic for this period when they felt their father's beneficent and imposing hand on their head while tasting the joys of independence; protected and justified by adults, they were autonomous individuals with a free future opening before them: now, however, they are poorly protected by marriage and love and have become servants or objects, imprisoned in the present. They once reigned over the world, conquering it day after day: and now they are separated from the universe, doomed to immanence and repetition. They feel dispossessed. But what they suffer from the most is being swallowed up in generality: a wife, mother, housewife, or one woman among millions of others; as a child, by contrast, the woman lived her condition in an individual way; she was unaware of the analogies between her apprenticeship to the world and that of her friends; through her parents, teachers, and friends, she was recognized in her individuality, she thought herself incomparable to any other woman, unique, promised to unique possibilities…. The woman she has become misses the human being she was she tries to find this dead child in her deepest self."[44]

Fig. 4.2: Edward Weston, *The Batik Gown* (Portrait of Tina Modotti). 1921, Platinum Palladium Print. Oakland Museum Museum of California, Oakland, CA.

[43] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Vintage, 2011), 667.

[44] Ibid., 760.

In "Woman as Alien," Lasch argues that this dissatisfaction, while experienced most acutely by women trying to live beyond the confines of traditional family life, was in fact experienced by middle-class intellectuals regardless of gender. "For this conviction that life lay always outside the narrow confines of one's own experience was common to all those, of whatever sex, who felt themselves imprisoned in the stale room of a borrowed culture."[45] What Lasch describes is a kind of alienation and unsatisfied craving characteristic of twentieth century intellectuals, artists, radicals, bohemians, who rejected the immediate circumstances of their middle-class condition and longed for some other, more authentic experience—someone else's experience.

> "The envy with which women looked on men had its counterpart in the envy of intellectuals in general of what they conceived to be the richer life of the proletariat (an envy which in our time [Lasch is writing in the late 1960s] has been transferred to Negroes). Women also, when they were not lost in wonder at the masculine world of activity and adventure, often gave vent to this mingled fear and envy of the working class. But when Inez Gillmore spoke of 'the hearty, vulgar social promiscuity' of the poor, to which her own 'faded gentility' made so poignant a contrast, she spoke not as a woman but as a middle-class intellectual gazing wistfully across the social chasm. She said no more than what every intellectual of the age must at one time or another have suspected that his own class had somehow lost contact with life. To live fully, directly, spontaneously; to live to the outer limits of one's capacities; to immerse oneself in the stream of experience—all this was no longer something one took for granted as the essence of the human condition but had become rather an objective to be strived after with all one's powers, an objective one was yet fated always to fall pitiably short of. It was precisely this mystical sense of the sanctity of experience, life, growth, and development that rendered the men and women of the period incapable of setting up an alternative to the cult of 'self-fulfillment' the destructive possibilities of which they were so quick to discern… The cultural and even the political history of the period, looked in such a light, seems always to shine back some reflected facet of this religion of experience. One sees it in the vogue of literary naturalism; in muckraking journalism… in the assumption, common to both, that "reality" was at once sordid and romantic, dirty and unspeakably exciting—whatever in short was the antithesis of genteel respectability."[46]

[45] Lasch, "Woman as Alien," 62.

[46] Ibid.

Educated Americans of the Harding and Coolidge "return to normalcy" and "new prosperity" era were increasingly inclined to the muckraker's worldview. The instinctual, irrational conviction that the dirty, sordid, dangerous, reality out there was somehow more "real" than their own middle-class standpoint. But beyond the 1920s and into the present, this would become the standard perspective of any foreign intellectual approaching Mexico. A decade or so later, the exiled and defeated, Belgian-born transnational revolutionist, Victor Serge expressed this unavoidable hardcore vision of Mexico's down-and-dirty reality:

> "I thought of a Mexican Proust. Would one be possible? At first glance totally impossible. Proust describes a world that's like an overheated greenhouse; here we're in the open in the tropics, the earth burns and trembles. Proust analyzes beings who are refined and complex in the fashion of a certain Paris, for whom the adventure of living is social, sentimental, psychological, and conventional, filled with the charm of fine dining, petits fours pleasantly offered in a salón, loves as learnedly futile as the chatter… Here instincts prevail over psychology, of whose existence only professors are aware. The arid mountain is close to the city, the knife is hidden beneath the hand, anger beneath laughter. Here elemental passion kills without complication, faith causes delirium and ensures forgiveness, envy is a flame, love is a violence that relieves, and death isn't bourgeois: it is near and dark with the laughing teeth of the calaveras… Everything is torrid, brutal, vehement, simple—but simple like the life of carnal flesh, swollen with blood…"[47]

Christopher Lasch wrote his essays on American radicals of the 1910s and 20s in the 1960s as an investigation into the social and psychological origins of a countercultural sensibility that had grown gradually mainstream in the course of the century. As Diego Rivera experienced in wartime Montparnasse, Bohemia had once truly been beyond the pale. Before 1919, the experience of social alienation that led artists, intellectuals, and radicals to disavow established society was limited to the kind of margins inhabited by John Reed or Emma Goldmann. After 1919, this alienation and disavowal became widespread enough to constitute a mass cultural phenomenon.

[47] Victor Serge, *Notebooks: 1936-1947*, eds. Claudio Albertani and Claude Rioux (New York: New York Review of Books, 2019), 672.

In his "informal history" of the 1920s, *Only Yesterday*, Frederick Lewis Allen described the phenomenon as a "revolt of the highbrows":

> "[The highbrows] feared the effect upon themselves and upon American culture of mass production and the machine and saw themselves as fighting at the last ditch for the right to be themselves in a civilization which was being leveled into monotony by Fordismus and the chain-store mind.… The intellectuals lapped up the criticisms of American culture offered them by foreign lecturers imported in record-breaking numbers and felt no resentment when the best magazines flaunted before their eyes, month after month, titles like 'Our American stupidity' and 'Childish Americans.' They quite expected to be told that America was sinking into barbarism and was an altogether impossible place for a civilized person to live in—as when James Truslow Adams lamented in the *Atlantic Monthly,* 'I am wondering, as a personal but practical question, just how and where a man of moderate means who prefers simple living, simple pleasures, and the things of the mind is going to be able to live any longer in his native country."[48]

The American pilgrims of the Mexican Renaissance were all part of this highbrow revolt. In the same entry to his 1926 Daybooks where Weston recounts the tension in Pátzcuaro preceding the Cristiada, he does not miss the opportunity to lament the scenic town's likely fate as a commercialized tourist destination:

> "Pátzcuaro, built on the slope of hills which flank an exquisite lake, is 'picturesque.' In the hands of American businessmen, it would soon be a world-famous all-year resort. But the hillsides and shores are so far free; billboards have not yet conquered Pátzcuaro. Instead, there are green hills with scarlet skirts of women and scarlet serapes of men scattered here and there like exotic tropical blossoms."[49]

Elsewhere, he remarks:

> "In Mexico most everyone has suffered, so they don't bother over another's affairs. One need not pose. It follows then, that there is less hypocrisy here, for actions succeed feelings. But the Anglo-Saxon lives on self-deceit or wears his

[48] Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920s* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2000).

[49] Weston, *The Daybooks of Edward Weston*, 175.

> mask and becomes a neurasthenic or a hypocrite. What one can't feel, one can't be. To play a part too long is death to instinct and consequent introspection."[50]

Suffering, in Weston's view, was what made Mexicans more authentic—less hypocritical than Anglo-Saxons. There is a great solipsism at work here. His claim that Mexicans "don't bother over another's affairs," is particularly suspect. More likely, he was so disconnected from his surroundings that he himself didn't bother about whether Mexicans bothered over another's affairs. Ironically for a photographer, Weston does not want to pose. He fears self-deceit and mask-wearing—the "death to instinct" which he attributes to "Anglo-Saxon" culture. Beyond the frank expressions of solipsistic detachment, this passage also reveals the photographer's devouring hunger for a kind of immediacy of feeling he felt himself deprived of.

In this sense, Edward Weston's photography can be read as an attempt to capture and objectify the immediacy of experience denied to him by some kind of alienation or detachment. The people and things which in daily life he can only look at, are captured and fixed permanently, distilled into primordial phenomena of tactile objecthood. His image of a rocky trail at the Barranca de los Oblatos in Guadalajara (Fig. 4.1) lacks the spatial coordinates that could make it readable as a landscape, or even as a place where one may walk or stand. Instead, it appears as a rich sensory manifold: dryness, roughness, brush, undulation, erosion and crevice. The sexually suggestive forms that at first glance seem like erotic symbolism are not symbolic at all, but byproducts of a broader impulse to objectify sensual immediacy. Weston denied that his famous photograph of a nautilus shell (Fig. 10) was meant to be sexually suggestive, and claimed he arrived at it as a "sheer aesthetic form" that recorded his internal "feeling for life."[51] The shell is no longer a shell, but an

[50] Ibid.

[51] Weston, *The Daybooks of Edward Weston,* 32.

objectification of this feeling, a hunger that lives within him but cannot be satisfied by the object as it exists on its own. It was probably something like this feeling that Weston was trying to capture in the series of nudes he took of Anita Brenner (Fig. 9). Just as the sensuality of the nautilus' shape is detached from the object itself, the sensuality of the nude's shape is abstracted from the model herself. Regardless of the thing photographed, both are pictures of the same thing.

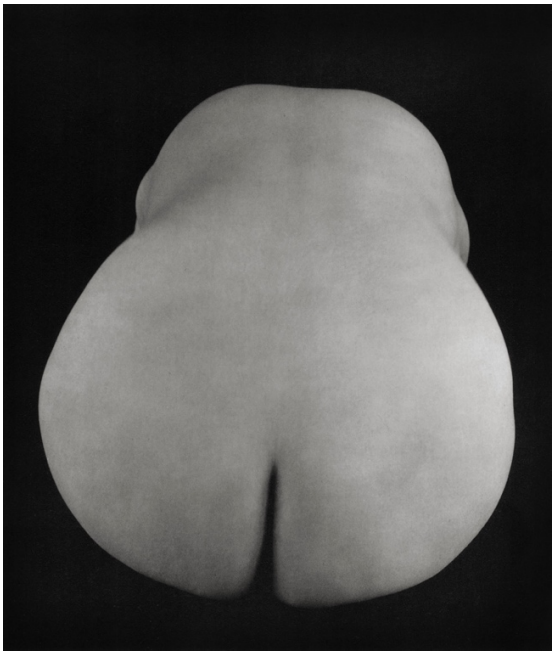

Fig. 4.3 Edward Weston, *Nude Study II,* (Anita Brenner). 1925, Gelatin silver print, Center for Creative Photography, Tucson, AZ; Fig. 4.4 Edward Weston, *Nautilus*. 1927, Gelatin silver print. Center for Creative Photography, Tucson, AZ.

In her biographical novel about Tina Modotti, Elena Poniatowska cannily imbues her narrator-protagonist with this same kind of all-consuming, craving for an elusive immediacy of experience. The non-linear narrative follows Modotti through the 1920s, from Los Angeles to Mexico City, where she evolves from a struggling Hollywood starlet to an accomplished photographer and then to a full-time member of the Mexican Communist Party. This is also the story of Tina's relationship with four men: the eccentric Roubaix "Robo" L'Abrie Richey, the

photographer Edward Weston, the painter Xavier Guerrero, and the young Cuban revolutionist-in-exile Julio Antonio Mella.

In Los Angeles, Tina lives with Robo, for whom she plays the simultaneous roles of figure-drawing model, opium den ornament, and fantasy object of fetishistic cuckoldry. Robo is spellbound by Tina's beauty and pleases himself by showing her off at his salon gatherings. Upon meeting Weston at one of these gatherings, Tina immediately lays bare the nature of her longings: She wants, above all, to be recognized in her unique and incomparable individuality: "Siempre he querido ser alguien y no pasar por la vida inédita," she confides, "Lo he intentado en el teatro, en el cine, en la vida diaria. Tengo algo maravilloso en mi y quiero darlo."[52] On the stage, on the screen, in Robo's admiring eyes, or even captured by the lens of Weston's Graflex camera (Fig. 4.2), Tina had spent her life being looked at, and yet remained unsatisfied in her desire to be seen: "Tina hubiera querido hipnotizar al mundo; no aguantaba su indiferencia."[53]

Robo decides to move to Mexico and brings Tina along. Weston, smitten and aimless, follows. Robo dies almost immediately upon arriving in Mexico, and Tina moves in with Weston, becoming his studio assistant and photography apprentice. It is a wonderfully logical move, to try and cure her dissatisfaction with merely being gazed upon as an object by becoming the gazing subject. Nevertheless, as Poniatowska depicts it, the self-discipline with which she takes up her apprenticeship is driven by the same old and increasingly tortuous craving for external validation. Her sense of self-worth depends on her practice, and her practice's worthiness depends on meeting Edward's standards. Her gaze must become like his. She is not merely imitating a style or seeking his approval but wants to become like him. That is, by means of her work, she wants to be

[52] Elena Poniatowska, *Tinísima* (Mexico City: Seix Barral, 2016), 131.

[53] Ibid. 125.

recognized by him as an equal. In her struggle for independent mastery—her struggle to come to full possession of herself and her talents—she remains dependent on his judgment.

> "Para ella era crucial que Weston la reconociera como fotógrafa, que la apreciara no solo porque él la había señalado, sino porque su presencia merecía un tratamiento ejemplar. Sus fotografías tenían que ejercer ese poder de interiorización. ¡Ni inconsciencia, ni motivación intuitiva, ni chiripazo, ni paisaje fácil! Alguna vez le dijo irónico: "Esto parece una postal de Hugo Brehme", y Tina rompió su negativo. El arte primitivo, el que venía de la tierra, el de los artesanos, el de las maravillosas piezas prehispanicas no era descriptivo ni anecdótico. Sus fotos también tendrían que ser abstractas, esenciales; le hablarían al intelecto y también a las fuerzas que se encuentran en otro nivel: las del inconsciente."[54]

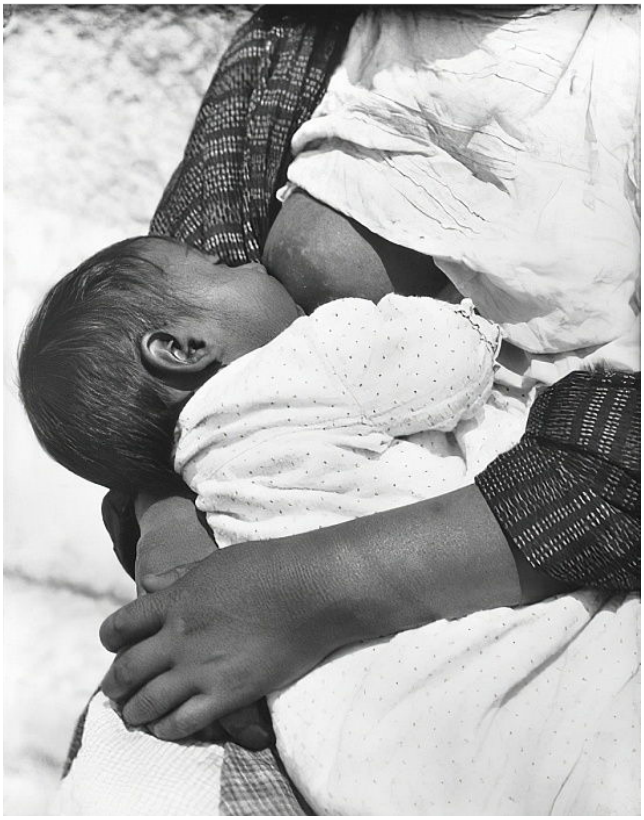

Fig. 4.5 Tina Modotti. *Child Nursing, (Conchita with her mother Luz Jimenez)*. 1926, Black and white photograph. Galerie Bilderwelt, Dahme, Germany.

[54] Ibid., 166.

Edward Weston and Tina Modotti's photographic expeditions to illustrate Anita Brenner's book were the last thing they did together. Edward went back home to California and Tina stayed in Mexico, where she began a romantic relationship with the painter Xavier Guerrero and threw herself into political activism. Guerrero was a skilled mason specializing in detailing before he became a fine artist. Unlike most of the well-bred and academically trained signatories of Siqueiros' famous 1922 manifesto of muralism, Guerrero was the real deal—a proper "*obrero técnico*" among the *pintores* and *escultores* of the *sindicato*. He joined the mural movement at its inception, collaborating with Roberto Montenegro in 1920 at the monastery of San Pedro y San Pablo, and in 1921 helping Diego Rivera figure out encaustic technique for his mural, *La Creación*. By the time he met Tina Modotti, Guerrero had taken over most of the illustration and typesetting responsibilities from Siqueiros at *El Machete* (Fig. 12). He worked with everyone in the movement, almost always collaboratively. Unlike his notoriously self-promoting painter-comrades, Guerrero seems to have actually inhabited the movement's rhetorical collectivism, feeling little, if any need for individual recognition as an artist. He was a Communist first and a painter second—a disciplined militant devoted to the cause. Perhaps, Tina may have thought, Guerrero's political discipline was the answer the maddening lack of reality that her apprenticeship under Weston had failed to satisfy.

Fig. 4.6 Xavier Guerrero, "Todos a la Protesta," illustration from *El Machete*, 3 no. 74 (August 6, 1927). The adjacent editorial calls for mass protests in response to the impending execution of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, which were to take place later that month.

At the time, Communist-led trade unions were taking a severe beating from the government and the CROM. But while the reds were losing their foothold in the labor movement, their propaganda and public relations efforts had grown more successful than ever. Tina's political work was focused on the latter, as she became a leading member of the Münzenbergian front organization, the Liga Anti-imperialista de las Américas. Between 1926 and 1927 LADLA's protest and propaganda campaigns centered on the Sacco and Vanzetti case, the threat of intervention in Mexico, and the invasion of Nicaragua. On March 10, 1927, an FBI agent stationed in San Antonio, TX reported on LADLA's activities:

> Synopsis of facts:
>
> The Anti-Imperialist league has started to organize the Mexican women to join the movement already initiated to protect the nation from American dominion.

DETAILS:

Reference is made to Agent's report of March 4, 1927, captioned as above, concerning the activities of the Latin American Union in Mexico City.

In this connection the local Mexican Press of March 8, 1927, published a special dispatch from Mexico City as follows:

The officers of the Anti-Imperialist League in Mexico City stated the victory is in our hands. We invite all the Mexican women to join the movement to protect the nation against the claws of the imperialistic politics or the United States.

The object of this organization is to add a section of women to the League to combat the so-called imperialists of the American government. This League is the organization that Secretary of State Kellogg attacked in his statement to the Senate Committee. Mr. Kellogg presented proofs that this league was nothing else but an agency of Soviet Russia to spread anti-American propaganda.

The invitation reads as follows:

Do you desire the happiness of your family? Do you want to secure the welfare of our country? The Women's section of the League invites all the Mexican women to defend the independence of Mexico and its sovereignty that is in danger of being destroyed by the claws of the imperialistic politics of the United States. IT depends on us to make a generation of free men or that our sons inherit the bonds of slavery.

The propaganda of this League also shows the necessity of forming a union of all the people of Latin America against the Yaqui [sic] imperialism.[55]

A few weeks earlier, Willi Münzenberg's long-planned Congress Against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism, had finally been held at the Palais d'Egmont in Brussels. It had been presided over by the celebrated French novelist and fellow traveler Henri Barbusse. Among the delegates were members of the Kuomingtang and the Indian National Congress, including Jawaharlal Nehru. Many of the participants were representatives of emerging North African and Near Eastern nationalist organizations, such as the Senegalese nationalist Lamine Senghor,

[55] Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Mexican Matters. Latin American Union*, San Antonio, Tex. March 10, 1927.

representing the Defense Committee of the Negro Race, the co-founder of the Algerian nationalist party Etoile Nord Africaine, Messali Hadj, and delegates from the Zionist Labor organization, Poale Zion. Charles Shipman, aka Manuel Gomez, the unofficial leader of the U.S. delegation, introduced himself as representative of LADLA, sharing the rostrum with José Vasconcelos, Carlos Quijano of the Revolutionary Party of Venezuela, and Ismael Martinez of the Tampico Labor Union. Among the U.S. organizations affiliated with LADLA, there was the Universal Negro Improvement Association, represented by Richard B. Moore and the American Civil Liberties Union, represented by Roger Baldwin. Alfons Goldschmidt, Julio Antonio Mella, Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre, and Diego Rivera were there as well. According to Frederik Petersson, Gómez gave a speech denouncing the "robbery politics" of the United States in the Caribbean and Latin America. Although the event did not achieve much at a practical level, in the moment it was something of a sensation, stirring up what Petersson calls an anti-imperialist "euphoria."[56]

The San Antonio-based FBI agent who had been keeping an eye on Mexican anti-imperialists got a hold of LADLA's promotional literature about the conference and put together an informative, though somewhat sloppy report:

> The following leaflet was sent to this Agent from Mexico City by a personal friend with a note that these leaflets had been circulated in Mexico, dated March 4, and 10, 1927.
>
> A Supplement Publication of El Libertador, official Organ of the Organizers of the Continental Committee of all America's Anti-Imperialist League, P.O. Box 613, Mexico, D.F.
>
> "The Anti-Imperialist Congress of Brussels on February 15th last closed the sessions of the first international Anti-Imperialist Congress assembled in Brussels, Belgium. There were present 173 delegates from all over the world. The All-America's Anti-Imperialist League was represented by six delegates. Together with the other organizations, laborer, farmers and Nationalists of Latin America, they presented

[56] Petersson, "'We are Neither Visionaries nor Utopian Dreamers," 508.

> the thesis that in part is reproduced in this supplement and obtained from the Congress the unanimous approval of that body with the exception of the delegation from Apra. The most important work to be done is against the Yankee Imperialism of America. To this effect they divided in four sectors, Caribe, Mexico, Central America, Panama and the Antillas, and their main work is to impress on the North American labor organizations that they must become active and more efficacious against the Imperialism of their nation and the base for the struggle against Imperialism can be found among the laborers and country people and they can do as in China, oppose the pressure of the Imperialist power."[57]

After copying from the leaflet, a long list of participating organizations and delegates, the FBI agent adds a note linking the Brussels meeting with the Mexico-centered Communist threat described by State Secretary Kellogg in his "Bolshevist Aims and Policies in Mexico and Latin America" speech:

> "This propaganda is of the same nature and by the same organizations mentioned by Secretary of State Kellogg in his statement to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, January 12, 1927, Agent would especially call attention to the organizations in the United States and their representatives and the continuance of their propaganda."[58]

The international Communist movement Tina Modotti joined in 1926 was a movement in retreat. The prospect of international proletarian revolution, which seemed to be within reach at the closing of the First World War, had been abandoned by the movement's leaders in Moscow, in favor of a policy of "socialism in one country." In Mexico, the United States, and Europe, Communist influence in the labor movement was by and large on the decline, and the movement's labor militants found themselves demoralized. And yet, despite defeat and demoralization, Communist engagement with the moment of anti-imperialist "euphoria" of the mid-to-late 1920s, with its prestigious intellectual fellow travelers and its heroic anti-colonial nationalist figures

[57] Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Anti-Imperialist League. Mexican Matters,* San Antonio, Tex. March 24, 1927.

[58] Ibid.

created an appearance of vitality and strength. This was to a great extent the achievement of Willi Münzenberg's organization, the IAH, and its international publicity efforts. The international Communist milieu which Mexican artists engaged in the 1920s was losing whatever grasp it once had on the working class, but conquering the hearts and minds of radical intellectuals everywhere. In a period of political counterrevolution, it was leading a cultural revolution.

As it turned out, the euphoric anti-imperialist moment did not last long. The kind of anti-colonial movements represented at the Brussels Congress were less than loyal as allies. The closest among these allies had been the Chinese nationalist party, Sun Yat Sen's Kuomintang, which had been working hand-in-hand with the Comintern and the Chinese Communist Party since 1922. In April 1927, only a few weeks after participating in the Congress, the Kuomintang, now led by Chiang Kai Shek, broke its alliance with the Moscow spectacularly, occupying Shanghai and leading a massacre of thousands of Chinese Communists.[59]

Meanwhile, in Poniatowska's novel, Xavier Guerrero takes Tina Modotti for a walk around the sketchy, hardscrabble environs of Mexico City's Candelaria de los Patos neighborhood. The fictionalized Communist painter declares: "Como esta hay cien colonias a donde no entran ni los policías porque los encueran." Moved by the impovershed surroundings, Tina's internal monologue reflects:

> "Era un México que Weston no había conocido. Los mexicanos no parecían esperar gran cosa; sobrevivían, sin embargo. Tras de ellos se abría todo un pasado de mitos, herbolaria, consejos de vida de una fuerza que Tina jamás sintió en Estados Unidos. Esa vida anterior, la certidumbre de una acción espiritual que los esculpía, la entrega en muchos de sus rostros, le daban una certeza que no había experimentado en América del Norte: la de la civilización. Allá jamás resistirían el hambre, no tenían con qué. En México los años de entrenamiento al dolor físico, a la desposesión, eran infinitos. Tenían dos vidas: su miseria sobre la Tierra y la otra que era su vida verdadera, la de la casa del Sol que los transfiguraría."[60]

[59] The CCP was almost wiped out right then and there, but as it turned out, it had a big future ahead of it.

[60] Poniatowska, *Tinísima*, 184.

The sentiment is not Marxist, but Christian—straight out of the gospels: 'the last shall be the first.' Like Edward Weston, this fictionalized version of Tina finds great virtue in Mexicans' capacity to endure pain. In her eyes their patient suffering is evidence of an ontological groundedness anchored in the spiritual bedrock of their civilization. Existentially untethered Americans like herself, she believes, would never be able to endure such pain and hunger. But while Weston appreciates this Mexican suffering from the distance of his solipsistic detachment, Tina seems almost to envy it. The way Poniatowska tells it, Tina's political commitment was undertaken as a kind of penance for the freedoms and frivolities she had come to enjoy as a liberated, bohemian "new woman." The novel depicts Tina's relationship with Xavier Guerrero and pursuit of disciplined militancy as a commitment to a regime of personal austerity. In one of the most striking passages of the novel, Poniatowska dramatizes the masochism of her protagonist as she turns against her own past pleasures and identifies instead with the wretched of the earth.

> "Cualquiera de las cosas que hacía antes, los compañeros las habrían juzgado extravagantes: Weston vestido de mujer, vicioso, maricón; ella disfrazada de hombre, caminando por la calle de su brazo, machorra, degenerada; Brett, a quien le prestaba su brasier relleno de naranjas, un pervertido; los bailes con Elisa temerosa y excitada, una desviación, una falta de respeto al pueblo, una malignidad sin nombre, y las tentativas de Weston por un apocalipsis sexual que lo llevan a intensificar su placer, una cosa de maniacos. ¡Bola de anormales! ¿Cómo canalizarían su sexualidad los compañeros? ¿Cómo haría el amor Hernán Laborde?... ¿Cómo harían los campesinos el amor con sus pies de lodo, sus talones curtidos, sus piernas y sus brazos cortados en la talacha diaria, sus pechos jadeantes como la tierra, la llamarada de su aliento? ¿Cómo las mujeres envueltas en su rebozo, los charcos mansos de sus ojos, sus manos siempre escondidas? Los pobres se agarraban a palos. Golpear era formativo. 'No me pegue, no me pegue, papá, no me pegue, mire, ya me abrió el lomo.' Vivir derecho, ser razonable, vivir como Dios manda, una buena tunda para caminar derechito, Tina; según el código de valores del Partido Comunista, los compañeros cada madrugada se levantaban a la lucha, abajo la imaginación; ninguno era como Diego, exhibicionista y cómplice del capital; desde la opresión lograrían construir otra realidad, la de un México para

> todos los desheredados y sobre todo un México para los indígenas, los campesinos, los verdaderos Mexicanos."[61]

Whether the novelist's depiction of the photographer's mind is factually accurate cannot be known, but the interpretation rings true. Tina's independent development as an artist, as she moved away from Weston's influence in the second half of the 1920s, attests to it. Weston's solipsistic gaze turned people and objects into monuments of sensory experience. The maguey's serrated edge, the warmth of a sunlit naked breast, the bulbousness of a bell pepper's curves; human, animal, vegetable, mineral—it was all the same. In psychoanalytic terms, his world was made up of partial objects. Modotti's work, specifically her portraits of poor and indigenous women and children, proceed as if trying to pierce through Weston's fetishism. While Weston's camera tries to capture objects of experience, Tina's tries to capture experiencing subjects.

The mother and child in her 1926 picture of a baby nursing (Fig. 4.5) is not portraiture. The face of the mother is cropped out, and the baby is facing away. Their dark skin identifies them racially, but there is little else here of sociological interest. That is to say, they are neither individuals nor social types. What Tina portrays is the emotional experience of their relationship. Straining to achieve some kind of intersubjectivity, the artist's gaze identifies simultaneously with the mother's patient, devoted tenderness and the child's blissful oblivion in her embrace. In her pictures of poor and indigenous Mexicans, Modotti seeks out and fixes these patiences, tendernesses, blissfulnesses, and oblivions in her models the way Weston seeks and fixes serratedness, warmth, and bulbousness. The authenticity or immediacy of experience that the alienated artist feels deprived of, she feels compelled to reproduce photographically. The same is

[61] Ibid., 242.

true for her picture of a little girl from Colonia de la Bolsa.[62] She is barefoot and dressed in rags and looks straight at the camera, (Fig. 4.7). As a specific individual she is anonymous, one among tens of thousands of Mexico City's most wretched. And yet what Modotti's camera identifies in the girl's gaze is a whole way of inhabiting this wretchedness: an innocent's courage and matter-of-fact resilience of a life on the edge of survival. But is this the innocence, courage, and resilience of the Mexican model herself or is it the innocence, courage, and resilience that the American photographer feels missing within herself and can only experience by means of projection? " la entrega en muchos de sus rostros, le daban una certeza que no había experimentado en América del Norte..."[63] When the painter Francisco Goitia remarked to Anita Brenner that "La vida de los miserables me encanta," was he expressing empathy or envy?

[62] Known today as Colonia Morelos, location of the famous "barrio bravo" of Tepito.
[63] Poniatowska, *Tinísima*, 184.

Fig. 4.7 Tina Modotti. *Girl from Colonia de la Bolsa*. 1928, Black and white photograph. Galerie Bilderwelt, Dahme, Germany.

Like Tina Modotti, Anita Brenner also explored Colonia de la Bolsa, conducting a survey as part of her research for Ernest Gruening's book. Although her writing is elsewhere often overwrought, her description of the neighborhood's appalling conditions is perfectly clinical. To quote a passage from this long and fascinating document:

> "Infant mortality is exceedingly high. Out of two hundred families surveyed, not over twenty had not one or more children dead. Cases of over ten children dead were frequent. One family—a husband and wife—had twenty-four children dead and none living. These deaths were caused most often by pneumonia, they said. Small-pox, typhoid, and intestinal infection were other reasons given. Adult mortality came from disease and also murder brought on by quarrels. The infant mortality rate is enormous in comparison to the adult. They were suckled sometimes until after they walk, but they eat chili and beans as soon as they will swallow them. Coffee they begin drinking just as soon. Little boys about seven years old smoke cigarettes…"[64]

[64] Anita Brenner, "Survey of Colonia de la Bolsa," n.d. (Spring, 1927), AB. 27.2.

Compared with Tina Modotti, Anita Brenner was not emotionally inclined to political commitment. Although she would go on to engage in some organizing and advocacy efforts in the 1930s, particularly in relation to displaced Jews and political refugees, she was never one to identify with misery or sacrifice herself for a cause. Perhaps it was the absence of Christianity in her background, or maybe it was the fact that her family had been dispossessed and displaced by social revolution. In Mexico, she was well aware of the misery around her, but unlike Tina, she always kept herself at an emotional distance.

Anita adapted her views to the fashionable radicalism around her, but there is little conviction in the occasional anti-capitalist gestures one may find in her journals.

> "Lucy dropped in, we went to see a movie, then had something to eat and had a long discussion of 'the revolution.' It fascinates me, and for no romantic or sentimental or humanitarian reason. Once you admit that our present economic system is wrong, placing values inversely, you commit yourself to it, I find. It is in the air anyway, and one who is at all sensitive reflects it. Money makes spiritual porquerías everywhere, but people will not believe it. Work is the only way out. Shall now try that way."[65]

There is avoidance in that end-of-sentence "I find." It is like this is an issue she would rather not think about too much. Her usually insightful writing becomes glib and superficial around the subject:

> "Rich people I do not like. Not because they have things I have not. It's always the human factor which strikes me first. There is something dead about them. The older the deader. These enormous women dressed in black are vultures to me. They are revolting, they are dead. The revolutionists have souls. I am afraid of money. It seems to me shameful that money should be of more value than a human emotion, or a beautiful action. I think it is shameful that we traffic with human emotions and human actions. Every time I sell an article I traffic too. And if the recompense were of the value of the thing, I could understand it. But it is the reverse…"[66]

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[65] Anita Brenner, Journal, May 27, 1927, AB 120.8.

[66] Anita Brenner, Journal, June 17, 1927, AB 120.8.

She is "afraid of money," she claims, just before complaining that she is not getting paid enough for her writing. Perhaps she was afraid, not of money, but of the intensity of her own wish to procure it. Anita's countercultural impulses were milieu-bound and career-oriented. Her existential commitment was to getting published, getting paid, and hopefully getting famous. Her counter-identification with wealthy 'vulture-like' women was not political, but aesthetic. It is a recurring theme in her journals. She did not want to become ugly and unfashionable like them. There is something perfunctory about the romanticism of her remarks on "revolutionists' souls" and "human emotion," like she is rehearsing her milieu's political-existential postures, trying them on like an outfit. She was anxious about fitting in, often insecure about her talents, always sensitive about what was being said about her:

> "Silva told me today that in certain intellectual high-powered circles it is said that Jean does my writing for me. Also that this is obvious since I don't know anything about painting. This can be directly traced to el Gran Don Diego. Madame Charlot may have had something to do with it, since she believes it. Tina is his little megaphone, I scarcely doubt."[67]

There is often a sour note of rivalry when Tina comes up in Anita's journals: "Tina said about me that I was nothing in myself, but that Jean had created an idealized version. It occurs to me that since I never bothered to talk to Tina seriously… "[68] Anita may have envied the glamorous aura of intrigue that surrounded her famously beautiful photographer friend—the kind of local fame that inspired Vasconcelos' corny depiction as a kind of international Communist *femme fatale*. Perhaps Anita felt herself lacking in what Poniatowska called Tina's "*disposición a la*

[67]Anita Brenner, Journal, May 23, 1927, AB 120.8.

[68] Anita Brenner, Journal, January 16, 1927, AB 120.7.

entrega."[69] Maybe this envy was why Anita would sometimes insinuate that Tina's political commitments as superficial and frivolous:

> "Tina appears to be much exercised over the Sacco-Vanzetti business. It seems important not because they were killed unjustly but because of the international protest. They were electrocuted last night. Yesterday was the first time since the revolution I'd heard 'mueran los gringos' shouted on the street."[70]

Whether Anita Brenner was wrong or right about the authenticity of Tina Modotti's feelings about Sacco and Vanzetti, she perfectly understood the role the Comintern and Willi Münzenberg's IAH had assigned to the two Italian martyrs.

4.4. Reconnaissance

The immediacy of feeling and authenticity of being that Americans like Edward Weston and Tina Modotti felt lacking within themselves, they projected onto Mexicans. Similarly, across the Gulf of Mexico, in his tropical cloister, Jean Charlot's object of envy was the otherworldliness he imagined he saw among the Maya—both ancient and modern.

> "But in these works palpitates a spirituality that clashes with the Greek Athletic ideal that gave such rustic health to both men and gods. The quasi-morbid attitude that those reliefs immortalize is still the appendage of modern Mayans. How such languid-looking adolescents were able to build and keep in working order the complex machinery of their civilization is more understandable for those who have seen Mayan masons lift with lazy gesture, and carry on their heads, weights under which one of our strong men would stagger… In the Mayan scheme of things, man was far from playing the dominant role. He was a well-nigh useless addition to the universe in which planets, stars, and an innumerable and complex host of gods moved in orderly fashion. To live his life without crossing the way of those mysterious beings was man's main concern. The wealth of complicated

[69] Poniatowska, *Tinísima*, 60.

[70] Anita Brenner, Journal, August 23, 1927, AB 120.8.

> garments and ceremonial ornaments climbs, vinelike, over the human figure, humbling it to the role of a mere peg for symbols."[71]

"Cupio dissolvi." Like the apostle Paul on the eve of his martyrdom, Charlot wished to be dissolved in divine contemplation. Like the "quasi-morbid" Maya, to transcend the hunger and heartache of worldly being by becoming nothing more than a peg for images and words, devotions and daydreams. Indeed, his moroseness at the time was so pronounced and unshakable that many decades later, even his son and biographer[72] commented on it:

> "Charlot's diary of late 1925 and early 1926 refers so often to his being sad that he seems to have been suffering from depression… Leaving Mexico City seemed to put an end to a period of his life defined by his hopes for a Mexican mural career. Even after he had been excluded from the walls and many of his colleagues were leaving for other cities or even countries, Charlot may have hoped that the early days of the movement would return. Moreover, he had entered the early movement with the intention of being born again as a Mexican whose art flowed from his inner being. Now along with his future, he was being deprived of his core identity."[73]

The passing of the Vasconcelian moment that led him to muralism upon arrival in Mexico was certainly a major blow for Jean. But on a more immediate level, it seems that much of Charlot's suffering stemmed from an allergy to relaxation—a pathological industriousness. His pangs of melancholy came after work, in the evening. During the day he seems to have been energetically engaged in satisfying, important work. New discoveries were being made one after another at the Sylvanus Morley-led Carnegie excavation. Much of his time was spent copying the bas-reliefs at the Temple of the Warriors and the freshly excavated Complex of a Thousand

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[71] Jean Charlot, "Mayan Art," in Jean Charlot, *An artist on art: collected essays of Jean Charlot* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1972).

[72] It really is strange that both Anita Brenner's daughter, Susannah, and Jean Charlot's son, John, went on to become scholars of their parents' life and work.

[73] *John Charlot, Jean Charlot, Life and Work, Volume 2: Mexico, 1921-1928*. Work in progress, unpublished, available online at https://jeancharlot.org/books-on-jc/#2003-2017_john-charlot_jc-lw

Columns. He would first copy the intricate designs as line drawings, leaving the masonry itself, and then re-constructed them as vibrant watercolors. (Figs 8 and 9). His particular talent for patient, precise, detailed, draftsmanship was well-suited for this kind of work. "Me gusta mucho el trabajo d'estar sobre un andamio a copiar columnas en el sol," he wrote to Anita, "Me pongo anteojos negros para no sentir tanto el calor."[74]

Figs. 4.8 and 4.9, Jean Charlot, details, bas relief from Temple of the Warriors (Dais Northwest Colonnade, West Side) line drawing and watercolor. From Earl H. Morris, Jean Charlot, and Ann Axtell Morris. *The Temple of the Warriors at Chichen Itza, Yucatan*. Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1931. Plates 125 and 126.

In January 1927, the crew found an older structure underneath the Temple of the Warriors. The frescoes in this newly discovered "Temple of the Chac Mool," were better preserved than any previously known. More staff was needed for visual documentation, and Jean—whose input Morley had come to appreciate—suggested his artist friends Lowell Houser and Edward Weston. Houser worked at the Carnegie dig for two seasons. Weston, his relationship with Tina at an end, declined and went back home to California, where he immediately set to work on the pictures that made him one of the most important figures in the history of photography.

[74] Jean Charlot to Anita Brenner, n.d., AB 48.3.

As the Summer of 1927 approached, the time came for Anita's long-planned visit. There was no tourism in this region at the time, so the journey was circuitous. After the first leg of the trip, by train from Mexico City to Veracruz, it was two or three days by ship to the Port of Progreso. From there by motorcar to Mérida, and then six hours by single gauge railroad to Dzitas. A proper road from Dzitas to Chichen Itza had just recently been opened by the fallen Governor Felipe Carrillo Puerto, likely at the request of Sylvanus Morley, who despite his conservative views, had made an effort to establish a good relationship with the socialist leader.

Yucatan reminded Anita of her hometown in tropical Texas. Of the capital city of Mérida, she wrote, "Strange as it may seem it is very much like San Antonio, aspect and climate, except of course, details like the round white houses on the edge, like this, in which you can catch glimpses of the cool dark interiors with people and hammocks…"[75] Her own observations on the native population were very different from Jean's. Where he saw otherworldliness, she saw worldly sensuality:

> "The women are something all their own, and quite unlike the Indians elsewhere in Mexico, as of course also the men. But the women are like nothing that one has seen or imagined, and that does not mean that they are exotic or spectacular. The type is that of a fine, sensitive face, full of sweetness and tranquility—the body, in lose white with flowers in colors or black around a square cut neck and the bottom, can scarcely be delineated. It is generally large, and with absolutely natural lines, which in the older women degenerate into fat and slackness. The men, on the contrary, are slim in the waist, like a schoolgirl, broad-shouldered, narrow but full hips, and give the impression of being taller than they are—precisely Egyptian, though comparisons are silly."[76]

Her dismissal of civilizational comparisons was one of those tokens of Boasian wisdom she inherited from Manuel Gamio, but her descriptive prose style was closer to fashion journalism

[75] Anita Brenner, Journal, April 29, 1927, AB 120.7.

[76] Anita Brenner, Journal, May 2, 1927, AB 120.7.

than to anthropology. Cultural relativism and a fashion-oriented appreciation of androgyny: Anita was without a doubt a child of the twenties. Her one-line portraits of Morley's crew paint a vivid picture of the American types she met out in the field. There was "Mrs. Thornton, like hundreds of slim and normally blond married women of those who run in 'sets'—bridge and tea and newest book stuff…" There was "Lynn Hammond, the mechanic, like millions of other college boys. Indeed, so true does he run to the type that I had the very definite impression of having met him before…" There was, of course, "Bob Frank, who ranks as 'assistant archaeologist' but who spends his time helping other people with the mechanics of their jobs. He is the son of a multimillionaire in some way connected to Carnegie, and his father keeps him here because although over thirty, he is about fourteen mentally…" There was also "Dr. and Mrs. Geo. Williams, who metabilize and measure heads and all that sort of thing. They are focused entirely on their work but in a disagreeable German way of seeing people no longer as anything but a set of measurements, and acting accordingly, a thing much resented by whoever happens to be subjected to it…" During her stay, Anita witnessed a scene in which a group of locals refused to have their heads measured by the Williamses, though after some argument they were finally convinced by the project's director. "Diplomatic Morley called them all his amigos and asked that they do it as a personal favor, and of course, they did—He said he expected them to come through like hombres and not like old women. M. certainly knows his stuff!"[77]

Not literally a diplomat but something close. Sylvanus Morley had recently served his country abroad as a spy for the Office of Naval Intelligence. During the war, scholarly research had been his alibi for a long reconnaissance mission along the Maya region's East coast—Tabasco, Campeche, Yucatan, all the way down to Honduras, in search of German submarine bases and

[77] Anita Brenner, Journal, May 4, 1927, AB 120.7.

gathering information on local economic and political conditions. The network of friendly informants he established across the region—the deceased Governor Carrillo Puerto among them—was so robust that after the end of the war and into the 1920s, Morley remained a willing asset of the intelligence community.[78]

In those years of professionalization across the social sciences, Sylvanus Morley's independent, holistic approach to archaeological science, in which individual erudition counted more than credentialed specialization, was becoming a thing of the past. Just like his elders Dr. Nicolás León, Frederick Starr, and Lucien Levy-Bruhl, mentioned in the last chapter, Morley was on his way to becoming a relic of his discipline's past. And yet, this process of professionalization would indeed lead to the expansion of one of Morley's idiosyncratic practices: the use of science as a front for national security interests.

Starting in the 1920s, the Carnegie Institution and the Rockefeller Foundation, whose international work had formerly focused on humanitarian relief and medical research, became major stakeholders in the production of social scientific knowledge. What is usually understood as the professionalization of the social sciences in that decade was to a large extent a product of the philanthropic foundations investment in a handful of academic institutions: Chicago, Yale, Columbia, among others, and the establishment of organizations such as Carnegie's National Research Council (NRC) and Rockefeller's Social Science Research Council (SSRC). At the time, the United States had achieved economic hegemony across the world, but partly due to the disappointments of Wilsonian internationalism, hesitated to take advantage of this hegemony and fully take on a role of international cultural and political leadership. According to Inderjeet Parmar,

[78] See Charles Harris and Louis R. Sadler, *The Archaeologist Was a Spy: Sylvanus G. Morley and the Office of Naval Intelligence (*Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009).

the philanthropic foundations' 1920s efforts to create international networks of experts represented an attempt, by a forward-looking segment of the U.S. ruling class, to counter such isolationist tendencies. In the conclusion to hist book, Foundations of the American Century, Parmar writes:

> "The central argument, over and above restating the importance of elite dominance of U.S. foreign affairs, is that the foundations' manifest purpose—to address fundamental problems like poverty and development through better knowledge of their causes—played second fiddle when compared to their (officially secondary) purpose of creating national and global networks of intellectuals committed to a Progressive-era state-building project for globalist ends. American foundations and the networks they nurtured and constructed carried out statelike functions for a global order consciously built by the corporate leaders who created and led the Big 3 foundations."[79]

The Mexican Renaissance was bound up with this phenomenon. In the early part of the decade, the Americans involved in the Renaissance had been radical "slackers" fleeing from Wilson's Terror. By the end of the decade, Mexico's post-revolutionary cultural revival was an occasion for the foundations' network-building. The Carnegie Institution's long-term Chichen Itza project was one major example. As we will see in the following chapter, some of the earliest successful exhibitions of Mexican art in the U.S. were the work of the Rockefeller Foundation.

The intellectual networks encouraged by the foundations were a new kind of phenomenon: like the League of Nations, but more effective, they were institutions of bourgeois imperial internationalism. Before the War, the aspiration to gain leadership of world politics by developing international networks dedicated to gaining political hegemony by the systematic study of society and a scientific approach to democratic reform had been the territory of proletarian politics. In the 1890s or 1900s, leaders of the Second International such as August Bebel, Georgi Plekhanov, or Eugene Debs would have never imagined that the names of robber barons such as Carnegie and

[79] Inderjeet Parmar, *Foundations of the American Century, The Ford, Carnegie, and Rockefeller Foundations in the Rise of American Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 471.

Rockefeller would one day come to stand for democracy, internationalism, and disinterested scientific inquiry. This reversal was one of the strangest outcomes of the new counterrevolutionary era: The international communist movement retreating in defense of the fatherland against an expanding, "isolationist" United States and its industrial monopolies, which now flew the flag of the radical Enlightenment's ideals of the universal republic of letters, infinite human perfectibility, and perpetual peace. A decade after Lenin's "highest stage of capitalism," world history was moving forward in reverse.

In her journal, Anita described the daily routine at Chichen Itza:

> "One breakfasts between five thirty and six and everybody scatters between six and seven. At eleven thirty the tocsin sounds for lunch. Siesta until two, then back to work until teatime, that is of course, five. Dinner at six, and then dancing, or bridge or whatever it may be. People scatter or fall into little groups of cliques… One dresses for dinner; white trousers are the order of the day."[80]

After dinner, Morley the entertainer would play something on his phonograph, often "Tiger Rag," or some other already outdated piece of "hot music." He would sometimes try to get a bridge game started, a duty which Jean Charlot reportedly avoided by insisting on playing by "French rules" which he made up on the spot in order to ruin the game so as to not be invited again. Once in a while Morley would also use his phonograph to hold a concert in the ancient Maya ball court. He was interested in the acoustic properties of its walls, thirty feet high on each side. But since Dixieland was too frivolous to go with such ancient mysteries of civilization, he would play Beethoven and Brahms.

[80] Anita Brenner, Journal, May 4, 1927, AB 120.7.

Anita had been anxiously looking forward to visiting Jean, but the truth of the matter was that their relationship always seems to have worked better long distance. They loved each other most when they could write to idealized versions of each other.

As Anita narrates in her journal, the couple's reunion was somewhat awkward:

> "In the evening we danced a little. Then, Jean and I alone with the moon, therefore it could not have been otherwise. He made me rather angry because he kissed me, by force, on the porch where we were as usual gracefully congregated and draped over the hammock, Lowell, Lucy, Jean and I… But withal, I liked it. The anger has a tremendous effect on him, and it makes me hurt to see him suffer… all the antecedents, therefore, perfect ingredients… He says that with me he is like a man who is, or rather has been, thirsty for a long time. He kisses me like that. He cannot restrain himself more than somewhat…

The moment seems to have triggered Anita's usual ambivalence about Jean. When they spent too much time together in person, she felt his emotional needs were simply too much of a burden for her to bear. So, in her journal she does what she can to convince herself that there is not much of a connection between them.

> "It is a highly ironical situation. Only things between us are our convictions and connections… Torture for him resulting in pain, sadness, for me. Morley very paternal and does not believe we are not on the way to his idea of a happy ending and accompanying bells and blossoms. Oh dear!"[81]

Anita's head was always in her work. Her excellent work ethic was profitable way of avoiding such awkward emotional entanglements. During her visit, she was reading Diego de Landa's *Relación de las Cosas de Yucatán*, and thinking about how the region and its people would fit into her own writings on Mexico. "The impression with which I began, and which is salient about the whole country and culture, is one of stillness. Not that stillness of something alive and

[81] Ibid.

living on, as of the Mexican Indian, but of something stopped, like a watch. Nothing plastically renascent in Yucatan and the Mayas, hence they will not fit into my book…"[82]

This appearance of stillness, which Jean Charlot read as otherworldliness, Anita described as a lack of historicity. Despite the great political earthquakes they had recently experienced—or maybe because of them—the Maya in Yucatan were, in Anita's view, a culture "like a stopped watch," whose temporality consisted in neither the cyclical patterns of a traditional society reproducing itself, nor the forward momentum of bourgeois modernity. Theirs was a directionless permanent present tense, lacking past and future, not unlike that of the war-scorched earth depicted by José Clemente Orozco in his Preparatoria murals:

> "...their minds work like one's own. They talk on the same plane and with the same terms and are furthermore much more acquainted with the mechanics of our own civilization. I saw meat-grinders and other supplementary domestic instruments in their houses—for instance, a baby drinking milk out of a modern hygienic bottle with measures marked and a rubber cap. It is several steps farther than the Mexican Indian, who has accepted only those things which struck sparks from traditional things like his own—like sewing machines, Fords, phonographs, and automobile tires from which to make the soles of a guarache [sic]. But the Yucatecan would never festoon a tractor with festival flowers, as would a Mexican. As a matter of fact, it is entirely another country. There is no more intimate connection with Mexico than with Argentina, for instance..."

She reflected that perhaps the difference between the Yucatecans and the Mexicans lay in the relative absence of Catholicism among the Maya: "The people here, while they are pagan, and speak with spirits, and sacrifice, and all that, are yet not so Catholic as Mexican Indians..." Yucatán was indeed an ocean away from the Christian core of Aztec New Spain, which lay in Mexico City and its hinterlands. While in Mexico, Anita had experienced the decaying aura of a wilting baroque culture, recent centuries in Yucatán had consisted of plantations, slavery, and caste war. Unlike

[82] Journal, May 2, 1927, AB 120.7.

the central Mexican highland of Anahuac, which had once been the core of a hemisphere's spiritual cosmos, there may have not been much in Yucatán for modernity to disenchant. Little to be nostalgic for, compared with the romantic withering of tradition taking place in Central Mexico, which could induce a kind of nostalgia for paradise lost that Roger Bartra called a "subverted Eden." Bartra rightly criticized this romantic fantasy as rank ideology—but perhaps there really was something absent in Yucatán but present in Anahuac which stirred the imagination in this direction: "un lugar previo y antiguo en el que reine la felicidad, pero es una felicidad pretérita y marchita que reposa en un estrato mítico, enterrado por la avalancha de la revolución mexicana y por el que solo podemos sentir una emoción melancólica..."[83] Maybe what looked like a celebration of cultural rebirth was in fact a great mourning. Perhaps the Mexican Renaissance was more like a very lively funeral full of bittersweet pageantry. Dusk can look a lot like dawn if one is disoriented enough.

At some point in the 1870s, the German socialist, Ferdinand de Lasalle, wrote to his comrade-rival Karl Marx:

> "Hegel used to say in his old age that directly before the emergence of something qualitatively new, the old state of affairs gathers itself up into its original, purely general, essence, into its simple totality, transcending and absorbing back into itself all those marked differences and particularities which it evinced when it was still viable."[84]

Maybe the Mexican Renaissance was something like this: not a new beginning, but a kind of final celebration of the baroque, syncretic, Christian lifeworld which Mexican culture had once been. While in Anahuac the melting into air of tradition could produce intoxicating vapors, in Yucatán the loss was barely noticed:

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[83] Roger Bartra Jaula de la Melancolia 32.
[84] Quoted by Georg Lukacs in his 1923 essay, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," in *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Boston: MIT Press, 1972), 208.

> Jean tells me that in [the Yucatecan village of] Piste he asked to see the Church and was taken to the locale of the Liga de Resistencia and was told that this was the Church. He explained and insisted and then they said, 'Oh the old church!' And took him to the regulation altar-and-candle Church, saying that the Liga was now the Church."[85]

It was not just the socialist *Ligas de Resistencia* in Yucatán who had been targeting hearts and minds. Across Mexico and elsewhere, the revolutions—industrial and political—of the past few decades had seen people wrested from traditional beliefs and ways of life like never before. Across Mexico and elsewhere, efforts were underway to integrate and reeducate these newly uprooted masses. After the War, there was a conscious effort underway to shape the minds of the inhabitants of the emerging social order: From Anatoly Lunacharsky and José Vasconcelos to John Dewey and Moisés Sáenz, from Manuel Gamio to Ernest Gruening and Willi Münzenberg. In Mexico, while Church and State were still at each other's throats, new players were already entering the fray: Carnegie and Rockefeller, Warner Brothers and Paramount Pictures. With the old order in its death's throes and the tide of revolution at an ebb, the masses were once again up for grabs. Vladimir Mayakovski's Futurist vision of the "new man" was passing away—a historical curiosity, a path not taken—but new men and women were being made, nonetheless.

During a day trip to a nearby village, Anita and Jean shared a ride with "two Seventh Day Adventists who distributed pamphlets to the Indians we met on the road, although they could not catch some of them because our camión was going too fast. They wanted to persuade everybody to cleanse their lives of sin and also that the soul is not immortal, therefore they should not communicate with the dead. Part of the pamphlet begins, 'Many people do not know what the soul really is…'"[86]

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[85] Journal, May 4, 1927, AB 120.7.

[86] Journal, May 5, 1927, AB 120.7.

Chapter Five

Rousseau walks on trumpet paths
Safaris through the heart of all that jazz
Through I-bars and girders, through wires and pipes
The mathematic circuits of the modern nights
Through huts, through Harlem, through jails and gospel pews
Through the class on Park and the trash on Vine
Through Europe and the deep, deep heart of Dixie blue
Through savage progress cuts the jungle line

In low-cut blouse she brings the beer
Rousseau paints a jungle flower behind her ear
Those cannibals of shuck and jive
They'll eat a working girl like her alive
With his hard-edged eye and his steady hand
He paints the cellar full of ferns and orchid vines
And he hangs a moon above a five-piece band
He hangs it up above the jungle line

Joni Mitchell, "The Jungle Line" (1975).

The preceding four chapters followed their protagonist, Anita Brenner, a Mexican-born, Texas-raised aspiring writer, as she got involved in the episode of national reinvention and cultural phantasmagoria sometimes known as the Mexican Renaissance. Between 1924 and 1927, Brenner became part of a group of writers and artists who participated in a series of cultural initiatives and publicity efforts aimed at promoting a positive image of Revolutionary Mexico at a time of ongoing political crisis and looming diplomatic conflict with the United States. The representation they conjured for foreign consumption did not adhere to straightforward notions of national progress and prosperity, but instead appealed to countercultural sensibilities of disaffected progressives and transient radicals such as themselves.

The nature of this national representation and the rationale for its deployment were exemplified in Chapter One by *the Nation Magazine's* April 1924 special issue on Mexico, where Brenner's article, "The Jews in Mexico," marked her earliest contribution to the Mexican

Renaissance as a genre. In addition to publicizing the political platform of presidential candidate Plutarco Elías Calles, the issue presented Mexico as a site of cultural revolution—a revolution that just so happened to be aimed against those very aspects of post-War American culture that the readers of this anti-establishment publication disapproved of. Against the industrially produced mass consumer culture of 1920s "New Prosperity," Bertram Wolfe's article in the same issue of The Nation, "Art and Revolution in Mexico," depicted a country where authorities encouraged folk art traditions, and where folk-art traditions nourished the emergence of a new vanguard of revolutionary art. Against the recrudescent racism and national chauvinism of the period, Anita Brenner's article on the Jews in Mexico depicted a racially promiscuous society, free from the American melting pot's noxious accumulations of racial prejudice and inter-ethnic strife.

Despite such publicity efforts, and the growing appeal of Mexican art and culture among U.S. progressives, relations between Mexico and the United States were worsening during these years. In 1926-27, the last year our protagonist spent in Mexico before moving away to New York City, they reached a point of acute crisis. As discussed in Chapter Four, laws passed by the Calles administration in 1925 regarding subsoil property rights antagonized the U.S. oil lobby and increased pressure on the State Department to take action against Mexico. Ambassador James R. Sheffield in particular took the lead in the anti-Mexico campaign, arguing that the new laws were an example of dangerous radicalism, and stirring up alarm about the Calles administration's alleged Bolshevist tendencies. This Mexican red scare reached its climax in January 1927, when State Secretary Frank B. Kellogg made the case before the U.S. Senate that Mexico had become a kind of hemispheric beachhead for international revolution—a claim that observers in both countries interpreted as a sign of impending armed intervention in Mexico.

In this chapter, I discuss the ideological role played by the Mexican Renaissance in the defusing of the crisis and use this discussion as a frame for the smaller-scale story of Anita Brenner's final months in Mexico and the beginning of her new life in New York City.[1]

The chapter is divided into five parts. The first part briefly discusses the way Mexican officials presented themselves and their national reconstruction efforts to the growing stream of American visitors and explains how it was that there ended up being no U.S. armed intervention. The second part catches up with Anita as she returns from visiting Jean Charlot at Chichen Itza and delves into her state of mind during a tumultuous period completing her work as Ernest Gruening's research assistant. In the third part, I elaborate on the way the Mexican Renaissance, as an ideological phantasmagoria, appealed to lost causes and impossible tasks in politics and art by promising a fresh start. The fourth part narrates Anita's hectic activity during her last weeks in Mexico. Finally, the chapter wraps up the story by following Anita during her first few months in New York City, and explains the nature of her earliest foray into promoting Mexican art in the United States. Interspersed throughout the text I include brief descriptions and discussions of contemporaneous drawings by José Clemente Orozco. As part of the "Horrores de la Revolución," series, which as we saw in Chapter Three, were commissioned by Brenner with the intention of promoting the painter's work in the United States, these drawings were intimately bound up with the transitional moment depicted in the chapter: when the Mexican Renaissance became an American cultural phenomenon.

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5.1 Reconciliation

Fig. 5.1 José Clemente Orozco, *Turistas*, circa 1928, Lithograph.
Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Los Angeles, CA.

There is nothing subtle about it. José Clemente Orozco's cartoon, *Turistas* (Fig. 14), is split diagonally into two, each side containing what looks like two wholly separate human species, each rendered in a different style, each having little in common with each other except the fact that they seem to have been crammed together into the same picture. The Americans are towering blocks of white drawn with clean, dynamic, parallel lines and right angles. The Mexicans are a crumpled-up mass of crisscrossing angles and half-smudged chicken-scratch hatching. The contrast is spectacular in its starkness. The Americans stand tall and solid like skyscrapers, monopolizing the picture; men and women are equally gigantic. The Mexicans stand slouched and stunted. The

difference between them is less about race or culture than about power. Observe the difference between the clunking shoes of the hulking Americans in the foreground and the small dirty feet of Mexican boy with the swollen belly.

There is nothing subtle about it, but despite the starkness of the contrast and the crassness of its depiction, there is no political message, or much of a punchline other than "Take a look at this!" José Clemente Orozco is concerned with the bewildering way things actually are, not with how they should or should not be. The drawing may be a picture of inequality, but it is not a protest against an injustice to be avenged or overcome. The Americans appear to have arrived with the best intentions, hoping to learn something perhaps, but at the same time not very open to new experiences. They all seem distracted, looking sideways. The woman on the far left, who Orozco has cannily made to look "progressive," and the man with the pipe stand with their eyes closed, seemingly looking within. They are giants lost in introspection. Their presence in Mexico marks them as cosmopolitan but they remain isolationist by nature. The Mexicans have little choice but to tolerate the invaders' presence. They face forward stupidly, not looking up at the Americans' faces, not looking at anything in particular, but holding on to their improbable cultural accoutrements.

These are not the figures of Orozco's mural panel *Razas Aborígenes*, discussed in Chapter Three—universally human in their tragic heroism. This is a cruelly racialized caricature of indigenous poverty. And yet, the objects of the caricature's mockery are not the poor Mexicans themselves, but the progressive American tourists who have come to appreciate their poverty and indigeneity. Depicting piety as grotesque is the cartoonist's job. "To put forward a recklessly unsympathetic proposition," wrote Gore Vidal, "as long as any group within the society deliberately maintains its identity, it is, or should be, a fair target for satire, both for its own good

and for the society's."[2] But who in this image is more invested in maintaining an identity, the Mexican poor or the pious tourists who celebrate them? Are those feathers authentic, or are they a costume of authenticity worn to please the wealthy visitors?

As his friend and admirer Jean Charlot[3] remarked, for José Clemente Orozco there was no clear line between political cartoon and "serious" art. His large-scale historical paintings always have something of the vulgarity of newspaper cartoons, and his cartoons often managed to achieve some of the tragic scope and concentrated iconographic eloquence of large-scale history painting. This is a case of the latter. Grotesquely comical but lacking a joke, "Turistas" stands as an allegory for the Mexican Renaissance as a whole, and in particular for the role it played in the rapprochement between the United States and Mexico in the late 1920s. Despite the diplomatic crisis, the second half of the decade was a time when excursionists from mainstream middle-class America began to follow in the footsteps of the radicals and bohemians and arrived *en masse*, often in groups, seeking to expand their cultural horizons. But this image, which was probably drawn sometime in 1927 before being made into a print the following year, seems to be of something more specific. The Americans appear sober and serious-minded. They have come as a group, and their excursion does not seem to be about leisure. Their pursuits are likely philanthropic.

In 1926-27, responding to the growing tensions between Mexico and the United States, a handful of influential U.S. Protestant organizations embarked on a series of "goodwill missions" to Mexico. In the words of one of the organizers they were meant to foster "mutual understanding" and improve "cultural relations" between the two nations. That is, they were meant to influence

[2] Gore Vidal, "Satire in the 1950s," in *United States* (New York: Broadway Books, 1993).

[3] With its diagonal composition, clunky white invaders, and distorted natives, Orozco's Turistas may have been riffing on Charlot's mural *Masacre en el Templo Mayor*.

public opinion in favor of the anti-Catholic Mexican government and against armed intervention. For the Mexican government these excursionists were a captive audience for propaganda.

One such group, led by Alva Taylor, editor of the *The Christian Century,* was invited to meet with President Calles and several members of his cabinet. The group was composed largely of leaders of several midwestern churches, as well as some university professors. The long, detailed record of the speeches and Q&A sessions tell us little about the excursionists themselves, but it says much about how Mexican officials wanted their audience to see them. The countercultural side of the Renaissance narrative was certainly part of the show. Carleton Beals spoke about the cruelty of the Conquest and framed the Revolution as a resurgence of the national authenticity it had suppressed. But most of the speakers emphasized not revolt and rebirth, but rather, the difficult work of reconstruction. In his speech explaining the government's work building rural schools, Moisés Sáenz, assistant secretary of education, declared that "the most significant thing in the work of this department is that for the first time—not boasting—we have thought in national terms. Previously, the effort was always either directed to the city of Mexico or to some particular place. But one of the results of the revolution has been that the people are thinking in national terms and of problems and solutions as a whole."[4] But he made sure to remind them of the scarcity of resources available for such a mission: "What kind of rural schools we establish does not matter, just so we can have schools. We are not very particular about anything. We grab a man or woman and put them in a school if they are willing to teach."[5]

> "Mexico is one of the best markets for American industry and it will continue to be a very satisfactory market for all American products; the consuming capacity of the Mexican people will be increased if all these poor peons who now

[4] *Mexico 1926: A Stenographic Report of the Interviews Obtained by the Alva W. Taylor Good Will Mission in the City of Mexico from July 28 to August 9, 1926 (*No publishing information or page numbers included).

[5] Ibid.

> only use sandals or no shoes and white drill clothes have their homes and can now have more of the things they need and want; up to now they have used only ground corn and chili and dressed in unbleached cotton, and as long as they remain so, they will not be good consumers of these things. But if we succeed in transforming ten million people into people who dress better, use better goods, and better articles of manufacture, the demand for American manufactured things will be increased ten or twelve times as much as now. Therefore, I believe that the American people ought to be deeply interested in solving the Agrarian problem in Mexico."[6]

What these words expressed was neither defiance nor subservience, but a demand to be treated as a legitimate government and an equal negotiating partner. Indeed, the striking feature of the series of speeches given to the Protestant "goodwill mission" is the frequent and sincere insistence on the matter of national sovereignty. From the conflict with the Church to the agrarian expropriations and the problem with the foreign oil companies—in all these questions the Mexican government claimed to be acting in defense of its sovereignty. Each one of the speakers agreed, from Luis N. Morones, to Adalberto Tejeda, to Moisés Sáenz: Their government represented the people's demand to rule itself. They were doing the best they could in impossible circumstances, and they would likely not succeed without the support of the United States.

Another Protestant publicist organizing "goodwill missions" to Mexico was Hubert C. Herring, secretary of the Social Relations Department of the Congregational Church and founder, along with Ernest Gruening, of the Committee of Cultural Relations with Latin America. His excursions got more or less the same welcome and spoke with many of the same people as the Alva Taylor group. But unlike Taylor, Herring was initiated in the Mexican Renaissance's jargon of authenticity, so he would come back to the United States writing things such as: "It will be a happy day when America is cured of its delusions of superior virtue and is ready to learn the art of living from these Indians of Mexico. It can only come as we move back and forth across the Rio

[6] Ibid.

Grande, seeking either neither financial advantage nor political power, seeking rather to enter into the cultural and spiritual wealth which these sons of the soil have so hardly won."[7]

The most politically consequential of these "goodwill missions" was the second one led by Herring. More than previous excursions, this one brought along members of the national press and influential leaders of public opinion: Herbert Croly, founder of the *New Republic*, Paul Hutchinson of the *Christian Century*, Rabbi Isaac Landman of the *American Hebrew*, and Margaret Jenkins of the Jane Addams-founded Women's International League for Peace. When the group met with President Calles, just as the church-state conflict was about to explode into open warfare, the president took the opportunity to address U.S. public opinion. He made headlines in the U.S. by openly expressing his concern about the possibility of a full diplomatic break with the United States and announcing his intention to submit the pending disputes between the two countries to the Hague arbitration tribunal in the hope of a negotiated reconciliation.[8]

President Calles' gesture about the Hague was perfectly well-calculated to appeal to the U.S. political class. In the second half of the 1920s, while revanchist nationalism gained ground in Europe, especially among downwardly mobile lower-middle classes, professional-managerial elites everywhere did their best to convince themselves that the Great War may indeed after all turn out to be the "war to end all wars." As we saw in Chapter Four, the years between the signing of the Dawes Plan in 1924, which briefly lifted Germany from hyperinflation, and the beginning of the global economic crisis of 1929, were a time when international politics got carried away by an overzealous pacifist faith in international arbitration. This momentary hope of reconciliation in the middle of the long European catastrophe of 1914-1945 is sometimes called the "Spirit of

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[7] Helen Delpar, *The Enormous Vogue of Things Mexican: Cultural Relations between the United States and Mexico, 1920-1935 (*Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995), 37.

[8] Ibid.

Locarno," in reference to the 1924-25 Locarno Treaties, in which France agreed to end its occupation of the Rhineland and Germany promised not to try and recover it. This Locarno Spirit was famously expressed by French foreign minister Aristide Briand when, at the League of Nations summit where Germany was accepted as a member, he exclaimed, somewhat overenthusiastically, "Away with cannon and machineguns: instead, conciliation, arbitration, and peace!"[9]

It was in this Locarno atmosphere that U.S. targeted pro-Mexico publicity efforts made their impact: from the special issue of *The Nation* to Carnegie-funded archaeological collaborations, from U.S. speaking tours by figures such as Manuel Gamio, José Vasconcelos, and Moisés Sáenz to the Protestant "goodwill missions" and the first stirrings of fashion for Mexican arts and crafts, which would become a mass phenomenon during the Great Depression. It was also in this Locarno atmosphere that the State Department's Mexican Red Scare was roundly rejected by the rest of the U.S. governing class. In late January 1927, Congress unanimously passed the Robinson resolution, which stated that there should be no armed intervention and that any confiscation or impairment of U.S. citizens' property in Mexico ought to be worked out by means of arbitration. Caught in the spotlight as a warmonger in the service of the oil lobby, Kellogg "reconsidered the State Department's policy toward Mexico and subsequently refused to sanction the department's role in advising business interests and intervening on their behalf in dealings with the Mexican government."[10]

Taking the defusing of the crisis as an opportunity to finally get rid of Ambassador Sheffield, in February, President Calles sent a message to President Coolidge and the State

[9] Briand was a poor weatherman. This was not the way the wind was blowing. J.B. Duroselle, "The Spirit of Locarno: Illusions of Pactomania," *Foreign Affairs*, 50, no. 4 (Jul. 1972).

[10] Daniela Spenser, *The Impossible Triangle: Mexico, Soviet Russia, and the United States in the 1920s* (Chapel Hill: Duke University Press, 1999), 93.

Department that he had received a collection of documents stolen from the American embassy. These potentially embarrassing documents revealed that Sheffield's embassy had long been acting in a prejudicial manner, purposely sowing discord to incite a conflict that would favor U.S. oil interests. One study of this episode, by James J. Horn, quotes one of the stolen documents, a report by the embassy's military attaché, Lieutenant Colonel Edward Davis, which seems to have been embarrassing for no reason other than how plainly it stated U.S. common sense about Mexico in the years leading up to the diplomatic crisis:

> "That the white man is somewhat disliked is natural but if the Mexican people are ever so fortunate as to be blessed with American intervention and administration this alleged bitter hatred of Americans will be proved a fake of the thinnest type… The year has proved that Mexico has little if any hope of developing into a self-supporting, respectable member of the community of Nations unless she received from the outside something she has never really had, that is to say extended training in actual self-government combined with education for the masses and proper economic development."[11]

But this common sense was changing. Although the possibility of armed incursion by the United States must have seemed quite real to observers at the time, in retrospect it appears to have been unlikely. Secretary Kellogg's motivations for stirring up the Mexican Red Scare had more to do with finding a rationale for sending gunboats to Nicaragua. More importantly, there were powerful financial interests on Mexico's side, namely, the bankers Thomas W. Lamont and Dwight Morrow of J.P. Morgan & Co. Back in 1918, when Lamont was put in charge of refinancing Mexico's foreign debt, he organized and spearheaded the International Committee of Bankers on Mexico (ICBM) to negotiate in the name of a panoply of American, British, French, Dutch and Swiss banks to which Mexico was indebted. In the years since, Lamont had served as

[11] James J. Horn, "Did the United States Plan an Invasion of Mexico in 1927?" in *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, 15, no. 4 (November, 1973), 459-60.

the ICBM's main dealmaker, cultivating good relations with Mexican officials, particularly Finance Minister Alberto J. Pani, with whom he negotiated the 1924 Lamont-Pani agreement, which reset the terms of the 1922 Lamont-de la Huerta agreement, and helped secure diplomatic recognition by making it into a condition for any further credit. As diplomatic historian Robert Freeman Smith put it, "of most significance for the future was the Committee's emphasis upon quiet, patient negotiation, which contrasted sharply with the bluster and debts of the oil men."[12] According to Freeman Smith, early in the Lamont-Pani negotiations, Pani informed Lamont that Mexico could not resume service on its exterior debt. When Lamont replied that the ICBM would have to declare the 1922 Lamont-de la Huerta agreement in 'final default,' Pani asked if this meant intervention by the governments involved, and Lamont emphatically stated that in his view 'the time when a debt could be collected by force of arms was past. The theory of collecting debts by gunboat is unrighteous, unworkable, and obsolete. While I have, of course, no mandate to speak for my colleagues in the investment banking community, I think I may safely say that they share this view with Mr. Morrow and myself."[13]

In the months leading up to the diplomatic crisis with the United States, a growing number of American visitors arrived in Mexico in search of the Renaissance that had earlier been discovered and elaborated by expatriate countercultural, artists, and intellectuals such as those in Anita Brenner's milieu. Among the new visitors were "goodwill missions" led by U.S. Protestant organizations which were set up as opportunities for Mexican authorities to influence U.S. public

[12] Robert Freeman Smith, "The Morrow Mission and the International Committee of Bankers on Mexico: The Interaction of Finance Diplomacy and the New Mexican Elite," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 1 no. 2 (November 1969), 150.

[13] Ibid., 151.

opinion in favor of Mexico. As the detailed record of the lectures and speeches given to one of these excursions shows, Mexican authorities only occasionally made use of the Renaissance themes of authenticity and rebirth, and instead presented themselves as practical men struggling against impossible odds to rebuild their country and preserve national sovereignty. When Congress rejected State Secretary Kellogg's attempt to make Mexico appear as a hemispheric beachhead for international Communism, the immediate threat of intervention was defused. This had something to do with Mexican Renaissance-adjacent publicity efforts, but it also had something to do with the widespread pacifist optimism of the years leading up to the Great Depression. All of this notwithstanding, intervention seems to have been, in retrospect, not very likely. Not only were Kellogg's threats only half-hearted, the International Committee of Bankers on Mexico, led by Thomas W. Lamont and Dwight Morrow, had a longstanding relationship with Mexico and opposed "the theory of collecting debts by gunboat."

5.2 Late Spring

When Ambassador Sheffield, embarrassed by the failure of his campaign against Mexico, announced his resignation, Ernest Gruening welcomed the news as a personal victory. But he was celebrating something more than the defeat of an old enemy. Several months earlier, at the height of the Mexican Red Scare, several newspapers of the Hearst chain had published allegations that Gruening had received $10,000 from President Calles to go abroad and help forge an alliance between Mexico and the British Trades Unions Congress, allegedly for the goal of international socialist revolution. This was of course, outlandishly untrue. According to his unsympathetic biographer, Gruening took the matter to heart:

> "Concerned that if he did not challenge the attack personally, Hearst's claims would sully his personal reputation and weaken his ability to influence the

> public, he filed a $500,000 libel suit. Gruening later boasted that he made himself independently wealthy for life by suing and collecting from every Hearst newspaper. In fact, Hearst settled out of court for $75,000, of which Gruening received only $25,000 after lawyers' fees. Despite his exaggerations the money obtained from the lawsuit in combination with his inheritance kept the family afloat financially through the 1920s."[14]

Gruening's career as a freelance anti-imperialist "constructive muckraker"—a term he made up for himself—had not been particularly profitable. The period between his involvement in Robert La Follette's presidential campaign in 1924, when he began writing about Mexico with Anita Brenner as research assistant, had been a drain on the inheritance that had always sustained him. His biographer describes a short-lived attempt at entrepreneurship.

> "In 1926, he formed a partnership with Harvard classmate Frank McLaughlin, the McLaughlin-Gruening corporation, which matched, (for a fee) U.S. investors interested in development projects with influential figures in Mexican politics. For access to his array of Mexican local, state, and national contracts, Gruening received $1000 per month plus living expenses. The two men had enjoyed warm relations before entering business together. Gruening frequently dined at McLaughlin's Mexico City residence and used his friendship with Calles to help McLaughlin obtain concessions for his oil company, El Sol. Both sides, he reasoned, profited, since the arrangement allowed the Mexican government to point at El Sol as a US firm willing to comply with Calles' nationalistic legislation."[15]

But these Harvard men's influence-peddling partnership did not last long because "McLaughlin wanted assistance from Gruening in all financial ventures, not merely those that forwarded an anti-imperialist agenda. This difference of opinion dissolved the partnership in less than a year."[16] After spending some time back home in Rockport, MA, the windfall from his libel

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[14] Robert David Johnson, *Ernest Gruening and the American Dissenting Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 62.

[15] Ibid., 58.

[16] Ibid.

suit allowed him, in May 1927, to return once again to Mexico to wrap up research on his book about Mexico, for which he re-enlisted Anita Brenner.

Up until her journey to Chichen Itza, Anita had been writing with increasing discipline. Her book, still prospectively titled "Mexican Renascence" or "Modern Primitives" had become her main priority. She had suspended her journalism and journal article work, with the exception of a few pieces for the *Jewish Morning Journal*, including retreads of previous articles, which she appears to have viewed primarily as a source of income. Suffering chronic insomnia, she would sometimes type up a whole chapter in one night. There were few distractions. Jean Charlot was in Yucatán, and the group of artists, writers, and assorted radicals she spent her time with back in 1925-26 was dispersing. Edward Weston was gone, and Tina Modotti had thrown herself into the cause. Diego Rivera was spending much time abroad, most recently having attended the anti-imperialist summit in Brussels. Carleton Beals was in and out of the city, chasing stories and chasing women. Frances Toor had distanced herself from Anita, who she now rightly viewed as a competitor in the Mexican Renaissance business. José Clemente Orozco, who never fit in that coterie, was still around.

Gruening arrived in Mexico City one day before Anita Brenner returned from her Chichen Itza trip. Anita would have preferred to keep at her writing, but she needed the money. So, for the next week and a half she spent nearly all of her time helping Gruening finish researching his upcoming Mexico book. She barely got a day's rest after her arriving in the city, after sharing an uncomfortable nighttime ride on the Veracruz-Mexico City train with her roommate, Lucy Perry Knox.

> Saturday, May 14:
>
> Arrived this morning after a racketing night, both of us in one bearth [sic] and an upper one at that. So much like mountain climbing I wanted to yodel. Letters: One from Papa, saying he can't help me with money this summer, as I

asked in order to be free to finish my book. I will have to borrow from G [Gruening]… Letter from Zaar, says articles are not Jewish enough but thinks the [*Jewish Morning*] *Journal* will use them anyway, out of regard for my name, which has become known and liked by readers… Found G. out of time, spent much time telephoning throughout the day, since he was expected in… Bought and read Gentlemen Prefer Blondes. Nice thing. Stomach out of gear. Wrote a poem. Typed all the preceding notes… Bathed and unpacked, massaged, shampooed, etc. My landlady has made up with her husband. Women are disgusting. Feels good to be alone. Lucy in for a moment, formal request for the valises we checked, which have not yet arrived. When she left, I heard a car starting, so concluded that she is not neglecting Good Old Saturday Night. My idea of good is that it's good to be alone. I have a brand-new need for Jean. Now that was really unnecessary. As soon as G. starts overworking me again, I'll no longer be diarrheic."[17]

Sunday, May 15:

Oh dear, the world is getting complicated again. In the morning, first thing went to G.'s. He had just returned from Tlaxcala, where he says is the Sistine Chapel of Mexico, in a place called Ocotlán, near the city of Tlaxcala. Also, he says that the ruins unearthed where Papa Xicotencatl told his descendants to dig are very interesting, that there are frescos like codices and buildings with true arches. Government, as usual, has done nothing for several months and the paintings are fading rapidly. Stayed there until two. As Jean predicted, G. made love to me. This embarrasses me exceedingly. He is not conscious of the employer-employee relation and I am. His lovemaking is at least somewhat discreet. Business of rumpling the hair and kissing the hand. He is leaving on Friday… but what will I do for the four evenings that I have to spend with him until then? I guess the little girl stuff is the best tactics, and anyhow that is my natural reaction…[18]

As in the rest of her journals, but even more so, these entries portray someone suffering from chronic, all-encompassing emotional ambivalence. Having just decided during her visit to Chichen Itza, that she no longer had feelings for Jean, Anita writes of her "brand-new need" for him and then immediately chides herself for indulging in such an "unnecessary" feeling. The gesture is present across her journals: expressing a volatile sentiment and immediately stamping it out with a joke or a change of topic. In the May 15th she even stalls for a few lines about archaeology in Tlaxcala before landing on the matter of her employer's sexual misconduct. She is

[17] Anita Brenner, Journal, May 14, 1927, AB 120.7.

[18] Anita Brenner, Journal, May 15, 1927, AB 120.7.

rightly concerned about what the incident will mean for the rest of her time working for him and decides to resort to "little girl stuff," to discourage further advances on his part, just before admitting to herself that this feigned immaturity is not feigned at all.

> Monday, May 16
>
> A crazy day. Patchwork. Jazz. In the morning went to see Gruening about money, although he does not owe me any. The three weeks in Yucatan are not paid for. He said all right but that he could not lend me for the summer, as I had asked. This gave me a headache… Went to the headquarters of the railroad workmen and got the latest on the strike. Went to see Tostado, the engraver, about his labor troubles, and he says he hasn't any. Home. Lunch… Went to see María Sandoval del Zarco, the only practicing woman lawyer in Mexico, who has been practicing for thirty years, she looks it. Her office is a combination of musty Díaz-days lawyer and old maid. Big desk and also cushions with lace covers over pale blue china silk. She says Mexican women have all kinds of rights but won't take them. She gave me her picture, in a folder on one side of which there is the chromo of a bunch of violets, with "María" in one corner, in gilt. Dropped in on Señora Gamio, find that Dr. will be here this week. He may be my salvation… went to Gruening as per appointment, but nearly two hours late. He was not in. Behold the wage slave now ready to report on the interviews. I left him María's portrait to console him.[19]

The style with which Anita begins the following entry, "A crazy day. Patchwork. Jazz," and what reads like an aggressive request for money she wasn't owed, makes it seem like Anita was coping with the shock from Gruening's unexpected behavior by identifying with the calculating "gold-digger" protagonist-narrator of the novel she had just read, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes: the illuminating diary of a professional lady*. Written by another Anita, Anita Loos, about a flapper's trans-Atlantic, Jazz-age adventures, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* was one of those bestsellers that, despite having been conceived with satirical intent, are so effective at tapping into fantasies of its time that they are consumed by mass audiences for vicarious experience.[20] In any case, Anita did not see herself as a victim. She believed herself to be ahead of the curve—sexually liberated and even sexually mercenary, like the bestseller's narrator. She does not seem to know

[19] Anita Brenner, Journal, May 16, 1927, AB 120.7.
[20] Anita Loos, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes: The Illuminating Diary of a Professional Lady* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1925).

what to make of María Sandoval del Zarco, who as the only practicing woman lawyer in Mexico at the time, was truly and indisputably ahead of the curve. She has nothing to say about Sandoval's coldly matter-of-fact claim about women in Mexico having all kinds of rights and not doing anything with them. Sandoval seems, in any case, like another object of ambivalence: while she clearly sees the lawyer's gilded portrait as a corny, outdated artifact, she gives it to Gruening as a vaguely feminist, but also somewhat farcical, passive-aggressive gesture of rebellion.

> Wednesday, May 18:
>
> I don't know whether it is apathy or fatigue, but I find myself singularly reluctant to work, and it never seems to me that it is legitimate for me to feel so. It is all right for other people who must sleep a large number of hours everyday. Although I sleep much more than I used to. Nerves frazzled. Not too much otherwise, doing this streetwalking and interviewing for G. Today I interviewed the chief of the employing department of the National railways, a back-slapper with a large bulldog in his office. Both he and his assistant, a shifty sort of person, impressed me most unfavorably, and the story he told me convinced me that the RR men got a dirty deal. At least the labor leaders look you in the eye and believe what they are saying. These others know they're lying and can't hide it. They get mixed up under even my lukewarm cross-questioning. One of them even got mad, when I asked him to explain why, if this is so, isn't that so, he answered: "Señorita I am not a lawyer!" Later went up G's to report on work. Made love to me. I told him he would impair my efficiency by corrupting me, and he said he did not think I was easily corrupted. I amuse him more than he amuses me…"[21]

As part of her research for Gruening, Anita conducted a series of interviews with figures involved in the recently defeated railroad strike, which involved tens of thousands of workers across the whole national territory. It pitted the railroad workers union, with its high concentration of Communist leadership, not only against management, but also against CROM's shock troops and federal armed forces. The railroad workers' defeat of 1927 was deeply consequential. With more than 20,000 strikers losing their jobs, the strike also represented the near-absolute victory of

[21] Anita Brenner, Journal, May 18, 1927, AB 120.7.

the CROM over the militant independent unions that emerged during the Revolution. The "back-slapper" of a manager who Anita interviewed must have been personally involved with the mass layoffs following the strike. And yet, despite Anita's acquaintance and friendship with a whole assortment of radicals who would have known something about the labor situation at the time, little of what she writes indicates that she cared to understand importance of the conflict she was researching. She does, however, comment on the managers' lack of authenticity, in comparison with the workers, who "at least believe in what they're saying." Unlike the radicals in her milieu who were a decade or two older than her, such as Tina Modotti and Bertram Wolfe, Anita's countercultural rebelliousness always stopped short of political—or any other kind of commitment. Unlike them, her worldview as it was taking shape in Mexico perfectly fit Walter Lippmann's famous description of the disillusioned generation of the 1920s: "What most distinguishes the generation who have approached maturity since the debacle of idealism at the end of the war is not their rebellion against religion and the moral code of their parents, but their disillusionment with their own rebellion."[22]

> Friday, May 20:
>
> Good cheer. Gamio is back and will have translations for me, perhaps other work also… Last night wrote a "Jew in Mexico" article, sent it to the Morning Journal. Today, besides seeing Gamio I did very little else… P.M., arranged my room which was getting tiresome, and put a different blanket and some Chichen stuff… Therefore, feel more cheerful.
>
> Friday, May 20[sic]:
>
> No one will ever know everything I have gone through to reach that plane upon which I am irresistibly placed… I get so tired… so tired… and put up with so many annoyances in order to make this bit of something my own possible… I have a touch of the flu, I guess. But every bone aches, and my head is like a ball of lead, in back. My thoughts struggle… there is a veil between me and what I am trying to crystallize, always and I fight to get there… Went to G's to report on my activities. After report over, he again made love to me. So I turned loose some childish remarks like "I remember when it used to make me furious to have my hand held…'

[22] Walter Lippmann, *A Preface to Morals* (New York: Transaction Books, 1982), 17.

and to the appropriate answer said: "No, now it doesn't make any difference." He let go my hand. I begin to think he is a *viejo sinverguenza*. I wonder how Jean knew. I went up to see Tina, but she was busy. Home, coffee, and at it again. Letter from José Clemente Orozco affectionately wants to see me. See no light ahead and also have lots of pains in my back. I guess the only real gain out of all this long struggle—because it is long—is that it will save my soul.[23]

Saturday, May 21:

I still feel stupid and have to fight for self-expression. Intense nostalgia overtakes me for Jean—a physical need of him which I've felt scarcely a touch before… [24]

Here is another constant across Anita's journals, a deep anxiety that she was not doing enough to deserve an elusive objective that lay always slightly out of reach, whether she recognized it as "something of her own," or "the salvation of her soul." It is when this anxiety reaches a point of despair (and here the despair was likely precipitated by Gruening's behavior) that her defensive ambivalence weakens and she writes down her feelings, not as a zigzag of snappy remarks, but as a great hunger and a great striving. The way she pulls herself out of these moods in the same way: getting back to work, writing more. Laying behind the veil was not just something she wanted, but something she herself had to crystallize--not only something of her own, but her self-made selfhood.

Sunday, May 22:

All work and no play is certainly making a dull boy out of this Jack. A.M. early to Gruening's. We went over the work and checked up on odds and ends. Then to a concert at Concha Michel's. Two of the members of the mariachi, a man and a woman, danced a very interesting machete dance. Saw there Tina, Diego, Paul, etc. etc… Lunch with Gruening, spent the afternoon talking with him, mostly about Mexico but also about other things. He has respect for my opinions and theories, anyway… I have another article ready for Morgen Journal and if I finish one more, that ought to hold them for a while. I hate to do the loose sort of

[23] Anita Brenner, Journal, May 20, 1927, AB 120.7.

[24] Anita Brenner, Journal, May 21, 1927, AB 120.7.

journalistic stuff I am doing for them, but I can't give the thing more time and effort, though my artistic conscience will pain me.[25]

Wednesday, May 25:

Yesterday was an irritating day, with my nerves and singing tension and ready to snarl. Usual thing, winding up the trails of the Aguila and railroad strikes for G… Today more or less the same. Nearly finished Gruening's last painful details. He left last night., with Elías, the president's brother, in a private car, heavily guarded by two big battle cars that look like naval convoys, with machine guns and many soldiers… The formal farewell occurred in the afternoon… Afterwards I regretted that said farewell had not been more artistic, on my part. If I was going to kiss him, I might as well have done it properly. It was quite without enthusiasm. But we parted very good friends. Exceedingly. I think he's to be counted a friend. He likes me a lot. I like him pretty well, too. As a matter of fact I must confess I like him better than I thought… Letters from Jean and Lowell. I had been feeling quite resentful because no letter from Jean, but since yesterday I was not so much in love with him. It seems that I need somebody to be nice to me, I mean personally and with some physical contact, though it can be extremely slight. There is nobody, now… There is an ultimateness about today. Sort of end of part one business. Later Orozco came with seven more drawings, as usual, breathtaking. A new quality of tranquility apparent. Static, they are, but never lifeless. Even Lucy noticed it. They are done with more acceptance of facts than the previous work, more kindliness, a tremendous comprehension without bitterness of protest. No criticism..."[26]

Fig. 5.2: José Clemente Orozco. *Heridos*. From "Horrores de la Revolución" series. 1926-28, Ink and graphite on paper. Museo de Arte Alvar y Carmen de Carrillo Gil, Mexico City, Mexico.

[25] Anita Brenner, Journal, May 22, 1927, AB 120.7.

[26] Anita Brenner, Journal, May 25, 1927, AB 120.7.

José Clemente lost his left hand as a boy while playing with explosives. He did not fight in the revolution because he was incapable of holding a rifle. He nevertheless claimed that the pictures in his series, Horrores de la Revolución, were all based on things himself had seen during his time marching alongside Carrancista forces and stationed alongside them during their occupation of the city of Orizaba. In his autobiography, he recalls this period as an exciting adventure where he made great friends, got to loot churches, and worked on a regimental news sheet alongside his mentor, Dr. Atl—all of this in the context of the war's great horror:

> "Sin embargo, la tragedia desgarraba todo a nuestro alrededor. Tropas iban por las vías férreas al matadero. Los trenes eran volados. Se fusilaba en el atrio de la parroquia a infelices peones zapatistas que caían prisioneros de los carrancistas. Se acostumbraba la gente a la matanza, al egoísmo más despiadado, al hartazgo de los sentidos, a la animalidad pura y sin tapujos. Las poblaciones pequeñas eran asaltadas y se cometía toda clase de excesos."[27]

There are at least fifteen figures here, but "Heridos" (Fig. 15) lacks a central protagonist. Every inch of the infirmary's surface is the setting for a small scene of tremendous pain, but none of them take center stage. Each one of the patients, medics, and nurses is absorbed in what they are doing, which is either suffering this pain or handling the sufferer. Drawing so many figures crowded together in the same space, keeping distances and proportions credible, is not easy, and the effort shows. There is a spatial and anatomical awkwardness throughout that has little to do with cartoonish distortion and much to do with a stubborn determination to place all the elements where they ought to belong according to the mind's eye. Despite the horror of the subject matter and the awkwardness of execution, there is something delicate about the overall effect, something terribly sincere in the hesitant linework. Whatever he is drawing, Orozco always seems to be learning how to draw it for the first time. He has no arsenal of tricks to rely on. Just as there is no

[27] José Clemente Orozco, Autobiografía (Mexico: Ediciones Era, 1970), 43.

protagonist, there is no sentimental appeal in this landscape of torture and solidarity, there is only Orozco's characteristically bewildered gesture: "take a look at this!"

5.3 Rebrand and Rebirth

The replacement of James R. Sheffield by Dwight Morrow as U.S. ambassador to Mexico represented a major, lasting shift in the relationship between the two countries. It did not mean the pending issues between the two countries had been resolved, or that the U.S. would not continue to leverage the economic inequality between the two countries to its advantage. What it did mean was that the legitimacy of the Revolution would no longer be cast into doubt and that the government that emerged from the conflict would henceforth be treated, not as a delinquent client state, but as a sovereign representative of the nation and a credible negotiating partner.[28] The common sense expressed by the military attache to Sheffield's embassy, Lieutenant Colonel Edward Davis, quoted above, that without American supervision, Mexico had "little if any hope of developing into a self-supporting, respectable member of the community of Nations," was being abandoned, more or less for good. The progressive view embodied by the new embassy was best expressed in an article by Herbert Croly for the New Republic written upon returning from one of Hubert Herring's "goodwill missions."

> "The Mexican nation is, for the first time, practicing self-government. Its form of self-government does not yet involve the free and honest expression of the popular will in elections, but it is, in its own way, expressly responsible to the

[28] On Dwight Morrow's Mexican ambassadorship see, Joaquín Cárdenas, *American Diplomacy in Mexico, 1929: According to the National Archives*, Washington, D.C. (Cuernavaca: Centro de Estudios Históricos Americanos, 1988); María del Carmen Collado, *Dwight W. Morrow: reencuentro y revolución en las relaciones entre México y Estados Unidos, 1927-1930* (Mexico City: Instituto Mora, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, Dirección General del Acervo Histórico Diplomático, 2005); Joaquín Cárdenas N, *Morrow Calles y el PRI: Según Archivos de Washington, D.C.; actualizado con, Los mil días del Presidente Salinas de Gortari* (Mexico City: Editorial Pac, 1992); Richard Melzer, "Dwight Morrow's role in the Mexican Revolution: Good neighbor or meddling Yankee?" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of New Mexico, 1979).

> Mexican people. It differs from all previous governments in Mexico in that it is trying to stimulate the ambition, diversify the opportunities, and enlarge the outlook of the Mexican Indian. Its practical program is thoroughly enlightened and has already achieved a small measure of success and popular approval. There is taking place in Mexico something in the nature of a national renaissance. Its spokesmen hope to build up a Mexican culture and society which is based, not upon the exploitation of the peon, but upon his deliverance and education."[29]

In Croly's view the Mexican government's legitimacy lay on its valid claim as representative of the people's striving for self-government. As he admits, this claim was not based on "the free and honest expression of popular will in elections." Neither is it based on the fact that the government emerged from the leadership of a revolutionary civil war; Croly was too conservative for such a notion. Rather, Mexico's legitimate sovereignty was based on the responsibility the government was taking for its people and on its uplifting of the masses. Although it had only achieved only a "small measure of success and popular approval" this program of reform impressed Croly as "thoroughly enlightened."

What was being reborn in Croly's version of the Mexican Renaissance was the civilizing mission of expansive reform he had preached in the years leading up to the War. The vision he had outlined back then, of an activist national government led by an enlightened minority less concerned with protecting individual rights than with active promotion of collective improvement had been trampled by the realities of Wilson's terror and the Harding-Coolidge "New Prosperity." But in Mexico he identified that which his own country had been deprived of in a national renaissance whose "spokesmen hope to build a Mexican culture and society which is based, not on exploitation of the peon, but upon his deliverance and education." This identification between

[29] Herbert Croly, "Mexico and the United States," *The New Republic* 50 (March 30, 1927), 161.

U.S. Progressivism in decline and Mexico's new reformers is made explicit in his final argument for opposing U.S. aggression against Mexico:

> "The Progressives, who are defending the right of Mexico to pursue a national policy which, for the time is justified in being suspicious and even defiant of the United States, are merely defending their own right to exist. Mexico is their test case. If they cannot safeguard her from the peril to her independence created by the alliance between progressive capitalism, narrow legalism and racial snobbery in this country, they will themselves in the long run have to submit to treatment as rough and as unfair as that to which the State Department and the oil interests are now subjecting the Mexican government."[30]

The replacement of James R. Sheffield by Dwight Morrow as U.S. ambassador to Mexico came at a time when the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, which posited that armed intervention was the proper way to deal with nations who failed to fulfill their obligations to international creditors, was losing favor in the U.S. political establishment. As U.S. hegemony expanded beyond the hemispheric boundaries of the Monroe doctrine, the tools used by the old Dollar Diplomacy were too blunt for the new tasks at hand. Controlled loans were failing to stabilize internal politics in debtor countries. Political unpredictability was making foreign bond markets increasingly unreliable.

In January 1927 Dwight Morrow published an article in *Foreign Affairs*, "Who buys foreign bonds?" arguing in favor of the ongoing expansion of private lending to foreign governments and against the practice of collecting these debts by gunboat. Throughout the article, he runs through several variations of the argument that the fact investors are able to place their trust in a foreign government's willingness to pay, particularly is a hopeful sign for the future of international civilization, particularly "at this time when so many people are saying that the various nations of the earth have lost faith in each other.":

[30] Ibid., 164.

> "Individuals in America taking their own money, with its present command over goods and services, and surrendering that command to nations on the other side of the earth, and they receive in exchange for it a promise. The question may be asked: nothing more than a promise? To which the answer may be made: nothing less than a promise. Human lives stop. Promises go on. The civilized world today is run on the basis of a belief in promises. Whatever our doubts about the meaning of modern civilization, we may at least take some comfort in the trust which men show in each other's promises."[31]

Near the end of the article, he lands on an a curiously worded passage:

> "There is no international sheriff. But there still remains our reliance on good faith, our reliance upon the law which is older than statute law—the acknowledged custom of mankind. The credit of governments is not easily built up. It may easily be shattered. And it must never be forgotten that there are rules of conduct accepted by the silent approval of civilized man, the breach of which hurts the one committing the breach more than the one against whom it is committed."[32]

Morrow here seems to be hinting that it is not only the debtor, but also the creditor that risks breaking with "the acknowledged custom of mankind," If the United States fails to act in good faith by using coercive measures to protect its interests abroad, it may risk breaching "the rules of conduct accepted by the civilized man, the breach of which hurts the one committing the breach more than the one against whom it is committed." Its credit as a member of the community of civilized nations may be shattered.

Throughout the article, Morrow does not seem to be using the term "civilized" in the nineteenth century, evolutionary definition of the word, for which the antonym is "primitive." Rather, he appears to be using "civilization" in the older, eighteenth century sense for which the antonyms are "savagery" and "barbarism." The relationship between these three words is defined with great clarity by Friedrich Schiller in his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*:

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[31] Dwight Morrow, "Who buys foreign bonds?," in Foreign Affairs 5, no. 2 (January 1927), 227.

[32] Ibid., 232.

> "But Man can be at odds with himself in a double fashion: either as savage if his feelings rule his principles, or as a barbarian if his principles destroy his feelings. The savage despises Art and recognizes Nature as his sovereign mistress; the barbarian derides, dishonors, and enslaves Nature, but more contemptible than the savage—he continues frequently enough to become the slave of his slave. The cultured man makes a friend of Nature and respects her freedom while merely curbing her caprice."[33]

As incoming Ambassador to Mexico, Morrow shared the widespread anxiety that his country's postwar economic expansion—what Herbert Croly called "the alliance between progressive capitalism, narrow legalism, and racial snobbery"—may lead beyond progress and civilization, into a condition of barbarism. Perhaps Mexico's most successful post-revolutionary pedagogical experiment consisted in taking advantage of this anxiety and casting Mexico, in contrast with this civilization in decline, as a civilization in the making.

In *Financial Missionaries to the World*, Emily Rosenberg writes about how mass cultural images of the primitive played a legitimizing role for Dollar Diplomacy:

> "…images of the primitive, in this time of uncertain direction, provided guideposts in the elusive search for national and personal identity. Most of the targets of dollar diplomacy, as they were economically constituted as dependencies, were culturally constituted as a foil against which Americans could build their own opposing self-images. Dependencies were represented as diametrically different cultures against which American nationalism could display and define itself in terms of rationality, progress, civilization, stability, and cohesion."[34]

As we have seen, it is true that Mexican images of the primitive served as "guideposts for the elusive search for national and personal identity," but the Mexican Renaissance reversed the terms of the narrative. While advanced rationality, progress, and civilization had led the United States to the brink of barbarism, Mexico's apparent primitivism represented the authentic ground

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[33] Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, trans. Reginald Snell (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2004), 36.

[34] Emily Rosenberg, *Financial Missionaries to the World: The Politics and Culture of Dollar Diplomacy 1900-1930* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 200.

on which a new and qualitatively different civilization could flourish. This was how the Renaissance could simultaneously represent an escape into the ancient past and the promise of a revolutionary future. The appeal of Rousseau's noble savage was not regression into an atavistic state of nature, but that the savage, untouched by the accumulated barbarism of history, possessed the potential to mature into a truly civilized condition. This is the reason why Mexican Renaissance narratives, such as the one Anita Brenner developed, so often depicted and conflated everything from the Conquest to the Porfiriato as a long medieval detour. It is also why there was such insistence in the continuity between the great civilizations of ancient Mesoamerica and the indigenous Mexicans of the present. In this historical imaginary, the tide of the Revolution had washed away five hundred years of historical flotsam and left in its wake the Indian—pristine human material with which the work of civilization could once again start from scratch.

No one believed such notions literally, but every imagination was stirred in their direction. It was not just a matter of Mexico. In those years of disillusion, the whole world was desperate for something to believe in; truths, half-truths, or falsehoods—it didn't much matter. This despairing mania for new myths was expressed by Louis Aragón in his post-War *eloge à l'erreur*:

> "I no longer wish to refrain from the errors of my fingers, the errors of my eyes, I know now that these errors are not just booby traps but curious paths leading towards a destination that they alone can reveal to me. There are strange flowers of reason to match each error of the senses. Admirable gardens of absurd beliefs, forebodings, obsessions and frenzies. Unknown, ever-changing gods take shape there. I shall contemplate these leaden faces, these hemp seeds of the imagination. How beautiful you are in your sandcastles, you columns of smoke! New myths spring up beneath each step we take..."[35]

[35] Louis Aragon, *Paris Peasant*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (New York: Exact Change, 2004).

When Schiller wrote, in his *Aesthetic Education of Man*, that civilization ran the risk of backsliding into barbarism, he was speculating on the effects of a miscarried revolution. His pessimistic argument was that in the Thermidorian world of 1794, where Enlightenment and Revolution had failed to bring about the freedom they promised, the only path for salvation lay in the pursuit of an artistic education. The emancipatory potential which had been frustrated in reality could still be realized in the realm of art, whose freedom he compared to the freedom of play, which he defined as "everything that is neither subjectively nor objectively contingent, and yet imposes neither outward nor inward necessity."[36] That is to say, art's freedom as defined by Schiller lay in that it consisted of purposeful activity which was not compelled or constrained by the practical requirements of living.

By the twentieth century, art's freedom in an unfree world had gone so far that it was no longer experienced as such. Just as the civilizational achievements of the nineteenth century had been cast into doubt by the events of the 1910s, art's emancipation came to be experienced, not as free play, but as a heavy burden. As Theodor Adorno put it in the opening lines to his lapidary *Aesthetic Theory*:

> "The sea of the formerly inconceivable, on which around 1910 revolutionary art movements set out, did not bestow the promised happiness of adventure. More was constantly pulled into the vortex of the newly taboo; everywhere artists rejoiced less over the newly won realm of freedom than they immediately sought once again after ostensible yet scarcely adequate order. For absolute freedom in art, always limited to a particular, comes into contradiction with the perennial unfreedom of the whole."[37]

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[36] Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, trans. Reginald Snell (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2004), 78.

[37] Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory,* ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Bloomsbury), 6.

This is the familiar story of the twentieth century European avant-garde: In the decade leading up to the War and the revolutionary crisis of 1914-19, the barriers of possible practice in painting were blown apart by an explosion centered in, but not exclusive to Paris: Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, Wassily Kandinsky, Hilma af Klint, Robert Delunay, Kasimir Malevich. In his early cubist phase of the second half of the 1910s, Diego Rivera himself was part of this generation and this revolution. But the catastrophe of the War and the failure of the revolution undermined prewar optimism in experimentation, leaving no way forward for art other than to "enunciate the disaster by identifying with it."[38] With Dada, art turned against itself. Futurism tried to imitate the disaster's mechanical racket. Surrealism sought to chart the erotic byways of the catastrophe's newly inaugurated reign of error.

But chaos can only be navigated for so long before it is necessary to reach for some kind of order. By the middle of the 1920s, the avant-garde could no longer justify its activities as ends in themselves and began to pursue extra-artistic rationale. The Bauhaus tried to turn artists into industrial designers. The New Objectivity tried to make them into something like journalists. Italian futurists turned from radical modernizers of their medium into extravagant advertisers of their modernizing regime—a regime that by and large rejected them. The avant-garde's attempts to merge art and life took their most extreme form in the Soviet Union, where sectarian artistic and literary organizations competed invent a new proletarian culture to replace the decadent culture of bourgeois Europe.

[38] Paraphrasing Adorno, "Art enunciates the disaster by identifying with it…" Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory,* 58.

Meanwhile the Mexican Renaissance presented this merging of art and life—so arduous in Europe—as a facile, organic process, always already achieved. This was the recurring claim of Anita Brenner's work-in-progress:

> "In the span of one generation Mexico has come to herself. Her first and definitive gesture is artistic. While the government shifts and guerrillas still battle for Cristo Rey and other interests, the builders, necessary as the destroyers, refound the nation. It is a nation which establishes a school for sculpture before thinking of a Juvenile Court, and which paints the walls of its buildings much sooner than it organizes a Federal Bank. Sanitation, jobs, and reliably workable laws are attended to literally as a by-product of art; for the revolution is a change of regime, because of a change in artistic style, or, if one wishes a more usual description, of spirit."[39]

The crisis of 1914-19 had been all-encompassing. As it launched the United States into a position of global hegemony, it undermined the prospects of the previous century's modernist aspirations, both political and artistic. The effectivity of Mexico's narrative of national rebirth—which was also a narrative of political legitimation--lay in the way it rekindled promises that had been snuffed out by the disaster. To a civilization anxious about sliding into barbarism, it offered an image of noble savagery in the midst of maturing into a civilized condition. Its artistic renaissance presented itself as having easily achieved the aims that stubbornly eluded the post-War avant-garde. The narrative was mutable and inchoate, not something to be taken too literally, but at a time when there appeared to be no way forward, every imagination was stirred in its direction, which looked just then, like a fresh start.

[39] Anita Brenner, *Idols Behind Altars* (New York: Brace and Harcourt, 1929), 229.

Fig. 5.3: José Clemente Orozco, *Bajo el Maguey*.
From "Horrores de la Revolución" series. 1926-28, Ink and graphite on paper.
Museo de Arte Alvar y Carmen de Carrillo Gil, Mexico City, Mexico.

The composition of "Bajo el Maguey" (Fig. 16) is deadpan to a fault. The plant's blades and the overlapping, freshly killed corpses, meet boringly right at the top of the perfectly centered mound. The second maguey plant and the feet of a third dead body stick out on the sides, but they are clearly afterthoughts. Although the stereotypical plant itself is shaded boldly and expressively, the two dead bodies are sketched in perfunctorily. There is something lightly comedic about the way the bodies are laid so neatly on top of each other. While the print "Turistas," discussed above, achieves something like tragic historical allegory by means of cartoonish farce, "Maguey" does more or less the opposite. Here is a tragic scene that ought to be full of weighty historical pathos, but it comes off as a lark. Rather than a scene from the Revolution, it seems more like a caricature of a scene from the Revolution. The "Horrores" series was meant for an American audience. Is this an attempt to flatter foreign taste, or is it a macabre joke at its expense? If it is the latter, a good punchline would be to add the caption, "*siesta*."

5.4 Late Summer

"July 1. I am happy. Why shouldn't I be? Jean will be here tomorrow."[40] Since all activity was made impossible by the tropical heat, excavation at Chichen Itza was put on hold for several months every Summer. Although during her visit in the Spring Anita had decided that there was no future to be had between Jean Charlot and herself, she was still looking forward to seeing him upon his return to Mexico City. For his sake she even distanced herself from one or two ongoing casual affairs.

Less than two weeks later, however, she had already grown tired of him. In her journal entry of July 12, she writes:

> "It is a perfectly gorgeous night, one to be happy in. Suave, cool, and brilliant. People are out and moving, numbers of them walking with each other. But me, I am in a fiendish mood. For one thing, my check is still delayed, and this is the fourth day upon which I've been so broke I can't even buy toothpaste. Then, too, my work has been interrupted a good deal. The chapter "Native Possessions" was just shaping but Lucy and Jean were here right after lunch and Jean stayed all afternoon, when Rodriguez Lozano and Orozco came, and now it is ten thirty. And I'm in a devilish humor. Jean too irritates me a good deal, I am ashamed to say. For one thing, he dresses so badly as to be conspicuous on the street, and I just hate that. If he were normal appearing, at least, I would feel less strained. There are so many other things to put up with, also for his sake because indeed he is worth the strain, but nevertheless it is a strain… Jean is so depressed and needing comfort and consideration all the time that it breeds impatience. This pobre-diablerismo bred by too much humility is an awful load for a friend to carry, and I always have the sense of carrying a load, and at the same time a feeling of being exploited, violated and taken possession of, all of which turns me against art and intellectual books and the rest of it. This motivated an explosion this evening, though most of it within. Nevertheless, I did blurt that he had a bad effect on me, and he just froze into silence and a sort of wilted sadness and this irritated me more than ever. It is not fair to anybody to be so goddamn defenseless. Makes you feel like a dog, or rather like one who has beaten an affectionate and confiding animal. Horrible![41]

[40] Anita Brenner, Journal, July 1, 1927, AB 120.7.

[41] Anita Brenner, Journal, July 12, 1927, AB 120.7.

When Jean was away, Anita tended to idealize and dwell on her longing for him, but when he was around, she always resented his emotional needs, which tortured and consume him. On both sides, the dynamic is reminiscent of what Christopher Lasch described in his work on *The Culture of Narcissism*:

> "The narcissist feels consumed by his own appetites. The intensity of his oral hunger leads him to make inordinate demands on his friends and sexual partners; yet in the same breath he repudiates those demands and asks only for a casual connection without the promise of permanence on either side. He longs to free himself from his own hunger and rage, to achieve a calm detachment beyond emotion, and to outgrow his dependence on others… But although the psychological man of our times frightens himself with the intensity of his inner needs, the needs of others appall him no less than his own. One reason the demands he inadvertently imposes on others make him uneasy is that they may justify others in making demands on himself. Men especially fear the demands of women, not only because women no longer hesitate to press them but because men find it so difficult to imagine an emotional need that does not wish to consume whatever it seizes on."[42]

The gender dynamic described by Lasch was flipped in Anita and Jean's case, it was she who feared being consumed by his pressing hunger and who was thus be driven to deny her own need of him. Their relationship was one of mutual idealization and permanent dissatisfaction, a dissatisfaction that both succeeded in sublimating into great productivity.

> August 6:
> "Last night copied the revised seventeen pages. Today went to town and attended to various details. Found I had far less money in the bank than I supposed. This is discouraging. Translated seven more pages for Gamio, leaving six to do now, when it is one A.M. but Jean has been here since about seven—we said our sentimental farewells. From now on we WORK.[43]

[42] Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979), 257.

[43] Anita Brenner, Journal, August 6, 1927, AB 120.7.

August 1927, Anita Brenner's last month in Mexico before moving to New York City, was a time of near-superhuman productivity. She had little choice in the matter. All four years she had lived precariously, but the situation had grown more difficult since her return from Yucatán. Her family refused to help. She was doing translations for Manuel Gamio, who paid one peso per page. She still owed work to Ernest Gruening, for whom she conducted several more interviews on the labor situation and the Church-State conflict, which that year had grown into a full-fledged war. She also picked up some Associated Press-related work with *El Universal*. That month she also published "Yankele's Kaleh" her first article in the *Menorah Journal*, which at the time was becoming an incubator for the young Jewish writers who would go on to form *The Partisan Review*. And still somehow, that same month she completed the first draft of her "Renascence" book, which would go on to be published two years later as *Idols Behind Altars*.[44]

> August 14, "I have declared to both Jean and Lucy my discovery that my book is not art criticism or history, but really anthropology. From geography through culture, traditions, folklore, inter-influences, convergence, divergence, and all these things in individual cases…"[45]

Whatever it was, the book that resulted was certainly unique—a ramshackle, half-Wagnerian "total work" weaving together everything she had learned about Mexico in the preceding four years, as she was learning it. For something so naively grandiose and full of disparate content, it is surprisingly cohesive, and clearly the product of impassioned accumulation

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[44] About *Idols* see Elissa J. Rashkin, "Idols Behind Altars: Art, Authorship, and Authority in the Mexican Cultural Renaissance," in Marcy E. Schwartz and Mary Beth Tierney-Tello, eds, *Photography and Writing in Latin America: Double Exposures* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006); Eduardo San José, "Ídolos tras los altares: La recuperación del México prehispánico y colonial en la obra de Anita Brenner," in Goyri Ortiz Bullé, Alejandro Ezequiel Maldonado, and Edelmira Ramírez Leyva, eds. *México prehispánico y Colonial: Miradas Contemporáneas* (Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Azcapotzalco, 2009.

[45] Anita Brenner, Journal, August 14, 1927, AB 120.7.

of knowledge. Indeed, it is not properly a work of art criticism, or history—neither is it anthropology. What it is, is an extravagant advertisement for the Mexican Renaissance. This is made evident by its mode of address, which is the second person singular—the advertiser's and the hypnotist's mode of address. Once and again, after elaborating on a bit of folklore, or a historical anecdote, or an artist's profile, the text lands on its recurring themes in what seems like an attempt at hypnotic suggestion:

> "Small things, if you stay long enough and are sensitive and not dogmatic, and patient and loving, cohere. Each is a symbol, a little finger that implies a hand and a body of the same color, texture, pulse. They add up like ciphers in your conscience, and when you think of the Indian you think as he does of himself. You begin and end thoughts, emotions, behavior, on the basis of the earth."[46]

For all its woolliness, the book had developed as part of Anita's increasingly deliberate effort to position herself as the leading interpreter of the Mexican Renaissance for a U.S. audience. Her experience of the past four years was something to be exported. So, in addition to all the work she was already doing, Anita spent those final weeks gathering and shipping a collection of works by the very same artists she included in her book. The when and the how she got involved in such an endeavor is not very clear from what can be found in her journals or her archive. The first mention of this project in her diaries is on August 15, where she writes about a visiting Alfonso Pruneda, dean of the National University: "… I saw Pruneda and it is settled that the art goes officially. He said I was a 'nuclea' and also the string on which the pearls are strung. I said I hoped the string would not burst, and we smoothed each other's beards for a bit, then I left."[47]

There is no mention of a specific exhibition, or other intended purpose for sending the artworks. What is certain is that there were at least two shipments consigned to Anita or, really,

[46] Anita Brenner, *Idols Behind Altars* (New York: Brace and Harcourt, 1929), 106.

[47] Anita Brenner, Journals, August 15, 1927, AB 120.7.

sent under the authority of the National University to the Mexican consulate in New York City. This much is clear in a letter from Anita to Consul Arturo Elías:

> "Con esta fecha se ha expedido un lote de material artístico dirigido a su oficina por la Universidad Nacional de México, de cuyo contenido adjunto lista detallada… Asimismo adjunto una copia de la carta del señor rector de esa digna institución, que establece la naturaleza y el objeto de este material, así como mi personalidad como comisionada de esa institución para hacer publicaciones, exhibiciones, etc., con fines de propaganda cultural… Muy próximamente llegaré a esa [ciudad], en cuya fecha me haré cargo del material, así como de la cuenta de fletes, etc., a que haya lugar… Me será muy grato saludarle de nuevo aunque quizá Ud. no recordará la ocasión última en que tuve el gusto de hacer lo mismo--- a su salida de México con el Dr. [sic] Gruening, en cuya obra he venido colaborando. Adelanto las gracias por su fina consideración…"[48]

The "lista detallada" and "carta del señor rector" are not to be found, but a separate document titled "INVENTORY OF MATERIAL, IN GENERAL, AND SUGGESTED USE," includes headings such as "Exhibits: A. Near future," under which are listed items such as "Orozco, sketches of the revolution, "Charlot, drawings and water-colors," "Dolores Cueto, embroidered panels," and another entry, "Articles, A., Near future" listing what must be photographs for publication, among them, "Chichen-murals and Charlot Yucatan work (Arts)," "Mexican lacquer," "Mexican pottery" "Toys (small sculpture)."[49]

[48] Anita Brenner to Arturo Elías, August 9, 1927, AB 11.7.

[49] Anita Brenner, *Inventory Of Material, In General, And Suggested Use*, AB 11.7.

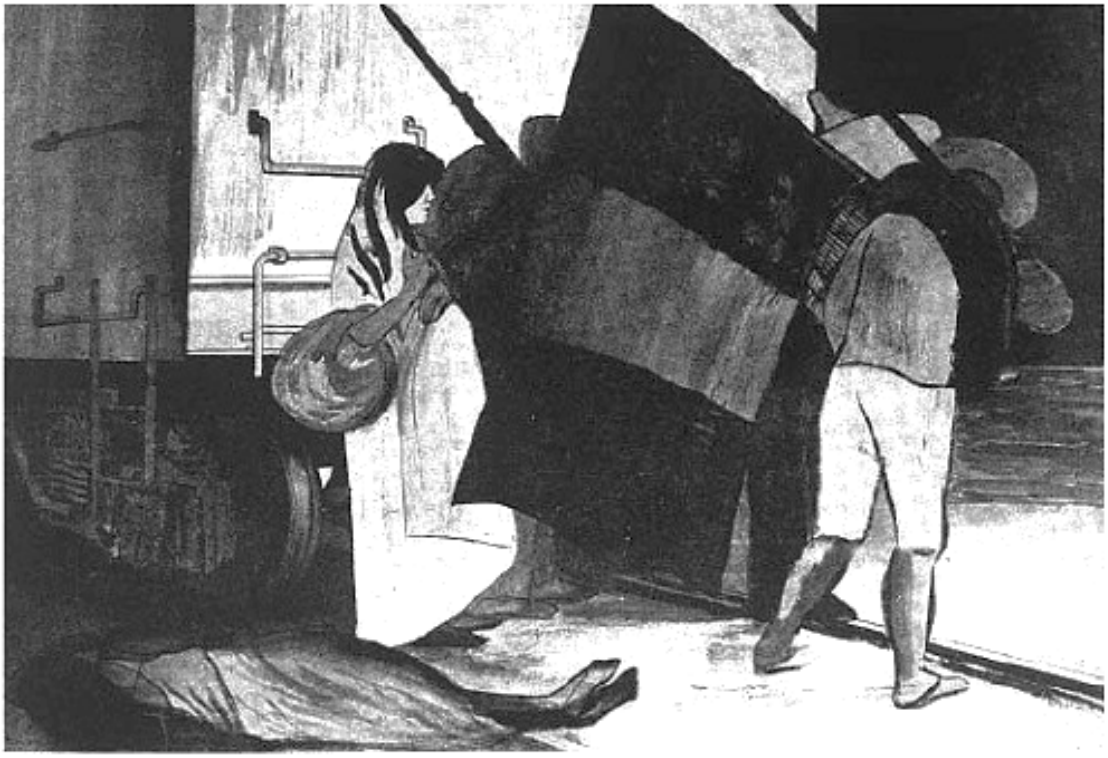

Fig. 5.4: José Clemente Orozco, *Bandera*,
From "Horrores de la Revolución" series. 1926-28, Ink on paper, private collection.

The title of the drawing, "Bandera," (Fig. 17) says little about the scene depicted. A woman watches a group of soldiers walk away, holding a flag lacking and eagle and serpent. They must be off to battle, about to jump on the train inspired by drink and patriotic fervor. But then there is that dead woman, lying right on the train tracks. Maybe the soldiers are not about to go fight, but are celebrating a victory in which the fallen woman was collateral damage. There is no knowing what side of the conflict the men are fighting for, for what purpose, long or short term. It is a dramatic scene without a story. There are patriots and there are casualties but there is no beginning and no end.

In her book's chapter on José Clemente Orozco, Anita Brenner writes:

> "One would believe that his political and social drawings for publication in dailies and magazines, had indeed, as the story goes, clubbed presidents and cabinets to oblivion, and one might also conclude from his Revolution sketches that

> all Mexico buried its guns because of Orozco... The fact is that by means of pictures he purposes to remove nothing except the pressure on his nerves, exposed in every tendril like vibrant and non-insulate electric wires to the human ugliness and beauty he loves. By sheer force he hurls his bitter and grief-stricken visions through the eyes into the seat of human emotions, making no detour to the brain, and thus it is that even his personal life is divided sharply into religiously subject friends and rank enemies."[50]

Nothing came easily to Orozco. The same volatile sensitivity and obsession that compelled him to keep at his work so tirelessly also prevented him from promoting himself with any success. As Jean Charlot later wrote, "He had concluded his cycle of frescoes at the Preparatoria School despite the jeers of a majority of the teachers and students, and the physical destruction of much that he had previously painted."[51] It was indeed thanks to Anita's intervention that he had been able to return to work at the Preparatoria, and thanks to her commission—the American collector she made up—that he had been producing his "Horrores" series. Although the muralist movement was yet to gain its celebrity, its mythical, originary phase, as part of José Vasconcelos's cultural crusade, had been over for years. Despite the improvement of relations with the United States, the political situation was deteriorating. There was the war with the Catholics, getting worse by the day, and on top of that there was the approaching presidential succession—the return of Obregón to the presidency, which was likely to lead to more war. Worst of all was that the government was absolutely bankrupt amid a tanking economy, so there was little hope for any more government commissions in the near future—let alone anything like a market for Orozco's work. In the middle of 1927, there was no future in Mexico for the Mexican Renaissance. Tamayo had already

[50] Anita Brenner, *Idols Behind Altars* (New York: Brace and Harcourt, 1929), 268.

[51] Jean Charlot, "Orozco in New York: Based on his letters to the author," in *College Art Journal* 19, no.1 (Autumn, 1959), 40.

migrated, and with Anita leaving by the end August, it was probably around this time that Orozco finally decided that it was time for him to try his luck across the border.

> August 31,
>
> "These last days (three of them) have been a shouting and a confusion, with me running back and forth between the University and the National Customs to arrange about the art. It has gone—revised, sealed, listed, etc. three kilos of it, and I am 75 pesos the poorer and therefore light in both pocketbook and spirit. It took a million documents, oficios, interviews, and whatnot, and finally a revision here, done by a very simpático agent, a Tehuano, Tocaven, who acted like a good scout and did not mess things up too much, and furthermore eased them along into final sealed and stamped form. Medina of the administrative of the University has acted like a grouch… And delayed me as much as he could. He is determined that I want to smuggle something. The afternoon of the revision came here but happily it was practically over since Tocaven told him oh yes, it was all ok, there were watercolors, and books, and modern oleos, and a lot of things which he gave in detail, reading the list, that medina could not do anything except grumpily assent and say it was to 'evitar dificultades por si fueran pinturas antiguas," etc, etc. The services of Tocaven and the old man who carried the wire and seals cost me 15.50, officially, not counting taxis."[52]
>
> September 1
>
> "Odds and ends, getting ready to leave. Awfully tired and lazy. Orozco came in and we made a crazy project for a home for painters in which each one of us should be given a lot of what he does not want or like, and also everything very unexpected… table-tipping and pepper in the dessert, and lots of opera, and all the stupid art articles posted in prominent places… As a result, they would all let out a wild protest in art—palette and brushes being on hand—and we would then have 'arte revolucionario.' In other words, says Orozco, a 'little Mexico.'[53]

In the same entry, she writes down a few sentences from Leon Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution*, in Spanish, which Anita had been –appropriately--reading in those last days before leaving:

> "Trotsky says: 'De esto podría deducirse la consecuencia general de que no solo no existe una cultura proletaria, sino que no existirá jamás, y que no habrá porqué lamentarse de ello: el proletariado se apodera del poder para acabar de una vez con todas las culturas de clase y abrir camino a una cultura de la humanidad. Y esto lo olvidamos algunas veces…"

[52] Anita Brenner, Journal, August 31, 1927, AB 120.7.

[53] Anita Brenner, Journal, September 1, 1927, AB 120.7.

5.5 The graduate

After spending a few weeks with her family in San Antonio, Anita arrived in New York City in late September, where she settled back again with her Mexico City roommate, Lucy. In her journal entry of September 22, she writes: "We found an apartment today, Thursday, Lucy and I went down and clinched it. 78.00 dollars and with more room than most."[54] For a relative unknown, the city welcomed her warmly. Theatrical designer Mordecai Gorelick and Rufino Tamayo both of whom she had earlier met in Mexico, took care of helping her with the move and introducing her to the intellectual and artistic scene. But the warmest of all welcomes was by Franz Boas, legendary head of the anthropology department at Columbia University. In the same September 22 entry, Anita writes: "Boas is an old darling. He has a sense of humor and lots of *buena voluntad,* and something may come of it yet…"[55]

Franz Boas had, by this time, already revolutionized the discipline as the founder of cultural anthropology, whose headquarters he established at Columbia. In opposition to the racial hereditarianism that dominated anthropological scholarship the previous century, his cultural relativism emphasized a diverse plurality of possible paths for cultural development. His criticism of overarching theories of civilizational evolution in favor of theoretical pragmatism and an inductive and highly empirical approach to research was particularly transformative, as it was carried on by influential students such as Robert Lowie, Alfred Kroeber, and Manuel Gamio. According to intellectual historian Charles King, in the 1920s Franz Boas made an effort to bring more women into the discipline. Among the women anthropologists that joined his program that

[54] Anita Brenner, Journal, September 22, 1927, AB 120.7.

[55] Anita Brenner, Journal, September 22, 1927, AB 120.7.

decade were Zora Neale Hurston, Margaret Mead, and Ruth Benedict.[56] And although Anita had not received anything approaching sufficient undergraduate credits while in Mexico, Boas enthusiastically supported her application to join:

> September 27, It being Rosh Hashonoh, I was able to get through a lot of red tape at school because so few Jews were around, and they are such a mass of the student body. It invariably makes administrators and clerks angry to have to handle my record. Foxy "Papa Franz" is trying to accumulate me enough undergrad credits for me to get graduate standing immediately. "Con ese motivo" I had an informal exam from the Spanish department. That is, a talk with [Federico de] Onis, at the written request of Boas, and Onis pronounced me as knowing the undergraduate work and whatever they teach of Spanish and Pan-American literature. It was very simple; I just gave him my opinions of the poets and passed judgment lackadaisically on Prieto, Gutierrez Najera, etc. etc. Also said I preferred Unamuno and Ortega y Gasset to Spanish modern poets… and voila, the exam was over. Oh façade, façade, how New Yorkese you are![57]

It was not just Columbia. Anita's work in Mexico had opened all kinds of doors for her. During her first weeks in the city, she met with editors of *The Arts*, *The Nation*, and *Menorah Journal*, all of whom wanted more material from her. During this time, she was also searching for a publisher for her book. Early in October she met with an editor at Alfred Knopf: "A.M. went to Knopf, saw Harry Block. Very young chap, pleasant, Jew, blond, and *requete águila* [very sharp]. Says they are interested but that Mexican things don't sell…" The market for Mexican things was about to improve, however. The cycle of public events and exhibitions which inaugurated the

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[56] Charles King, *Gods of the Upper Air: How a Circle of Renegade Anthropologists Reinvented Race, Sex, and Gender in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2019). For more (so much more) on Boas, see George W. Stocking, *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 195-233, esp. 195-98; George W. Stocking, *The Ethnographer's Magic and Other Essays in the History of Anthropology* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992); See also Marshall Hyatt, *Franz Boas, Social Activist: The Dynamics of Ethnicity* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990); Anthony Darcy, "Franz Boas and the Concept of Culture: A Genealogy," in *Creating Culture: Profiles in the Study of Culture,* ed. Diane J. Austin-Broos (Boston: Allen & Unwin 1987); Julia Liss, "The Cosmopolitan Imagination: Franz Boas and the Development of American Anthropology" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1990); and Vernon J. Williams Jr., *Rethinking Race: Franz Boas and His Contemporaries* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1996); Mauricio Tenorio Trillo, "Stereophonic Scientific Modernisms: Social Science between Mexico and the United States: 1880s-1930s" *The Journal of American History* 86, no. 3 (Dec.1999).

[57] Anita Brenner, Journals, September 27, 1927, Anita Brenner Papers, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas Library.

Mexican trend of the late 1920s and early 1930s was about to get started. September 28, "In the afternoon, Tamayo brought a Mrs, Paine, who is organizing a monster exhibit of Mexican stuff, general and complete. She has evidently all the proper backing and wanted me to come in on it with the art I brought. Seems all right. She is a little woman, very *simpatica*, and, says Tamayo, *muy fiera*. She is going to work on this in several fields. Carlos Chavez ballet, art, industry, folklore, whatnot."[58]

Frances Flynn Paine's "proper backing" was none other the Rockefeller Foundation's General Education Board, where she was employed. The initiative for this "monster exhibit of Mexican stuff" had come from a group of seven galleries in the uptown art district known collectively as The Art Center, which had been recently founded with the purpose of organizing cooperative exhibitions focused on arts and crafts. The inspiration for the idea must have come from the surge of pro-Mexico propaganda launched the previous year to counter the State Department's saber-rattling. When the Art Center's director, Alan Bement solicited the contribution of the Rockefeller Foundation, he echoed the rhetoric of Hubert Herring's Protestant "goodwill missions" to Mexico, making the claim that "cultural relations" are "the basis of understanding between nations." Despite such diplomatic sentiments, when Anita met Bement the next day, she was put off by the gallerist's casual sexism:

> September 29, New York has caught me into its own nervous high-tension rhythm. Today, saw Mrs. Paine and was taken to Bement, head of the Art Center. He has a splendid façade but is unjudicious about where to use diplomacy. He said to me, when I told him (among other things) about the retablos and that Jean had worked with me on the choosing, 'If Charlot chose them, I am certain they are all right.' They have said nothing definite except that they will expedite the art out of customs."[59]

[58] Anita Brenner, Journal, September 28, 1927, AB 120.7.

[59] Anita Brenner, Journal, September 29, 1927, AB 120.7.

The Art Center was more interested in the folk art and craft aspect of the exhibition than in modern artists. In his application for Rockefeller funding, Bement expressed his hope that such allegedly ancient traditions would become an inspiration for American design: "The preconquest Arts [sic] of Central America [sic] are the artistic heritage of the Western Continent and therefore a natural, as well as a vigorous source, from which we as Americans may draw inspiration for our native creative design. An established familiarity with these art forms should soon find expression and reflection in our contemporary arts. Demand for it is already felt, owing to the strong Mayan influence expressed in some of our modern urban architecture." It is probable that modern artists were only considered because of the convenience that Anita had already brought with her a large sample of such work. The exhibition ended up becoming two separate shows, one of folk arts and crafts, and another of modern art, with only the former being financed by the Rockefeller Foundation. The best account of these arrangements is from a letter from Bement to Anita several weeks later.

> My dear Miss Brenner: -
>
> Our first communication to the Mexican Government was an informal invitation to send an exhibition of fine arts to the Art Center in January 1928. It was transmitted through Mrs. Frances Flynn Paine to the Honorable Louis [sic] Montes de Oca, under the date of September 8. Upon receipt of Mr. de Oca's letter of acceptance, dated September 30, a formal invitation was immediately forwarded and was transmitted to the Department of Education.
>
> Thereupon we approached the General Education Board of the Rockefeller Foundation and secured the sum of $5000 as underwriting for the purchase of a supplementary exhibition of craft material. In furnishing this underwriting, the Foundation stipulated that they be permitted to send both exhibitions on tour for a term of months, not less than six months, nor more than twelve, through the United States. Believing that their contacts, plus those of the Art Center, would bring added advantage to the artists of Mexico, we readily acceded to their request.
>
> In the beginning it was our intention to show the two exhibitions together, but it is now decided to have two exhibitions, the fine arts in January and the applied arts in March. The Art Center understand that the Mexican Government will finance the exhibition of fine artists, packing, insurance, and transportation to the Art Center and return it to Mexico at the conclusion of the travelling exhibition, the understanding being that the Rockefeller Foundation or an organization named

thereby, shall be entirely responsible for the above items during its tour within the United States. It is understood that the Art Center and the Rockefeller Foundation will be responsible for the supplementary exhibition of crafts material.

It transpires, however, that the Ward Steam Ship Line, in answer to a request from the Art Center and in the interests of international good feeling, has agreed to reduce its transportation charges on all the material sent to the Art Center by 50%. As this includes considerable reduction in charges on the fine arts, it is our hope that the Mexican Government will in return assist us in the transportation of applied arts from Mexico to Vera Cruz, it being understood, of course, that any sum that can be thus saved to us will be invested in additional applied art material.

Yours very sincerely,
Alan Bement
DIRECTOR[60]

Now a full-time graduate student at Columbia University's Anthropology Department, Anita was also trying her hand as an art dealer. Back in August, four of the artists included in her shipments of artwork, Jean Charlot, José Clemente Orozco, Francisco Goitia, and Máximo Pacheco, signed identical letters of consent making her their official representative in the United States:

"The bearer, Miss Anita Brenner, is my authorized representative and has my consent and confirmation in the handling of my work however she judges opportune and convenient. She has the power to exhibit, publish, or place my work with galleries and recover it, fix prices, sell, and collect, it being understood that she does this in my name and adhering to my wishes.

This representation holds good until otherwise indicated."[61]

In addition to the Art Center group show, she was searching for exhibition opportunities for Charlot and Orozco. On October 15 she met with the Weyhe Gallery about a solo show for the former and with the Valentine Gallery for the latter, though it appears that neither of these

[60] Alan Bement to Anita Brenner, November 30, 1927, AB 11.7.

[61] Jean Charlot, José Clemente Orozco, Francisco Goitia, and Máximo Pacheco, letters to Anita Brenner, AB 11.7.

exhibitions ended up taking place. That same day, she met with Frances Flynn Paine, with whom she was becoming good friends and making big plans:

> "Exceedingly long conference with Paine resulting in a project for partnership, which seems inevitable as she's done the New York half of the big enterprise thoroughly and I have done the Mexican half. This extends to exhibits, publication, and commercialization of Mexican stuff. Marvelous and magnificent and exceedingly practicable, and so well under way already that we are pendejas if we don't push it to the ultimate implications, and anyway, we are pretty much committed to it. That makes her Mexican trip unnecessary and makes a lot of preliminaries here done for me. Wheee! Both of us so excited we forgot about dinner."[62]

Late in December, Paine did end up travelling to Mexico, where she spent several months collecting material for the folk-art exhibit, and met Ambassador Morrow and his wife, Elizabeth Cutter Morrow, who had just recently arrived in Mexico with their children.[63] That same month, at Ambassador Morrow's request, Charles Lindbergh landed his *Spirit of St. Louis*, at the Balbuena airfield in Mexico City, an extravagant gesture of diplomatic goodwill that captured the imagination of Mexico's capital and made headlines across the world.

The modern exhibition was set to open first, on January 19, 1928 as a kind of prelude to the folk art and crafts exhibition, which would not open until March. The exhibition catalogue, a single folded sheet, announced at the very top that, "The exhibition is under the patronage of Señor Plutarco Elías Calles and the Mexican Government." Among its list of honorary patrons were philanthropists and art patrons like Robert W. de Forest and Otto H. Kahn. Listed right alongside were several major figures of the Calles Government: Secretary of Education José Manuel Puig Cassauranc, Assistant Secretary of Education, Moisés Sáenz, Secretary of Foreign Relations

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[62] Anita Brenner, Journal, October 15, 1927, AB 120.7.

[63] Helen Delpar, *The Enormous Vogue of Things Mexican: Cultural Relations between the United States and Mexico, 1920-1935 (*University of Alabama Press, 1995), 84, 147.

Genaro Estrada, Ambassador to the U.S. Manuel C. Tellez, and dean of the National University Alfonso Pruneda.

Included in the list was also the figure bringing them all together, Ambassador Dwight W. Morrow. The painters represented were David Alfaro Siqueiros, Abraham Angel, Ben Hur Baz, Julio Castellanos, Jean Charlot, Miguel Covarrubias, Gabriel Fernandez Ledesma, Carmen Fonserrada, Francisco Goitia, Pablo O'Higgins, Lowell Houser, Ricardo Jimenez, Fermín Martinez, Carlos Mérida, Roberto Montenegro, Máximo Pacheco, Fermín Revueltas, Diego Rivera, Lozano M. Rodríguez, Jesús Rojas, Antonio Ruiz, Matías Santoyo, Rufino Tamayo, and Víctor Tesorero. There were also four sculptors: Luis Albarrán y Pliego, Elizondo Fidias, Enrique Meyran "(Age, twelve years)," and Guillermo Ruiz.

A note at the bottom of the list of works reads: "The Art Center takes this opportunity of expressing its appreciation to Miss Anita Brenner, Mrs. Frances Flynn Paine, and Senor José Juan Tablada for their assistance in organizing the Mexican Exhibition."

The brief "Introductory Note" printed in the catalogue , written by the art critic Frank Crowninshield is worth quoting in full:

> "We have been hearing a good deal about Ambassadors to Mexico—and the increasing amity between that country and ours. First of all there was Mr. Morrow ('ami intime' of Mr. Coolidge) who, acting the role of evangelist, is now so diplomatically spreading good-will among the unregenerate Mexicans. Then there was Lindbergh, our flying Ambassador, whose task it was to strew, from the Mexican skies, fresh seeds of harmony.
>
> As these plenipotentiaries of ours have been religiously preaching the gospel of Americanism in Mexico some good will perhaps result from their labors. But the Mexicans are going about *their* end of the job in an even more far-sighted way. They are sending us their artists as Ambassadors. They are trusting more to the potency of good art than to that of the flying machine. They are matching Rivera, Goitia, Orozco, Tamayo, Charlot, Covarrubias, and the rest of their shining band of painters against Coolidge and Lindbergh and Morrow.
>
> Mexico is perhaps beginning to sense, what France has sensed for more than a hundred years, that a nation's art, taste, craftsmanship and feeling for beauty are the safest evangels with which to batter down prejudice and build up good-will.

> Go to Mexico from any American border town—from Brownsville to Matamoros, from El Paso to Juarez, or from San Diego to Tijuana—and note how instantaneously one feels the spell and the beauty of Mexican art. One feels, too, how much more genuine, vitalized, and widely diffused it is than our own. One must marvel at their painting, architecture, fabrics, sculpture, rugs, pottery, glass, frescos, dancing, wood carving, and music. There is another thing to marvel at. That theirs is in no sense a *barbaric* art. Never do they permit sensuality to be placed above good taste. Exuberance is always made to submit to organization and design, while, even in their use of the hottest and most exotic colours, they exercise a vigorous, almost austere restraint."[64]

Here are a whole series of claims to be examined. According to Crowninshield, Morrow and Lindbergh were in Mexico spreading goodwill and Americanism among the "unregenerate" Mexicans. Unregenerate because, despite the threat of aggressive intervention, they had, to paraphrase Herbert Croly, continued to pursue a national policy which, for the time was justified in being suspicious and even defiant of the United States, in order to defend their own right to exist. Crowninshield then establishes a sort of relationship of moral equality despite a difference in political and technological power: In place of ambassadors, Mexico exported artists. In place of flying machines, Mexico created art. In place of Coolidge, Lindbergh, and Morrow—Mexico had Rivera, Goitia, and Orozco.

Then comes the comparison to France—to the Restoration. Just as France had been apologizing for its revolution, "for more than a hundred years," with its "art, taste, craftsmanship, and feeling for beauty," so too Mexico could apologize for its own revolution as well.

As Crowninshield depicts it, to step across the border is to enter a world where every aspect of life is imbued with artistry. From painting and architecture to rugs and pottery, it is as if the

[64] Exhibition catalogue, The Art Center, Exhibition of Mexican Art, n.d (January 1928), AB 11.7. On this particular exhibition, see also Alejandro Ugalde, "The Presence of Mexican Art in New York between the World Wars: Cultural Exchange and Art Diplomacy" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2003).

whole nation were a single, cohesive work of art. And there was "another thing to marvel at." That this general feeling for beauty did not entail an uncivilized slavery to sensuality. Unlike the savage, who, in Schiller's words, "despises art and recognizes Nature as his sovereign mistress," Mexican art was capable of mastering its own natural inclinations. Its exuberance submits to "organization and design." Its hot, exotic colors are tamed by "vigorous, almost austere restraint."

For dislocated American radicals and disillusioned American Progressives, the allure of the Mexican Renaissance lay, at its core, in the possibility of escape. Mexico was an escape from their country, but more importantly, it was an escape from the impasse of their historical moment into a place outside history, or a place where history could still turn out otherwise. And yet, as we have seen in this chapter, when the Renaissance narrative was redeployed for diplomatic purposes, it became a story of sovereignty. It was a story of a people teaching itself how master its own revolutionary impulses by means of organization, design, and vigorous, austere restraint and become, in the words of Lieutenant Colonel Edward Davis, military attaché to the Sheffield embassy, a "self-supporting, respectable member of the community of Nations."

José Clemente Orozco did not appreciate how his work was being framed at the Art Center show. He was especially offended by the fact that his work was being exhibited as a sideshow to folk art and even art made by children.

He had arrived in New York City in late December. Upon arrival, one of the first people he wrote to was Jean Charlot, who was back in Yucatan.

> Brother Jean:
> This is the first chance I've had to write since I arrived on Friday night, very tired and during a spell of terribly cold weather. I saw Anita on Saturday, she greeted me with a "How awfull [sic]" because she says she wrote me not to come

> until April, which was when the exhibition of 12 of my drawings was to be held, and although she doesn't actually say so, I understand that it's all off now….
>
> Yesterday I saw two exhibitions, Picasso and Renoir. Drawings by the former: figures apparently copied from Greek vases in museums. Just two or three lines. Much repetition. Ink drawings. A very skilled hand. Pencil drawings with 'much volume.' I tried desperately to be enthusiastic, but I couldn't. You and I have drawings a hundred times better… Renoir impressed me very much, I liked him exceptionally well. I spent an hour and a half looking at five or six little pictures. The rest are not as good, they must be studies or early works.[65]

That evening, Orozco visited Walter Pach, who he had met when Pach was a visiting lecturer in Mexico City. But their re-encounter in New York did not go so well. Orozco felt that the art critic did not take him seriously as a painter and resented his tentative remark comparing Diego Rivera to Picasso. The most awkward moment came when Pach showed his own paintings to Orozco.

"He didn't like what I said," wrote Orozco to Charlot, "He showed me his own works and asked my opinion of them. He did NOT like my frankness." When Pach showed him a painting of his wife dressed up as a stereotypical *china poblana*, all Orozco could say, in his heavily accented English, was, "wonderful picture."[66]

[65] José Clemente Orozco to Jean Charlot, December 21, 1927, in José Clemente Orozco, *The Artist in New York: Letters to Jean Charlot and Unpublished Writings, 1925-1929*, ed. Jean Charlot (Austin: University of Texas Press).

[66] Ibid.

Conclusion

This dissertation narrated a brief period in the life of Anita Brenner: the four years she spent in Mexico as an undergraduate, which marked the beginning of her career as an interpreter and promoter of Mexican art and culture in the United States. This biographical fragment served as a narrative framework for a critical historical account of a cluster of simultaneous, interconnected, artistic, cultural and political phenomena that may be generally be referred to as "The Mexican Renaissance."

A narrow focus on Anita Brenner's life and work in this formative period would have merited at most an article or a single dissertation chapter. But as anyone who has read Brenner's diaries knows, what is so interesting about her life during this period is everything else that was taking place around her. There was the muralist movement certainly, but there was also Mexico's post-revolutionary reconstruction, the outsize role of the Communist movement among Mexican intellectuals and artists, the decline of the Vasconcelian cultural revolution and pedagogical crusade, *indigenista* nationalism, and the beginning of anthropology's curious role in Mexico as a nation-building science. There was the emerging fascination with and revolutionary branding of folk art, the international post-Wilsonian anti-imperialist moment of the mid-1920s, the accelerating emancipation of middle-class women from traditional gender roles, and the expansion of bohemian counterculture into a mass culture phenomenon. Anita Brenner's story in these years offers a privileged vantage from which to observe these interrelated phenomena to a large extent because of the people with which she surrounded herself: Frances Toor, Bertram Wolfe, Ernest Gruening, Carleton Beals, Jean Charlot, Tina Modotti, José Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera, Sylvanus Morley, Franz Boas, etc.

One way to address these people and these topics would be to do what Brenner's biographer, Susannah Glusker, did: to praise the protagonist for the impressive array of people she met and things she wrote about—an understandable approach, since Glusker was Brenner's daughter. Another way to do this would have been to proceed like Helen Delpar. Without Delpar's exhaustive book on the cultural relations between Mexico and the United States during the Mexican Renaissance, *Enormous Vogue of Things Mexican*, this dissertation would have been much more difficult to research. And yet, despite its encyclopedic breadth—or more likely because of it—her account never finds a deeper historical question around which to organize her impressive array of case studies.

My own approach was to take up the perspective of Anita Brenner and her cosmopolitan milieu of artists and intellectuals and use it as a basis to take the Mexican Renaissance out of its usual position as an aftermath of the Mexican Revolution and position it instead as an aftermath of the larger world historical crisis of the 1910s. The First World War and the international revolutionary crisis it catalyzed were experienced across the political spectrum as collapse of bourgeois society and bourgeois culture—often foretold since the second half of the nineteenth century. In the United States, this was a period of catastrophic defeat for the socialist left and of grave disappointment for progressive liberalism The U.S. was clearly emerging as the world's economic hegemon, but what this would mean culturally and politically was uncertain well into the 1920s.

In Chapter Two, I claim that this was the collective historical experience that led figures like Roberto Haberman, Carleton Beals, Bertram Wolfe, and Ernest Gruening to become fascinated with the Mexican Revolution. In Chapter Four I write about how the ebbing of the revolutionary tide and the general political disillusionment of the period also led to a kind of

depoliticized counterculturalism among the middle-class intelligentsia which was bound up with a widespread moral opposition to imperialism—as was the case with Ernest Gruening—and a kind of anti-American, anti-bourgeois search for cultural and racial authenticity, as illustrated in the case of Edward Weston and Tina Modotti.

Another major story underlying the experiences of the figures which populate this dissertation is more Mexico-centered: the passing of the Vasconcelian moment following the De la Huerta revolt and the rise of Plutarco Elías Calles to the presidency. In Chapter Three this is the political background for the mid-1920s impasse of the muralist movement—an impasse which defines this moment for two of the figures I place closest to Anita Brenner: Jean Charlot and José Clemente Orozco. For them, the Mexican Renaissance represented an opportunity to develop themselves as artists, even if they were each in his own way skeptical about the ideological fetishes of the moment.

The passing of the Vasconcelian moment is also the political context for the reorientation of the muralist movement toward the United States, a process in which Anita Brenner and the rest of the expatriates played a central role. The story of the emergence of the United States as the global hegemon after the inter-imperialist rivalries of the First World War and the failed European revolutions is strung throughout all the chapters, leading to the diplomatic crisis of 1927 and its peaceful resolution, which are narrate in Chapters Four and Five.

All together, these narrative strands tell the story of how a handful of American radicals and counterculturalists facilitated the process by which the moment of post-revolutionary nationalist artistic and intellectual effervescence known as the Mexican Renaissance became an instrument of U.S.-Mexico diplomacy—how the muralists went from working for José Vasconcelos to working for Dwight Morrow. As I articulate in this dissertation, this story is best

understood as a manifestation of a larger transition—the counterrevolutionary interregnum following the First World War, the failed revolutions that followed, and the emergence of a new U.S.-centered international capitalist order.

There is a conversation Anita records in her journals in which Alfonso Pruneda, at the time the dean of the National University, affectionately calls her "the string on which the pearls are strung." This is more or less the role Anita Brenner plays in this dissertation. Her coming-of-age story serves as a thread stringing together a series of people and phenomena in a sequence which could not have been arrived at by a more traditional historiographic approach. She is the POV character whose role is to observe, learn, and reflect. In her narrative arc she goes from an ambitious yet impressionable new arrival in Mexico to a professional writer, an expert in Mexican art and culture completing work on her first book.

Once Anita moved from Mexico to New York City in the Fall of 1927, the already hectic pace of Anita Brenner's intellectual and professional pursuits only intensified. In 1928-29, while working on her Ph.D. in anthropology at Columbia, she continued writing and publishing articles about Mexico in publications such as *The Arts*, *Menorah Journal*, and *The Nation*. Oswald Garrison Villard, Ernest Gruening's old friend at *The Nation* even hired her as the publication's chief Latin American editor. At the same time, she searched for a publisher for the book she had written in Mexico, and continued to publicize and search for exhibition opportunities for the artist friends she met in Mexico, in particular Jean Charlot, José Clemente Orozco, and Carlos Mérida. These artists were among the group of Mexicans that began arriving in New York City in the late 1920s and early 1930s in search of patrons and audiences, Rufino Tamayo, the composer Carlos Chavez, and the poet Octavio Barreda were also among this group, for which the nickname was

coined "La Mexicanada."[1] In 1929, Anita met her future husband, the young Jewish doctor David Glusker, fresh out of medical school, and around that same time was finally able to find a publisher for her Mexican opus: "Payson-Clark definitely accepts the book—making it a five-dollar popular opus, not an art book. And since they are such darn nice people and do get the point, I submit, and I cut."[2]

Despite the delay in publication and the material—mostly images—that was cut out of the final version, *Idols Behind Altars* was a success. Reviews were largely positive, often praising the author's impressive erudition relative to her young age. Some reviewers read the book mainly as an account of Mexico's indigenous cultures, others took it to be mainly about the Revolution, and only a few engaged with it as a work about modern artists. What everyone remarked upon was Brenner's meta-narrative about religious syncretism as a means of spiritual resistance to European colonization. The main lesson American readers seem to have taken from the book was laid out succinctly by Toby Joysmith of *The News*:

> "The whole Colonial section is devoted to an examination of the idea that although the Spaniards and their friars came and did attempt to infuse the Indians with the modes of Christianity, in fact they failed, for the Mexicans simply took the Christian hierarchy of saints and substituted their names for those of their own old gods."[3]

[1] Charlot may have been French and Mérida Guatemalan, but both had indeed by this point become "Mexican artists."

[2] Anita Brenner, Journal, August 28, 1928, AB 120.8.

[3] Toby Joysmith, "Idols Behind Altars," *The News (*Nov. 15, 1929).

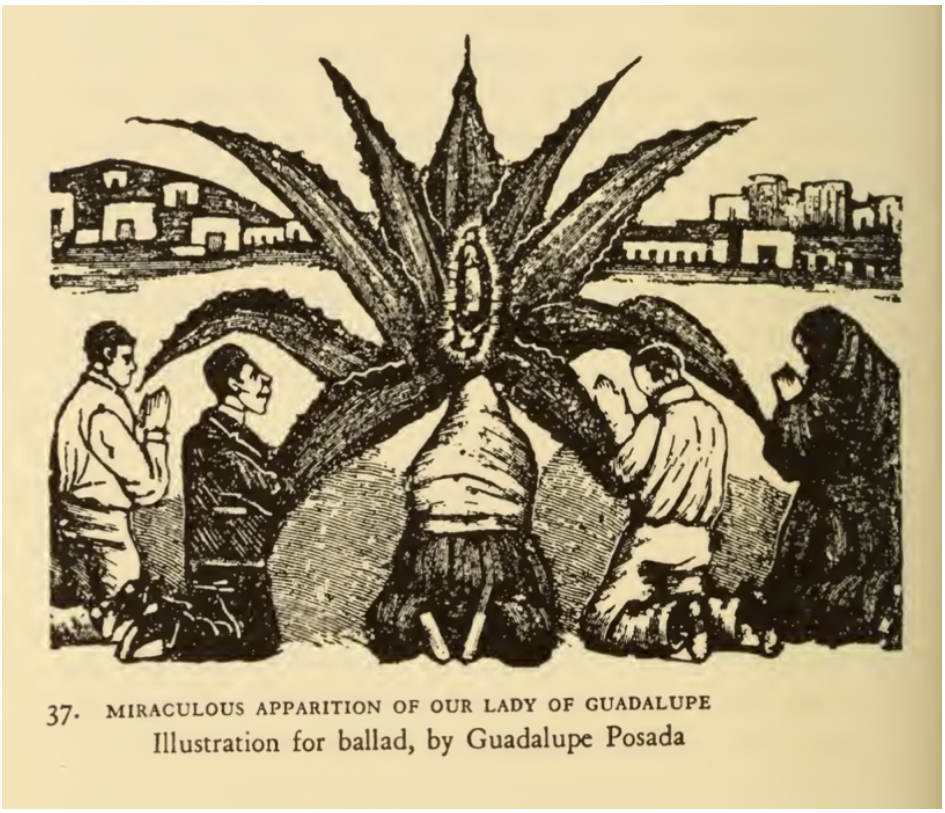

Fig. 6.1: José Guadalupe Posada, *Miraculous Apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe*. N.d. In Anita Brenner, *Idols Behind Altars*, Fig. 37.

As suggested in earlier chapters of this dissertation, it was this meta-narrative that made *Idols Behind Altars* so compelling to U.S. audiences. It equated Mexico's cultural-religious idiosyncrasies with anti-imperialist resistance, indirectly positing that the centuries between the Conquest and the Revolution—from a world historical perspective, the whole bourgeois era—had been a long detour, and that it was only in the present that Mexico was reclaiming its authentic self. On the one hand, this narrative was familiar enough to an American audience which had inherited the old anti-Catholic, anti-Spanish Black Legend, on the other, it appealed to widespread post-War countercultural disillusion with the hopes and aspirations of the bourgeois nineteenth century. Brenner's meta-narrative intimated that Mexico's indigenous culture had kept the

inauthentic bourgeois era at bay, that unlike the barbaric, imperialistic wars recently waged by Europe and America, Mexico's recent war had been a struggle for a civilization's rebirth.

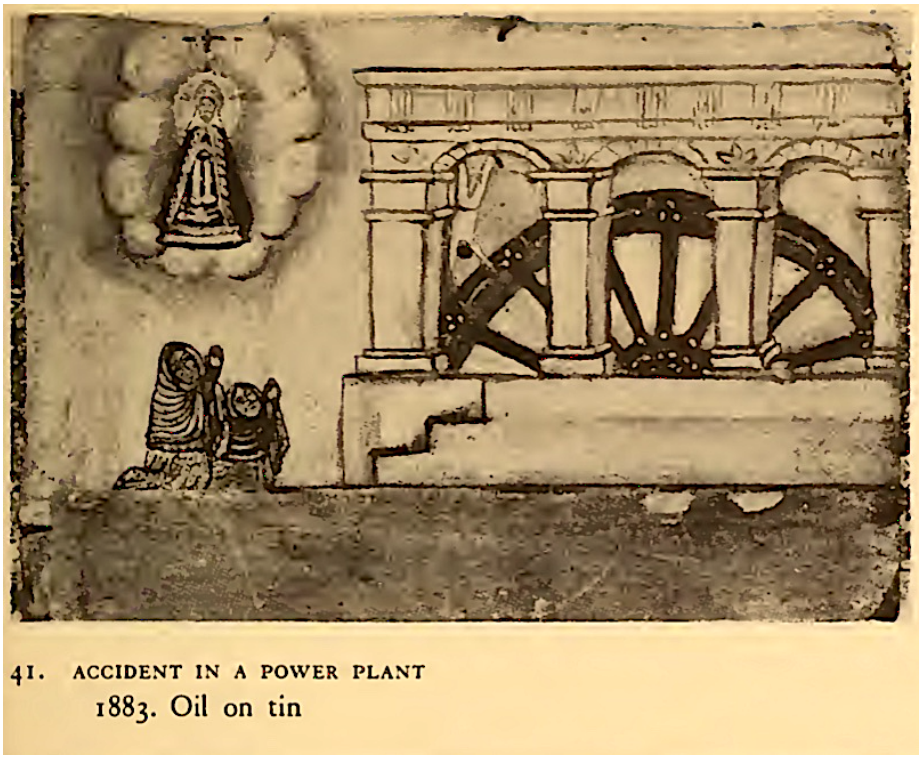

Fig. 6.2: Anonymous, *Accident in a Power Plant*. 1883.
In Anita Brenner, *Idols Behind Altars*, Fig. 41.

Indeed, the book only intimates; it refuses to argue. Its rhetorical style is seductive and suggestive, rather than scholarly or polemical. It never asks the reader to accept anything that it says, but simply to entertain it. The book's illustrations go a long way to creating this non-committal atmosphere. They include everything from ancient pre-Columbian codices to charming painted pottery, from impressive churrigueresque colonial church ornaments to endearingly naive retablo paintings (Fig. 6.2), from popular ballad illustrations by José Guadalupe Posada (Fig. 6.1), to revolutionary muralism. Despite the monumental scope of its narrative and the solemn tone of some of its passages, like a Mexican curio shopkeeper the book seems to say, *llévese lo que usted guste*.

One famous reader who was delighted by the book was Miguel de Unamuno. In a letter to Brenner, the Spanish author recalled fond childhood memories of reading about Mexico:

> "Entre los primeros libros que leí, varios de ellos traídos por mi padre de Nueva España, estaba la historia del antiguo México del P. Clavijero, y a mis doce años conocía el calendario Azteca y contemplaba jeroglíficos Aztecas. Más de una vez leí esos libros sobre una mesa cubierta con un magnífico zarape cuyos colores se mantienen aun tan frescos y vivos como mis recuerdos."[4]

Unamuno praised *Idols Behind Altars* effusively, even if, as he points out in his letter, he disagreed with some of its core premises:

> "Bastante de lo que usted cree indígena, pre-Colombino, a mi me parece muy español. Lo que conozco de la Virgen de Guadalupe primitiva, la extremeña, la española—ibérica—creo que el indio mexicano tenía más de ibérico en el espíritu que de americano en el sentido actual. Y el libro de usted me ha corroborado en esta creencia. Acaso también España se desarrolla 'not as a nation in progress, but as a picture' que progresa también, y también un pueblo español no está 'in insurrection but constantly reborn.' También es un pueblo que se reboza en el noble orgullo de su humildad. ¡Si usted viera los milagros, las pinturas de ofrenda de los viejos santuarios provinciales de España!"[5]

In his praiseful critique, Unamuno touches on the core of the lasting idealization of Mexico: its exoticism has to be remade once and again, as it is in fact just another version of the West.

Idols Behind Altars was well received. The young author's enthusiasm for her subject matter was, without a doubt, part of its appeal. But this did not stop less impressionable critics from pointing out the book's lack of seriousness as a piece of scholarship. For instance, Brenner's colleague at the *Menorah Journal*, Isidore Meyer, pointed out her weakness as a historian:

> "Her enthusiasm also makes Miss Brenner constantly and romantically ambitious to discover and announce generalizations that will clear, with sudden strokes, immense areas of the Mexican mystery. The ambition deserves praise, but unfortunately critical reflection will invalidate many of these generalizations. For while it is obvious that Miss Brenner knows Mexican history thoroughly, it is obvious that she knows relatively little of world history. She deals with Mexico as if it existed in a historical solitude apart from the rest of the world, and certain

[4] Miguel de Unamuno to Anita Brenner, April 5, 1930, AB 3.9.

[5] Ibid.

> conditions that are regarded as typical Mexican phenomena when a relation with world events would easily show them normal rather than exceptional."[6]

Meyer was not wrong. But Brenner's inability or unwillingness to place Mexican history in an international context may have contributed to the book's immediate success and the long-term appeal that throughout the decades led to many reprintings. The case of Anita Brenner's *Idols Behind Altars* illustrates that Mexico's supposed historical isolation, the romance of its putative solitude, has been a favorite narrative of the country's overbearing neighbor, its inescapable companion: the United States. Mexico's twentieth century national identity was, to a large extent co-authored by its neighbor. The intellectual trajectory of these twentieth century myths was described by Mauricio Tenorio:

> "Caminos que mutuamente se nutren: por un lado, pensadores que observaron a México influenciados por sus visiones del sur norteamericano, y a veces en busca de modelos revolucionarios; por el otro, políticos e intelectuales mexicanos que se apoyaron en esas visiones para elaborar sus propias explicaciones de la época posrevolucionaria que no acababan de entender, así como sus discursos oficiales."[7]

What better illustration of these lines than the circular path that led from Franz Boas at Columbia University, to Manuel Gamio in Mexico, and then through Anita Brenner back to Columbia? This was the transnational circuit traversed by renascent gringos such as Ernest Gruening, Frances Toor, and Frank Tannenbaum as well as Moisés Sáenz, Carlos Chávez, Rufino Tamayo, and the rest of the *Mexicanada*, coming and going between New York and Mexico City—an exchange that reached its height in the late 1920s and early 30s.

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[6] Isidor Schneider, "The Mexicans," *The Menorah Journal* (Nov. 1929).

[7] Mauricio Tenorio, "Viejos gringos: radicales norteamericanos y su visión México," *Secuencia* (Sep.-Dec. 1991), 96.

The title of Helen Delpar's *Enormous Vogue of Things Mexican* was taken from a 1933 New York Times editorial arguing that "the present enormous vogue of things Mexican... came into being at the height of our prosperity when people gave signs of being fed up with material comforts and turned, for respite from the Machine Age, to primitive cultures. Mexico lay close at hand."[8] Delpar argues that the editorial's diagnosis is "accurate, but incomplete"—that it was in fact somewhat later, after Dwight Morrow's arrival in Mexico, and with the dawning of the Great Depression, that the Mexican vogue reached its peak. The slackers, radicals, and bohemians who arrived in the early 1920s may have been running away to from prosperous Americanism, but the prospect of escape became far more appealing after 1929, when that prosperity collapsed.

As Delpar recounts, after Anita's departure from Mexico, many more American pilgrims began to arrive: the poets Wytter Brynner and Hart Crane, painters Marsden Hartley and Ione Robinson, and Doris Rosenthal, the photographer Paul Strand, the literary scholar Lesley Byrd Simpson, and others—many of them with support from the Guggenheim Foundation's Latin American Fellowships. As the economic crisis devastated civil society—*Gesselschaft*—these cultural pilgrims were arriving in search of the romance of community—*Gemeinschaft,* which their radical predecessors discovered, as this dissertation has argued, as a consolation for dashed political visions.

This widespread romantic longing is well illustrated by the most widely read of the books associated with the Mexican vogue, *Mexico: A Study of Two Americas*, by the economist and cultural pilgrim Stuart Chase. The book, illustrated by Diego Rivera, compared the "machineless" Mexican village of Tepoztlán (based on Chicago anthropologist Robert Redfield's idealization of

[8] Quoted in Helen Delpar, *The Enormous Vogue of Things Mexican: Cultural Relations between the United States and Mexico, 1920-1935* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995), 55.

the village, published the previous year) to the industrialized "Middletown" of Muncie, Indiana—to the benefit of the former. The book concludes with a piece of "advice to villagers":

> "You have in your possession something precious; something which the western world has lost and flounders miserably trying to regain. Hold to it. Exert every ounce of your magnificent inertia to conserve your way of life. You must not move until you can be shown, by the most specific and concrete examples, that industrialism and the machine can provide a safer, happier, more rewarding existence. No such examples obtain anywhere on earth. The most likely place to look for them, if they are ever to be attained, is Russia. The United States for the moment has nothing to offer you save its medical and agricultural science."[9]

The historical irony of publishing these lines in 1931 is almost too rich. That year, mass unemployment in the U.S. led local governments to deport over 130,000 Mexican migrant workers. For the repatriated, Stuart Chase's advice could have only been a meager consolation. The Depression hit Mexico early and hard. American investment had been drying up since the mid-1920s, leading to a situation of mass unemployment which was only made worse by the arrival of hundreds of thousands of repatriated migrants. The late 1920s were times of profound political crisis in Mexico, a crisis precipitated by the assassination of the revolution's top caudillo, Álvaro Obregón, and whose resolution led to a particularly revolutionary consolidation of Mexico's post-revolutionary political order. The story is complex and well known, so it need not be recapitulated here. Suffice it to say that by the end of Dwight Morrow's ambassadorship in late 1930, the country had been pacified, the Cristiada had been brought to an uneasy truce, labor—including the mighty CROM—had been brought to heel, and the foundations of a single-party political system had been laid. As the Mexican government aligned itself ever more closely with the United States, it broke relations with the Soviet Union and drove the Mexican Communist underground. The heady days of Felipe Carrillo Puerto and José Vasconcelos were long gone. The political fire that had

[9] Stuart Chase, *Mexico: A Study of Two Americas* (New York: Macmillian Company, 1931), 318.

originally fueled the Mexican Renaissance was being extinguished. In 1930, after two years of harassment by the authorities, the Communist photographer Tina Modotti was driven into exile. The Communist painter David Alfaro Siqueiros abandoned the country the following year. At the height of the international fashion for Mexico, its revolution, and its renaissance, Mexico was becoming a barren, unwelcoming landscape for radicals and artists—at least for those not supported by a Guggenheim fellowship.

Carleton Beals, who in the meantime had become a pioneering chronicler of the Nicaraguan occupation, knew counterrevolution when he saw it and said as much in his review of *Idols Behind Altars*:

> "The upthrust of the racial-economic revolution has ended, and with it the valiant deeds of its painter-fighters. Miss Brenner has left us an invaluable historical record of the *primitivi* of the Mexican Renaissance—or is it just a Risorgimento? She has told us of the local Giottos, the Cimabues, the Buonisegnas, the Lorenzos of contemporary Mexican art. But that movement, for the moment, has been dammed. The future has been aborted. Two things must happen before Mexican painting can reach full maturity. The czardom of Diego Rivera will have to sink into historical perspective, permitting new tendencies, of which Toomayo is an expression; and Mexico once more will have to rise up against the foreign invasion and rediscover its soul."[10]

The future as the Renaissance imagined it in the early 1920s had certainly been aborted, but the future kept arriving, nonetheless. At the height of the Depression, a new phase of the Mexican Renaissance was taking shape, and this new phase was American. Rufino Tamayo was the pioneer. After arriving in New York City in 1926, he jump-started his post-Mexican career with the help of Walter Pach, who arranged a one-man show for him at the Weyhe Gallery. The stage was set by the Rockefeller Education Board-funded Art Center exhibition curated by Anita Brenner and Frances Flynn Paine, but it was the Carnegie-sponsored exhibition, which opened at

[10] Carleton Beals, "Goat's Head on a Martyr," *Saturday Review of Literature* (Dec. 7, 1929).

the Metropolitan Museum on October 13, 1930, that really launched the Mexican art invasion. Organized on the initiative of Dwight and Elizabeth Cutter Morrow and curated by René D'Harnoncourt, the show was a sensation. Something like half a million people visited the exhibition on its national tour of thirteen cities, including Boston, Washington, D.C., and San Antonio, Texas.

José Clemente Orozco's first years in the United States, 1928 and 1929, were not easy. He had trouble getting his work exhibited, and often found himself on the edge of destitution. The letters he wrote to Jean Charlot at the time are full of despair, but they are also full of deep insights about art and life in the United States. Early in 1928, he wrote to Charlot:

> "What a pleasure it would be to have you here! There are lots of sights, local as well as imported. Through the sheer power of money, Europe is carried over here bit by bit. One of these days they will plant the Eiffel Tower in Central Park, close to the obelisk. One should see the machinery with which rock is scooped out, and planted the steel frames to uphold a skyscraper. Ten minutes away there is a collection of El Grecos, and Egyptian tombs thirty-five hundred years old...
>
> Here in New York French art means the cream of the cream. It stands for the ideal, is tops, most prestigious, the paragon. To praise anything, one compares it to the French. It is most exquisite. We the Mexicans, perhaps will come to have later some sort of influence, but it will have to be along other lines. Nothing about us is exquisite. Do you know what I mean?"[11]

Orozco was witnessing New York City take its place as the twentieth century's center of world culture. Europe's self-destruction, which began precipitously in 1914 and continued at least until 1945, had driven European modernism into exile. Finding refuge in New York, its legacy was inherited in the 1930s by a new American modernism.[12] The New World's post-European modernism could be said to have first started to take shape in post-Revolutionary Mexico.

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[11] José Clemente Orozco to Jean Charlot, January 4, 1928. Quoted in Jean Charlot, "Orozco in New York," in Jean Charlot, *An Artist on Art: Collected Essays of Jean Charlot* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii), 305.

[12] On the migration of modern art from Europe to the United States in the 1930s, see Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983).

Despite the difficulties he faced upon arrival, in the United States Orozco finally gained the recognition he had so long strived for. As with the completion of the Preparatoria murals, this would have been impossible without the help of his friend Anita Brenner, who was the one who introduced him to Alma Reed, who became his tireless promoter. The story was documented by Reed herself: Her support took him from his first solo exhibition to his famous murals at Pomona College and the New School of Social Research. In the early 1930s, despite being a Mexican artist who had never been to Europe, this lifelong underdog became a true founding figure of twentieth century American art. And yet, success didn't make him any less resentful or paranoid. He attributed ulterior motives to the group of women who had helped him so much on his way to the top. Alma Reed, who he accused of profiting from his work at his expense, and further, "in the eyes of Orozco, [Frances Flynn] Paine, along with Brenner and Frances Toor were partisans of Diego Rivera, who Orozco disdained as a 'Mexicanist con man.'[13]

Unlike Orozco, Rufino Tamayo, or Carlos Mérida, who all arrived in the United States somewhat like immigrant workers in search of a better life, Diego Rivera arrived like a visiting celebrity. In 1927 Diego had visited the Soviet Union, where he had been invited to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Russian Revolution. The day of the festivities was a culminating moment in the Stalinization of the Communist Party and the Soviet government. Partisans of the Leon Trotsky-led opposition came out on the streets in a final, desperate gesture of protest were rounded up. Stalin's complete authority over the Party was never again publicly questioned.

Several days later, Diego Rivera signed a contract commissioning a fresco at Moscow's Red Army Club, which was meant as a kind of a test-run for a more prestigious commission decorating the city's Lenin Library which was then under construction. Diego stayed for several

[13] Delpar, *The Enormous Vogue of Things Mexican*, 84.

months but never completed his work. For a long-time admirer of the Russian Revolution like Diego Rivera, these commissions ought to have been a great honor, but there was terror in the air. The "Stalin Revolution" of the late 1920s was already under way. This time the terror was not aimed against opponents of the Revolution, as it had been during the Civil War, but rather against supporters of the regime: party cadres, civil servants, artists, writers. Most appallingly, the terror was now aimed against old generation of Bolsheviks who made the Revolution—this is why Leon Trotsky referred to this "revolution," as the "Stalinist Thermidor." It is difficult to know just how Diego Rivera felt about all this at the level of politics, but by early 1928 accusatory fingers of young zealous Bolsheviks were already pointed at him. Surely, he must have felt the Soviet authorities were not paying him enough to take that kind of abuse.

Upon his return to Mexico, Diego found far more congenial patrons. The Morrows paid him a small fortune to paint a series of frescoes at the Cortés Palace in Cuernavaca. During the year that it took him to complete these murals, Diego took over his patrons' vacation home—the so called Casa Mañana. It was a kind of honeymoon for him and his young new wife, Frida Kahlo. The Cortés Palace frescos, which depicted dramatic scenes from the Conquest, are reminiscent of pictures in a children's storybook. They saw Rivera moving into a colorful, narrative, and didactic faux-naive direction. As Diego embraced his new role as a provider of artful, edifying amusement for the New World's ruling class, Cubism and Montparnasse must have looked to him very small and far away, "as if from the other end of a telescope."

The Morrows were Diego's first-class ticket to the United States. He got his start on the West Coast, painting murals at the San Francisco Stock Exchange and the California School of Fine Arts, periodically returning to Mexico City, where he had begun work on his magnum opus at the National Palace. Meanwhile, thanks to the combined efforts of Alfred Barr, who he had met

in Moscow, the Morrows, and Frances Flynn Paine of the Rockefeller Foundation, Diego got his own solo exhibition at the newly inaugurated Museum of Modern Art in 1931—an honor shared by only one other living artist, Henri Matisse.

Ten years after quitting Paris for Mexico, Diego Rivera had become an international celebrity. In New York, Mexican modernism now stood on equal footing with French modernism. This was a step forward for Mexican modernism, to be sure, but was it a step forward for modern art writ large? One skeptical critic, Harrison Kerr, expressed some interesting doubts:

> "We need only to glance about the gallery to see Gaugin, Matisse, Picasso, Derain, Rousseau, and even the trivial Spaniards that were popular ten years ago looming out of three fourths of his canvasses. This hospitality to every style is more disquieting in that it confines itself to no one period in his development. In fact, one questions whether he has developed at all."

In Kerr's view, Rivera was not a painter, but an actor. He was a virtuoso who could adopt a variety of postures, paint in a variety of tyles, perform a variety of roles, serve a variety of masters—but what was he really about? Was this serious art or a variety show? Was it revolution or demagoguery? Was he "making it new"—as Ezra Pound's modernist injunction goes—or was he merely making it Mexican?

Jean Charlot continued working at the Carnegie Chichen Itza Project until late 1928, before catching up with his friends in New York, where, like his old muralist colleagues, he got the chance to show his work in the context of the moment's Mexican vogue. But unlike Diego, Orozco, or even Tamayo, his career as a painter never managed to get off the ground. Unlike his colleagues, he did not seem to crave recognition—let alone celebrity. Or at least, he didn't seem to want it bad enough. Throughout the 1930s, he leaned more toward teaching, writing, and illustration. He remained a close confidant to Anita Brenner for years, but their romantic relationship was never rekindled. His mother, who he had also brought with him to New York, died in 1929. And almost

immediately after Anita married David Glusker, he found someone for himself, the artist Dorothy Zohmah Day, with whom he went on to live a quiet life dedicated to art.

Anita Brenner had arrived in New York just as the Mexican vogue was starting to take off. It was almost as if her presence was the catalyst. The city had welcomed her and she had found too much to do: graduate studies in anthropology, artistic representation for her Mexican artist friends, freelance journalism, getting her book published, an editorship at *The Nation*, planning a wedding. In late 1929, overburdened by all this and with her doctoral dissertation, which was due soon, she collapsed of nervous exhaustion. After a break of several months, she recovered, prioritized, slowed down. She gave up her job at *The Nation* and took a step back from the art world. She continued writing, but at a less hectic pace. She completed her degree with a short, modest dissertation analyzing designs on the pottery of ancient Culhuacán. She got married.

She returned to Mexico in 1931, on a Guggenheim Latin American Fellowship to study Aztec art. What came out of the fellowship was her second book, more successful than the first: the tour guide *Your Mexican Vacation*. Released in 1932, it was perfectly timed for the wave of American visitors that arrived that decade to see for themselves all the marvelous things Anita had discovered back in the 1920s.

Coda

One of these visitors was the Sergei Eisenstein, the Soviet filmmaker who in 1926 had revolutionized the medium with his *Battleship Potemkin*. Anita and Sergei met when visiting David Alfaro Siqueiros during his house arrest in the village of Taxco—a town in Guerrero which had become something of a vacation spot for veterans of the Mexican Renaissance. Battleship Potemkin had made such an impact that Eisenstein was an already world-famous modernist star, like Picasso or Diego Rivera. But at the time Anita met him, things were not going well for him.

Just as the "Stalin Revolution" of the late 1920s targeted the old generation of Bolsheviks who had made the revolution and won the Civil War, it also set its sights on the artistic avant-garde which in the late 1910s and early 1920s had sought to invent a new revolutionary culture on the basis of radical formal experimentation. This was the scene Eisenstein from which Eisenstein had emerged: Isaac Babel, Osip Brik, Alexander Rodchenko, Sergei Tretyakov, etc. The prestige of his Battleship Potemkin had protected him, but his follow-up films, October and The General Line, had been criticized by authorities for their "decadent" formalism. In 1929 he was given special permission to leave the country temporarily to learn European and American filmmaking techniques. After spending some time in Europe, he ended up in Los Angeles, where he got a chance to develop several film scripts for Paramount Studios, which if approved, he could get the chance to direct. The three scripts he delivered were too ambitious—too big in scale and too risky in content for Depression-era Hollywood.

After six months, Paramount fired Eisenstein. At this point, he must have been afraid of going back to the Soviet Union. He had little to show for his long tour of the capitalist West, and knew things were not well back home. His old friend and colleague, Vladimir Mayakovski, who had toured the New World five years earlier, had just killed himself. When the old California-based radical writer Upton Sinclair, offered to raise funds for a Eisenstein to make a small documentary about the Mexican Revolution, Eisenstein accepted. As Eisenstein could tell, Mexico had become a fashionable subject among artists and intellectuals in the United States, and although he knew very little about it, the filmmaker saw this as a great opportunity. Whether it was an opportunity to stay away from Russia or to ingratiate himself with Soviet authorities, he was not sure. He was also not sure what direction to take with the film, at least not until he read Anita Brenner's *Idols Behind Altars*

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